



**HOWARD COUNTY
LIBRARY SYSTEM**
Public Education for All

MEDIA RELEASE | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: April 26, 2021

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Howard County Library System Launches Brave Voices, Brave Choices Racial Equity Initiative

(Ellicott City, MD) – While the nation anxiously watched the trial resulting from the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and reeled from numerous other acts of violence against people of color, more than 200 Howard County, Maryland residents have been engaged in an authentic and innovative process to explore the roots of racism and its impact on their community.

“At Howard County Library System, we condemn racism, xenophobia, misogyny, hatred, and racial and gendered violence in all forms against all people. We believe in standing against racism and hatred each time it is in our midst, and strategizing to enact change until America’s promises ring true for all people. We believe true and lasting change requires true and lasting intention to learn, grow and act,” said HCLS President & CEO Tonya Aikens. “That is why we are launching a new initiative, Brave Voices, Brave Choices. We are acting on our commitment to move past statements and begin the work of creating the reality we want for all people.”

Over the last year, HCLS has been actively advancing racial equity for its staff and the larger community. Internally, HCLS staff have engaged in leadership development, staff training, and REAL (Racial Equity at the Library) Conversations. For the community, HCLS has provided opportunities for racial equity training and conversation, curated reading lists and other learning materials, hosted speakers, led classes, and organized community events. Its new Racial Equity Alliance, comprising 20 community leaders, guides the Library in meaningful equity work and engagement opportunities.

Howard County NAACP’s Laura Johnson says, “Hatred simply makes no sense. I want to live in a Howard County where I don’t have to explain to my young, black son how a person could hate him because of the color of his beautiful caramel skin or the ‘crown’ of his kinky, cottony hair. I want him to see, through efforts like the Racial Equity Alliance, that the work, tears, voices, and bloodshed by so many freedom fighters have not gone in vain but continue in citizens courageous enough to expose racism in all its forms, heal together, and to dismantle systems that fail to uplift our common humanity, dignity and shared prosperity.”

Working in partnership with local consultants Equity Matters, HCLS invites the community to share and reflect on personal experiences related to racism and discrimination through an innovative story collection approach called Sensemaking. By examining stories and the impact they have had on people’s lives, participants will look for patterns that represent systemic biases

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and oppressive constructs that support, promote, and perpetuate racism within our community and the institutions by which we are all connected.

The Brave Voices, Brave Choices initiative officially launches on Tuesday, April 27 and will complete its first phase by July 1, 2021. Various community engagement activities (largely virtual) are planned for the summer months, and training sessions will resume in the fall. Visit hclibrary.org for more information.

ABOUT HOWARD COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

An award-winning system, Howard County Library System consistently earns the highest five-star ranking, which is attained by fewer than one percent of public libraries in the U.S., and is the only library system in Maryland to do so.

- Mission: We deliver high-quality public education for all.
- Vision: A vital component of Howard County's renowned education system, we deliver excellence in education for everyone, advancing the economy and quality of life.
- HCLS has six branches across Howard County, plus an administrative office in Ellicott City.
- Collection not only includes books, movies, and music, but also ukuleles, DIY tools, and artwork.

ABOUT EQUITY MATTERS

Equity Matters offers a variety of supports and organizational strategies for getting voices heard and improving their impact in a group or community. Its team is comprised of experts from a variety of backgrounds who have the training and experience to develop and implement real change. Equity Matters works in a racial equity framework that called "counter-racism," which stands on the shoulders of traditionally anti-racist practices, but adds complexity science practices as well. Learn more at equity-matters.org.

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