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On Friday, July 19, the Executive Committee of the Wisconsin Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs released the statement below. You can find the Club CEO pledge to **Take Action in Response to Racial Inequality** at <https://www.bgcwisconsin.org/new-page-2> and post it on your website or run it as an editorial. It has been posted several places, including <https://www.wisbusiness.com/2020/wisconsin-boys-girls-clubs-pledge-action-against-racial-inequity/>

As CEO of the four Clubs of the BGC of the Greater Chippewa Valley, I proudly share and endorse this message. Boys & Girls Clubs are a space where all kids are safe and respected, and all kids can succeed. This has always been core to our programs and practices, and in light of recent events we are giving more focus, time and energy to its practice. Locally we are having conversations with our Club leaders, taking a pulse on our current state, and identifying further steps we can take to best serve the members and families in our local communities. We will be utilizing the resources of Boys & Girls Clubs of America, as well as relying on our partner Clubs throughout the state of Wisconsin.

Please feel free to contact me to learn more about our local efforts or to connect with a spokesperson for the Wisconsin Alliance.

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## **Boys & Girls Clubs of Wisconsin: Taking Action in Response to Racial Inequality**

Boys & Girls Clubs have stood for inclusion for over 160 years, and our commitment to creating a safe space is unwavering. Our mission is to inspire and empower all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. We cannot inspire kids when they live in fear of losing parents, or their own life and liberty. We cannot enable them to reach their full potential while they witness communities being torn apart in a fight over whether their own lives matter. We need our youth to know: *You matter, your dreams matter, and your life matters.*

Statements of advocacy are hollow when void of action. It's time to make change, rather than discuss it. We need real results beyond hashtags and town halls. Seven out of ten club children across our state are kids and teens of color. As we step forward together to resolutely affirm Black lives matter, we best honor good intentions with real outcomes. It is time to do the work of dismantling systemic racism.

We support peaceful protest for change. When a segment of the population is denied justice under the law, it is the obligation of all citizens to make their voices heard. Continued civic engagement is at the core of serving as a responsible citizen, and our sustained action can take many forms.

Within clubs, we will continue to create permanent infrastructure to enforce and maintain policies of inclusion and diversity. We will hold relevant trainings for staff, evaluate our internal hiring practices, and review compensation and promotion policies. Board recruitment and development will reflect diversity and inclusion, and we will implement meaningful best practices to avoid all discrimination.

Within local communities, we will urge mayors, county officials and law enforcement to review use of force policies and report out on reforms. Local officials matter most in changing criminal justice practices, and voter turnout in these elections is low. We will encourage citizens to *complete the census, register to vote and show up at the polls*.

Within institutions -- including our own boards, state alliance, area council and national organization -- we will push for programs, policies and partnerships to better support equity work. We will ask for relevant racial trainings in regional and national conferences. We will value our staff of color to ensure they feel included. And we will encourage all to reward diversity at the club level, push for policies of inclusion, and amend strategic plans to reflect this new reality.

As individuals, some will march in protest or sign petitions. Others will donate to victim funds or support black-owned business. And all of us will vote. But we will also need to step out of our comfort zone, including uncomfortable conversations with coworkers, friends and family on recognizing white privilege. One of the intentional outcomes will be learning and unlearning biases that can cause harm in our clubs and communities.

As leaders, it's our responsibility to ensure this work is sustained. Everyone has the opportunity to choose how they participate, but no one has the choice of whether or not they are a participant. We must plan, strategize, organize, advocate and unify around policy change to address racial disparities in education, health care, employment, incarceration and our criminal justice systems.

Ultimately, it's going to be up to a new generation -- including youth in our clubs right now -- to continue to shape the strategies that move us forward. We best serve our youth tomorrow with meaningful actions today.

**The Executive Committee of Wisconsin Boys & Girls Clubs**