

Heads of Black Civil Rights & Religious Organizations Encourage Communities to Stay at Home

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Rev. Al Sharpton (NAN), Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson (CNBC), Sherrilyn Ifill (NAACP, LDF), Marc Morial (NUL), Derrick Johnson (NAACP), Melanie Campbell (BWR), Kristen

Clarke (Lawyers' Committee) & the Heads of the Nation's Largest Historically Black Religious Denominations Encourage Communities to Stay at Home

(April 24, 2020) — A group of national Black faith and civil rights leaders along with the heads of the largest historically Black religious denominations are encouraging communities to stay at home in states where stay at home orders are being lifted until there is evidence that it is safe.

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We, the undersigned, have joined together to state our unequivocal and firm opposition to the premature effort of governors to willfully re-open their states. The actions of these governors, which demonstrate reckless disregard for the health and life of Black residents, compel us to speak out and take action to protect ourselves. As faith leaders and civil rights leaders, we work every day on behalf of the needs of our families and communities. We regard this pandemic as a grave threat to the health and life of our people, and as a threat to the integrity and vitality of the communities we are privileged to serve.

For these reasons, we encourage all Black churches and businesses to remain closed during this critical period. The denominations and independent churches represented in this statement, which comprise a combined membership of more than 25 million people and more than 30,000 congregations, intend to remain closed and to continue to

worship virtually, with the same dedication and love that we brought to the church. The civil rights organizations represented are working tirelessly to protect our communities from injustice and inequality as this country responds to the pandemic. But they are doing so remotely, working from their homes to continue the vital work of civil rights.

This pandemic has ravaged Black communities in both urban and rural areas. The CDC reports that Black people constitute 20% of all U.S. coronavirus deaths, although we are only 12% of the U.S. population. Across the country, we see the same disproportionate impact. Our families need us. Our communities need us. We must continue to telework wherever possible, and to tele-worship for however long it is necessary to do so.

Opening too soon also threatens our financial future. As church leaders and business owners, we must take responsibility for helping to protect the health of our parishioners and patrons – the very people with whom we must work in the coming months to rebuild the economic strength of our communities.

Of course, we recognize that some members of our community may feel compelled to engage in some aspects of public life. For those who must, we strongly encourage you to take seriously the need to wear masks and gloves in public spaces, to limit your contact with others, to engage in continued physical distancing, to regularly wash your hands

and to refrain from touching your face. Please reach out to your local churches if you are having difficulty obtaining masks and gloves.

We do not take it lightly to encourage members of our communities to defy the orders of state governors. But we are compelled by our faith, by our obligation as servants of God, and by our commitment as civil rights leaders, to speak life into our communities. Our sacred duty is to support and advance the life and health of Black people, families and communities in our country. And so, we link arms in our shared determination to protect our communities from the ravages of this pandemic. For now, that means encouraging each and every one of you to stay home.

And because we are surrounded by the “great cloud of witnesses” who came before us – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thurgood Marshall, and Fannie Lou Hamer – we encourage you to use this time at home to do what is necessary to ensure that our community will emerge from this challenging time stronger than ever: register to vote, take the necessary steps to prepare to vote in the upcoming elections (in person or by mail, depending on your state laws), and complete your census form. This is work we must do now if we are to secure a brighter future for our children and for generations to come.

SIGNATORIES

Reverend Al Sharpton, President of the National Action Network

Reverend W. Franklyn Richardson, Chairman of the Conference of National Black Churches (CNBC)

Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Derrick Johnson, President and CEO of the NAACP

Marc Morial, President & CEO of the National Urban League

Melanie Campbell, President and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and convener of the Black Women's Roundtable Public Policy Network

Kristen Clarke, President & Executive Director of the National Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee)

Senior Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson, African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)

Senior Bishop George E. Battle, Jr., African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ)

Senior Bishop Lawrence L. Reddick, III, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)

Presiding Bishop Charles E. Blake, Sr., Church of God In Christ (COGIC)

Dr. Samuel C. Tolbert, Jr., President, National Baptist Convention of America, International, Inc., (NBCA)

Dr. Jerry Young, President, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc. (NBC USA)

Dr. Timothy Stewart, President, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. (PNBC)

ADDITIONAL STATS

In Georgia, Black people account for 54% of COVID-19 deaths, although we are 30% of the state's population. The virus has ravaged Black communities in both urban and rural areas. In the city of Houston, we are 57% of COVID-19 deaths, although only 22% of the city's population. Albany, Georgia – a majority Black town of 75,000 residents – has experienced the fourth worst coronavirus outbreak in the country.