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Council President Lynn Peterson

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Friday night, hundreds of Oregonians marched peacefully down Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. to protest centuries of injustice in our nation and our region. They marched to protest the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Philando Castile, Quance Hayes and so many others. They marched to protest the injustice faced by Black Oregonians like Michael Fesser. They marched because governments, including Metro, took rights, wealth, life and livelihoods from Black Oregonians in the name of prosperity for whites. They marched because our government, for so long, made it illegal to be a Black Oregonian.

We still aren't listening. We might say we are, we might think we are, but the on-the-ground reality remains the same: It's not safe in our country, or our region, to be Black.

This weekend, I reached out to Mayor Wheeler and Commissioner Hardesty in Portland to ask how Metro can be of assistance. I've also asked Metro's office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to continue and amplify their work to educate Metro staff and partners on anti-racism and advancement of equity for Black Oregonians. We have to work together to do better, and I commit to be a part of that.

I also want to extend my support to Commissioner Hardesty's call for a special session to address police accountability in Oregon. We have a moment where this is front-of-mind, and Oregon can set a national example. We can, and should, incorporate meaningful feedback from public safety providers, faith leaders, community leaders victims of police wrongdoing and their advocates. We've waited too long. There has been ample time to deliberate these issues. It's time to act.

As it's been said before, to move forward, we have to look in our past and our current realities, to recognize and confront the racism and pain that has gotten us to this point. All of us – in Metro, in Oregon and in America – have to acknowledge racism and the pain of Black families in our halls of government, in our schools, in our workplaces. Yes, we need to intervene in spaces where we see something as drastic as a white police officer holding a Black man down by a knee. But all of us, particularly white Oregonians, also must intervene when we see Black people being held down by metaphorical knees in our civic, cultural and political spaces.

We have a moment, right now, to build the future we want in our region – to build a better normal. A future where Black and brown bodies are safe and can thrive. If we do that right, by centering that movement around the needs of Black and Indigenous people of color, we will all, in our region, be stronger than we were before.