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## **Media statement from Secretary of Health John Wiesman**

“As Secretary of Health, I am deeply disturbed, saddened and outraged by the violent, senseless death of George Floyd. Communities across Washington state and around the country are responding with an outpouring of anger, frustration and protest as we collectively mourn the loss of yet another Black man killed by a white police officer. In this time of extreme grief and weariness, I want our Black community members and all People of Color to know that the Department of Health is standing with you in solidarity, support and love.

It is a shame that a national outrage is serving as a sobering reminder to many of us that violence against Black lives has occurred since the founding of this nation, and the broader public health and healthcare system too has been a bystander and, in some egregious circumstances, complicit in perpetuating harm.

While more recently, we have taken intentional action to address the root causes of health inequities, including structural racism and other forms of oppression, there is still a lot of work to do. Public health must continue to respond and lead with racial equity and social justice. Racism is a public health threat that can’t be ignored. And leading with racial equity and social justice requires us to prioritize the health and wellbeing of historically marginalized and oppressed communities — including Black, Indigenous and People of Color, individuals with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community, to name a few.

The Department of Health’s mission is to “work with others to protect and improve the health of ALL people in Washington state.” We must ask ourselves: as a nation, why are we not able to fully protect and improve the lives of Black people? Our agency, like each of us, is imperfect and actively learning to do better. As we take stock of what is unfolding in this moment, we have an opportunity to truly and wholly acknowledge, honor and respect Black lives and communities. Black lives must matter.”

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