

July 15, 2020

The Honorable Jim Kenney, Mayor
Liz Hersh, Director of Office of Homeless Services
Brian Abernathy, City Managing Director
Thomas Farley, Department of Public Health
Members of City Council

Re: Immediate Protection for Camp JTD and other encampments

EqualHealth - Campaign Against Racism:
Public Health and Medical Providers Letter of Support
For Camp JTD - Philadelphia, PA, USA

We, health workers and activists, stand in support of the residents of the James Talib Dean (JTD) encampments and affirm their right to take action to protect themselves and their loved ones during this unprecedented pandemic. The lack of adequate, safe, and accessible housing is a public health crisis that has spanned decades and is intensified due to the spread of COVID-19. United globally, as a community representing 23 chapters of EqualHealth's Campaign Against Racism across 9 countries, we call on the city to cease violent actions against the James Talib Dean Encampment (Camp JTD), and meet the material needs of its residents.¹ It is a public health imperative that vulnerable populations have access to nutrition, shelter, and running water during this crisis in order to control the spread of infectious diseases and prevent unnecessary death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have issued guidance against clearing encampments of unhoused individuals during the current pandemic, in order to ensure that people experiencing homelessness can live safely in the absence of other housing options.² The encampment is serving to mitigate the harms of a failing healthcare and housing system, acting as the only option for unhoused people to gain access to critical and basic necessities. By disbanding the encampment without providing a housing alternative to its residents, the city risks exacerbating the COVID-19 crisis in Philadelphia.

We demand that the city of Philadelphia take action to provide safe and accessible housing and support to the residents of the JTD encampments, and others throughout Philadelphia. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty has documented more than 85 jurisdictions across the country that have placed people experiencing homelessness into individual units, including hotels, and vacant dorm rooms.³ This action is not only feasible for the city to take, it is also crucial to the containment and prevention of the spread of infectious diseases including, but not limited to, COVID-19.

¹ <http://www.socialmedicineconsortium.org/campaign-against-racism/>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>

³ <https://nlchp.org/coronavirus/>

The City of Philadelphia has consistently failed its unhoused residents by refusing to provide appropriate and affordable housing to the community. The residents of Camp JTD are acting in defense of their lives by maintaining the encampment and providing basic and necessary structures for safer living while allowing members to participate in the urgently needed transformation of Philadelphia within a vision of the wider Black Lives Matter movement. In the absence of support from the city, Camp JTD has successfully arranged a food preparation area with the ability to receive, organize, prepare, and distribute donations, along with multiple sanitation stations including hand-washing units and a shower. Residents and volunteers run a medic station to distribute basic medications and supplies, as well as to coordinate access to emergency medical support, urgently needed COVID-19 screening, testing, and an additional hotel for high risk individuals.

As medical providers and healthcare workers, we support the demands of the Camp JTD residents as well as their rights to serve displaced and unhoused people by providing accessibility to healthcare, food, sanitation, COVID-19 prevention, harm reduction support, and ongoing community care. We call on the City of Philadelphia to cease any plans for violent actions to remove residents of this encampment or other encampments throughout the city, because this action will directly contribute to preventable deaths and poor health outcomes for already vulnerable populations.

The goal of EqualHealth's Campaign Against Racism is to dismantle structural racism and its effects on health around the world by supporting local actions, efforts, and networks which aim to improve the health and lives of those most affected by racism, because racism kills. Until the City of Philadelphia takes responsibility and meets the urgent material needs of its unhoused residents, most of whom are Black and Brown, all actions to disrupt the encampment will be racist and illegitimate acts, directly contradicting our public health advice. We await your response to these life-saving demands and look forward to meaningful action to meet the material needs of the residents of Camp JTD.

Sincerely,

1. Michelle Morse, MD, MPH, internal medicine and public health doctor, Washington, DC
2. Juan Spinnato, MD, MBE, internal medicine and primary care doctor, Philadelphia, PA
3. Alan Alves Brito, PhD, Adjunct Professor, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil
4. Susanne Johnson, MSN, CRNP, FNP-BC, Family Nurse Practitioner and Associate Medical Director of Project HOPE - Camden's Healthcare for the Homeless, Philadelphia, PA
5. April Budd, MHSA, hospital administrator on and global health professional, Philadelphia, PA
6. James Deutsch MD PhD Dept. of Psychiatry, University of Toronto (originally from Greater Philadelphia)
7. Aarti Bhatt, MD MED/PEDS community health doctor, Minneapolis MN

