Our world looks so different from one year ago. Every institution, business, organization, and community group in Los Angeles County has had to adapt their operations, stretch their finances, and make difficult decisions to keep essential services running over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. From restaurants to churches to schools, no one will emerge from the pandemic unaffected.

The county and city of Los Angeles had to pivot and adjust along with everyone else, making available unprecedented levels of emergency support to the most-in-need residents, while also working in partnership with community groups to build an immediate care infrastructure to battle the pandemic and its impacts.

Finally, relief is on the way. Over the next few years, all levels of government are expected to receive an unprecedented infusion of federal dollars that could total more...
than $3 billion between the county and city of Los Angeles. We understand the pressure local governments feel to backfill budget holes created to respond to the pandemic but filling holes in municipal budgets should not be the only priority. It will not begin to repair the generational harm that has been inflicted upon Black, Indigenous, Latino and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders communities in LA County. These impacts are not new, but they have become clearer than ever over the course of the last year.

As philanthropic leaders, we are committed to doing everything we can to help fill the gaps that COVID-19 has ripped into so many communities, but philanthropy alone simply does not have the firepower. This is why we believe the way we spend this unprecedented infusion of flexible federal dollars is so important. We may never see another opportunity like this to address our shared legacy of systemic racism by making direct investments into the communities that have been hardest hit.

We believe our best way forward is to invest in and empower those individuals and organizations, rooted in their communities, to test new ideas and know-how to create the most effective programs and interventions. We strive to do this by employing a few key principles in our funding decisions: 1) apply a racial equity lens to all our funding decisions and policies; 2) prioritize direct service support to those in greatest need; and 3) wherever possible, seek to catalyze a transformative systems-change approach to address root causes of some of our region’s most entrenched challenges.

We applaud the effort laid out in the recent collaborative proposal to the city of Los Angeles: Making Los Angeles Whole: A Radical Recovery for All Angelenos. We believe the investments laid out by Brotherhood Crusade, Community Coalition, Inner City Struggle and SEIU 2015 embody these core principles and we encourage our policy makers to advance these priorities and investments.

Black and Latino families have made the greatest sacrifice over the course of the pandemic. Black Angelenos have experienced a death rate double that of White Angelenos, while for Latinos it has been nearly triple. These disparate death rates have held throughout the devastating duration of the pandemic and they continue as the vaccine rollout creates unintentional barriers to these same populations. In communities with average incomes over $120,000, vaccination rates are more than double that of communities with average incomes under $40,000.

Amid these cycles of systemic racism, we are fortunate that decades of community organizing and service have created an infrastructure where nonprofit and labor leaders rooted in some of the communities most impacted by COVID-19 have been able to quickly identify priorities for investment in a bold, far-reaching proposal. They call on
local government leaders to take advantage of this potentially transformative infusion of resources by making long-overdue investments in our most marginalized residents: communities of color, working families, children, the elderly, and women. We agree.

The investments laid out in Making Los Angeles Whole reinforce many of the recommendations prioritized in the recent report No Going Back: Together for an Equitable and Inclusive Los Angeles: Building an economy that prioritizes those who have been left or kept behind; investing in systems of community-based care; celebrating and supporting youth leadership and empowerment, and aligning business, community, philanthropy, and government for equity.

Foundations are often asked by government to help pilot initiatives that can provide a proof of concept for future models of service delivery, organizing or administration. We see this as central to our role. We supported efforts to respond to the homeless crisis, including by educating the public about Measure H and Proposition HHH.

We joined forces with the city and county to create a Justice Fund to provide much needed legal support to undocumented immigrants facing deportation. In response to COVID-19, we have bolstered efforts to expand testing and vaccines to communities disproportionately impacted and to provide food, rental assistance, and other services to those who need it. Most recently, The California Endowment has leveraged its own assets to launch a $300 million social bond.

We will continue to do everything we can to support organizations fighting for equitable outcomes. We are calling on every institution: private sector, social sector, and government, to dig deep and find ways to help create and fund the type of transformative change we need to see.

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