RESPONSE TO “PITTSBURGH’S INEQUALITY ACROSS GENDER AND RACE” REPORT

We are a collective of Black women and femmes— representing government, non-profit, community, research and the academy— who have been working in Reproductive Justice and Maternal and Child Health for over several decades combined. We have reviewed “Pittsburgh’s Inequality Across Gender and Race” published by the City of Pittsburgh’s Gender Equity Commission and felt a responsibility to the organizations where we work and the communities we serve to respond to the report and specifically to the health-related content given the national discourse about Black maternal and infant health in the United States and Pittsburgh:

The introduction of the report cites Kimberlé Crenshaw and the foundations of intersectionality (“racism and sexism as interlocking systems of oppression, resulting in a form of disadvantage that affects Black women uniquely” - Crenshaw); however, there was a lack of representation of Black women and femme community leaders and researchers in Pittsburgh who have been doing this work among the authors of this report. What’s worse is that this lack of representation ensued despite a group of qualified Black women researchers having submitted a proposal for this project, and having offered to support in other capacities. The lead author penned a personal letter about racism being a core issue. However, this report has actually depersonalized the labor of Black women and femmes, exploited and ignored those same people, while centering white scholars as “validating” Black people’s experiences, which is a manifestation of racism and the appropriation of knowledge and scholarship from Black women and femmes.

This report regurgitated much of what has already been public knowledge and done in research regarding the disparate outcomes for Black people and specifically related to Black infant and maternal health in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County— as the report states that these data have already been reported in numerous formats. Ideally there would have been an intentional effort to co-construct a process to ensure that Black women and femmes were meaningfully included. Instead what we reviewed as “America’s Most Livable City” and as a nation, was a report that highlighted the endangered health and well-being, lack of equity and limitations in opportunity for Black women, while itself perpetuating these same inequities. This act serves to further silence those most impacted by the findings in this report and make invisible the very Black bodies for whom the report makes recommendations for improvement.

There are plans for subsequent reports that will detail results from a local survey on gender and racial equity among employees, qualitative work of interviews with community members, and a final report of policy recommendations, yet it is evident that there is no plan to meaningfully engage Black women, femmes and girls in leading this work with adequate resources. Of equal concern is that these reports and their conclusions will not only serve as a basis for suggested policy but also allocation of resources, when as a collective of Black women and femmes, we have been leading this work in many cases without financial resources, institutional support and platforms to recognize our thought leadership. These recommendations should come from the Black community and those who have long been engaged in this work, centering them as the experts in their own well-being. Additionally, although following up with a penned letter discussing the role of racism in the outcomes reported, the authors fail to explicitly name racism as the cause within the report. Furthermore, both the report and subsequent media articles fail to address how the authors of this report and the City of Pittsburgh government, including the Gender Equity Commission, plan to dismantle a system of race, gender and economic inequity from which they benefit.

If the City is serious about moving forward in addressing inequities that exist Our call to action for furthering this work includes the policy recommendations of the Black Mamas Matter Alliance Advancing Holistic Maternal Care for Black Women through Policy and are outlined below:
• **Read** and support the policy recommendations of the Black Mamas Matter Alliance—specifically Policy Priority I: *Identify and ensure mechanisms for engagement and prioritization of Black women and Black-women led entities in policy and program development and implementation, including research.* This means due diligence in ensuring adequate representation and means thorough investigation into how to best support and uplift the research and work that is already being done Black women-led organizations, workers, researchers, academicians.

• **Invest** in time and expertise of Black women-led and community-based organizations that use Reproductive Justice, birth justice, health equity, and human rights frameworks. Invest financial resources in Black women-led organizations and services as opposed to repeatedly investing in research and reports that narrate a story that has already been told.

• **Respect and trust** Black women, femmes and girls as leaders in all areas of life, including our own health and well-being, for our families and our communities.

• We call on the Mayor and the City of Pittsburgh to recommission how this work will move forward. We hereby request that Black researchers in this city are included in this work.

• Organize a meeting between the Mayor of Pittsburgh, Mr. Peduto with a Black women coalition from our city who are and have been doing the work to discuss next steps and inclusion.

• **Stop** the practice of treating Black women as inferior and not capable of studying their own populous.

For reference, and as a contribution to this work, we have included in the signature line a non-exhaustive list of Black women-led and community-based organizations—as well as researchers, advocates and activists—that use Reproductive Justice, birth justice, health equity, and human rights frameworks while centering Black women, femmes and/or girls in this work. For every signatory, there are additional Black women behind the work and in the movement.

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