8. Rachel Bedenbaugh, MPH, Public Health Professional and Disaster, Response Program Manager, Boston MA
9. Rose Olson, resident physician, internal medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA
10. Anne Marie Collins MA, Community Organizer, Red Antiracista, Spain
11. Rakhshanda Saleem, Phd, Associate Professor, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA
12. Hugo Flores, MD. Mexico.
13. Rahed Mohammed, MD. Internal Medicine. Philadelphia
14. Adam Bitunguranye, M.D, Junior Medical Officer, Nyaruguru, Republic of Rwanda
15. Cassandra Fox, Nurse Practitioner Student, Boston, MA
16. Virginia Byron, MD Pediatrician, Arc Health
17. Asongu Ncho, MD. Internal Medicine Los Angeles
18. Tanvi Avasthi, RN, Baltimore, MD
19. Amaia Elorza Arregi, Graduate Student, The Fletcher School - Tufts University, Boston, MA
20. Janhavi Dubhashi, MPH, Atlanta, GA
21. Tony Spadaro, M.D., MPH, Emergency Medicine, Philadelphia PA
22. Greg Gabrellas, MD, Resident Physician in Psychiatry, UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute
23. Brienna Milleson, medical student, Saint Louis University School of Medicine
24. Bram Wispelwey, MD MPH; Internal Med and Public Health; Boston, MA
25. Maile Panerio-Langer, MPH; Boston, MA
26. Joseph Panerio-Langer, MD; Chief Medical Officer, Brockton Neighborhood Health Center, Brockton, MA
27. Christopher Garcia-Wilde, MD/MPH Student, University of Miami
28. Lucas Hill, DO/MPH student Touro University California, Vallejo, CA
29. Leah Ratner, MD/ MS, Physician, Boston MA
30. Ahmed Elnaiem, Harvard Medical School MD Candidate, Boston MA
31. Renán Orellana, DO Student, Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine, Las Cruces, NM
32. Karim Sariahmed, MD, Internal Medicine Physician, New York, NY
33. Dani Baurer, MD, Family Doctor, Project HOME, Philadelphia
34. Vanessa Van Doren, MD, Internal Medicine Physician, Atlanta GA
35. Lily Bessette, EMT, Boston MA
36. Faizah Shareef, Medical Student Boston, MA
37. Grace Ng, Medical Student, Philadelphia, PA
38. Toni Eyssallenne, MD, PhD, Internal Medicine-Pediatrics, community medicine physician, Brooklyn, NY
39. Ruth Staus, DNP, MS, APRN, Nurse Practitioner, St. Paul, MN
40. Sophia Geffen, MPH, Boston MA.
41. Elizabeth Boyle, MD, Internal Medicine and Primary Care, Philadelphia, Pa
42. Matthew Hing, MD/PhD student, University of California, Los Angeles, CA
43. Nasreen Quadri, MD, Internal Medicine and Pediatrics Hospitalist, Minneapolis, MN
44. Rebekah Sugarman, Medical student, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
45. Mike Westerhaus MD, community health provider, Minneapolis, MN

46. Jennifer Goldsmith, MS, MD, Division of Global Health Equity, Brigham and Women's Hospital
47. Mauricio Polidoro, Associate Professor, Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, Brazilian National Association of Public Health (ABRASCO)
48. Ayah El-Fahmawi, BA Clinical Research Coordinator, Philadelphia, PA
49. Rudmila Rashid, Medical Student at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
50. Brett Mitchell, Medical Student at Drexel University College of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA
51. Tinashe Goronga MD, MPH Centre for Health Equity Zimbabwe , Zimbabwe
52. Anna Hing, MPH. Graduate student, University of California, Los Angeles
53. Clare Idehen, B.S. Medical Student at Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA
54. Marysol Encarnacion, MSPH, Medical Student at Drexel University College of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA
55. Jimena Maza, MD, Clinical Director at PIH Mexico. Chiapas, Mexico.
56. Tanvi Avasthi, MSN, MA, RN, Emergency Nurse, Baltimore, MD
57. Marisa Nadas, MD, MPH. OBGYN physician and public health professional. New York, NY.
58. Sanjna Surya, Medical Student, University of Pennsylvania
59. Catherine Raney, Medical Student, Philadelphia PA
60. Amrita Ayer, Medical Student, University of California Los Angeles David Geffen School of Medicine
61. Suhaib Abaza, Medical Student, Atlanta, GA
62. Chaand Ohri, Attending Physician. Washington DC
63. Zadok Sacks, MD, Internal medicine and pediatrics. Ventura, CA