

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, United States House of
Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

July 31, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Chairman Nadler, and Ranking Member Jordan:

Cc: Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s seminal text, "Why We Can't Wait," was written in 1963 and has emerged as more prescient than ever in this moment. The multi-racial, cross-generational protests across the United States have ushered in a national reckoning on structural racism—and a sea change in attitudes. A [majority of people in the US support the protests](#) and believe that [racism is a serious issue](#) in this country. **We, the undersigned organizations, believe addressing it can no longer wait.**

People in the US are now more eager than ever to pull back the curtain on institutions to see whether they have helped to advance or stall racial progress, and the US Congress is no exception. One bill in particular can demonstrate support for meeting this moment in a reasonable, rational, and compassionate way: [House Resolution \(HR\) 40](#). We urge House and Committee leadership to bring this bill to a full vote once it reaches the floor.

The current social movement, the largest in US history, is in response to problems that are centuries in the making—issues intractably tied to the horrors of settler colonialism and the enslavement of Black people in the United States. People in the US are increasingly aware that there is no way forward from the current strife without addressing one of the nation's most egregious violations of human rights—the institution of slavery. HR 40 would establish a commission to investigate the legacy of slavery and its ongoing harms as well as come up with proposals to Congress for redress and repair.

HR 40 is simply a first and reasonable step—it is a commitment to truth-telling, studying and coming up with ideas to treat the disease, rather than a commitment to the treatment itself. The bill has been introduced for 30 years—yet for 30 years, it has languished. If the protests have demonstrated anything, **it is that action cannot wait.**

- HR 40 can't wait, when Covid-19 [is harming Black people in the US](#) at three times the rate of white people, with disparities across all age groups and areas of the country.
- HR 40 can't wait, when [Black infants are more than twice as likely to die](#) as white infants—making the disparity worse than it was in 1850, when Black people were enslaved.
- HR 40 can't wait, when heads of white households who only have a high school diploma are sitting on [almost 10 times more wealth](#) than Black households with the same level of

education. If Black families did “everything right,” the advanced degrees would still allow them to accumulate less wealth than a white family whose head of household only had a high school diploma. They’d be disproportionately [denied mortgages and fair lending rates](#) regardless of their incomes.

- HR 40 can’t wait, when the [gap between Black and white wealth](#) is as large as it was in 1968.
- HR 40 can’t wait, when school districts that serve higher populations of Black and brown students [receive \\$23 billion less in funding](#) compared to mostly white school districts, even though they serve the same number of children.
- HR 40 can’t wait, when [Black students are disproportionately punished and criminalized in their schools](#), beginning in preschool, facing greater rates of suspension, expulsion, and arrest compared to their white peers, often for the same behaviors.
- HR 40 can’t wait, when experts say that systemic racism is leaving Black people with [symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder](#), [harm to their immune systems](#), [premature aging](#), and in Washington, DC, life expectancies that are a staggering [14.9 years shorter](#) than white residents’—all while Black people are less likely than white people to have access to mental health services and more likely to receive poor quality care.
- HR 40 can’t wait, when the suicide rate [for Black children is rising faster](#) than for any other racial and ethnic group, and the second-leading cause of death for Black youth aged 10 to 19.
- Don’t ask us to wait, when governments’ [infrastructure plans](#) have racially segregated cities across the country, creating separate conditions of life for Black and white people through “urban removal,” highway construction, restrictive zoning laws, and use of eminent domain.
- Don’t ask us to wait, when as a result of government-imposed segregation, health outcomes in Black neighborhoods are disproportionately impacted by [heat levels](#) and [environmental hazards](#) due to the close proximity to places like oil refineries, trash incinerators, construction sites, and waste dumping sites.
- Don’t ask us to wait, when even after the broken promise of “[40 acres and a mule](#),” formerly enslaved Black people and their descendants managed to own 14 million acres of land at the start of the 20th century, while today [at least 90 percent](#) of that land is not in their possession, due to systemic oppression, targeted racist violence, and an inequitable legal system.
- Don’t ask us to wait when the property tax system has [discriminated against Black families](#) throughout history and across the country, saddling them with an unfair tax burden – and when to this day, Black people pay 13 percent more in property taxes than similarly situated white families.
- Don’t ask us to wait, when even dying costs Black people more — end-of-life care under Medicare is [\\$7,100 more expensive](#) for Black individuals compared to their white counterparts.
- Don’t ask us to wait, when Black people are more than six times as likely as white people to languish behind bars for possessing drugs for personal use, even though Black and white people use drugs at the [same rates](#).
- Don’t ask us to wait, when [1 in 1,000 Black men and boys in the United States](#) can expect to die at the hands of police in a country where it’s rare for police officers to face legal consequences — and [even rarer to face a conviction](#) — for killing Black people.

- Don't ask us to wait, when [Black women in the United States](#) are three times more likely to die of preventable pregnancy related causes than white women, and are nearly twice as likely to die from cervical cancer.

As Dr. King argued in 1963, the movement for racial equality and equal rights under the law calls on us to move courageously towards repair. We can't get back those years and wages that Black people lost while in bondage and unfairly behind bars. We can't recover the lives lost to systemic anti-Blackness and heinous racial terror. We can't undo the trauma that has wreaked havoc on Black communities and bodies. **But what we can do is pass HR 40, and its Senate companion S 1083.** It is what the moment requires. It is an opportunity to start moving the United States out of this deep quagmire of inequality and to finally make it whole.

Sincerely,

IHood Media
 African Ancestral Society
 Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
 Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School
 American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
 Amnesty International USA
 Appeal Incorporated
 Autistic Self Advocacy Network
 Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
 Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)
 California Alliance for Youth and Community Justice
 Center for Community Alternatives
 Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
 Centro Legal de La Raza
 Change The Ref
 Chinese-American Planning Council
 Chi-Town Impact
 Council of Jewish Women
 Church World Service
 Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute
 Community Healing Network, Inc.
 Dance/NYC
 Demand Progress
 Disability Rights California
 Drug Policy Alliance
 Dynamic Force Productions, LLC
 Faith Action Network - Washington State
 First Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
 Fit, Fyne & Fabulous, LLC
 Giving Blueprint

Global Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School (for affiliation purposes)
Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
Health in Justice Action Lab, Northeastern University School of Law
HERitage Giving Fund
Historic Vernon AME Church
Human Rights Watch
IKAR Jewish Community
Immigrant Legal Defense
Institute of the Black World (IBW) 21st Century
International Black Women's Congress
Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)
Johnson & Klein Law
Justice Roundtable
Keep The Change, LLC
Let's ReUp
Life Line Financial Group
makeitplain.com
Matthew Shepard Foundation
McPherson Strategies, LLC
Merakai
Murph-Emmanuel AME Church
Nathalie Molina Niño, LLC (O³)
National Action Network (NAN)
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC)
National Association for Black Veterans, Inc.
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA)
National Conference of Black Lawyers
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Lawyers Guild (NLG)
National Lawyers Guild - International Committee
National Partnership for New Americans
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New American Leaders
New Yorkers for Culture & Arts
One World Exchange Project Blueprint
Pacific Community Ventures
Poo-Pourri
Primera Impact
Radical Health
Raleigh Immigration Law Firm
RaVae Entertainment, Inc.

Red-Horse Financial Group, Inc.
Reparations Pledge
RESULTS
Rise Up Kingston
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
ScienceVest
SimonSays Entertainment, Inc.
Sixth Episcopal District African Methodist Episcopal Church
St James African Methodist Episcopal Church
Stetson University College of Law
Strive Till I Rise
Sunrise Movement
Terence Crutcher Foundation
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
The Association of Black Psychologists, Inc.
The Taifa Group, LLC
The Chocolate Factory
The Husseini Group, Inc.
The Mezzanine Fund
Third Avenue Business Improvement District
Tyler Household Girl Chat 3.0
Umbrelly Welly
Union for Reform Judaism
University Network for Human Rights
Ureeka, Inc.
USC Gould School of Law International Human Rights Clinic
Vote Run Lead#WeAllGrow Latina Network
WESPAC Foundation, Inc.
WOCstar Fund
Women's Law Project
Woodhull Freedom Foundation
World Within Labs
YOUnify
Zehner, LLC