



Dear Members of the Little Brothers Community,

The senseless and callous murder of George Floyd before our eyes has reenergized so many Americans to demand change. The streets of communities all over the country are filled with people from all walks of life calling for the elimination of racism and police brutality, and for upholding the civil rights of African Americans.

Over the past couple of weeks, you have probably received many emails from corporations and organizations lending their support to Black Lives Matter, while making promises to repudiate and fight against systemic racism.

At Little Brothers, we don't make promises. **We make commitments and follow through.** Over the past 60 years, **we have worked to build a diverse community** that respects and appreciates the differences of its members, our elders, while treating everyone with kindness and dignity. We are always evolving and we know we must do more.

As a Black woman, I have been grappling with a wide range of emotions. Frankly, I have found myself thinking of and reliving the many instances where racism has affected my life. Anyone who's ever been made to feel less than whole, less than who they have a right to be, knows how demoralizing, demeaning, and wrong racism is. Yet, these experiences are woven into the fabric of daily life for Black and Brown people across our country. And these include many of the elders we serve: in fact, two-thirds are Black and Brown, and all have lifetimes of both pain and joy to share.

At Little Brothers, we have the **privilege of learning about life** from those who have lived it. Bearing witness to our elders' lives, memories, and experiences validates our mission daily and deepens our understanding of who we are and who we're meant to be. When I'm troubled, I know I can always turn to our elders. Their perspectives are only achieved from life experience. My recent conversation with one of our elders who is a 102-year-old Black woman brought me a steadying, calming perspective that seemed impossible to find anywhere else.

As an **elder-centric organization**, it's part of our organizational DNA to create forums for our elders to express their opinions. We believe our elders have the right to express their thoughts in many ways and especially now, about George Floyd's murder and the ensuing civil unrest, as so many grew up in the 1950s and '60s. Their voices speak to all of us—especially to young people.

Our elders helped to build and were part of the civil rights movement. I honor them. All of us at Little Brothers honor them. Most important, we believe **their voices and their wisdom are valuable and necessary for all of us to hear.**

For this reason, we want to share with you what our elders have to say, with the hope that you may be inspired by their perspective.

*"What was the purpose of my life? I thought we were past this. I thought we had made progress. This is the fight I had when I was growing up. This is the fight my kids had. This is the same fight. I thought my lifetime was about freedom, but now here we are... again."*

*"My neighborhood is unrecognizable. It's like a war zone outside. I just can't go out."*

*"Two of my neighbors were robbed, and the ATM from our lobby was stolen."*

*"Stores are closed everywhere. Only one store is open, and it's over a mile away. How am I supposed to get groceries?"*

*"I'm really worried about my grandkids..."*

*"I'm unable to join the protests, but I support the protesters."*

*"Why are we hated so much? I just don't understand it... This reminds me of the 1950s, and it's very triggering."*

*"We've all reflected back on the '60s, the assassination of Dr. King, and how frightened we were then. We didn't know what change would come and how we would be affected. We're still dealing with the injustices of being Black in this country. It exists. It has to be addressed. But even still, my grandchildren do not know what their great grandparents experienced."*

*"What I went through... it's going to be a lot different for the next generation."*

*"Our young people need encouragement. Those young people who vandalized and caused a lot of destruction, they're going to need to know that we can still work together. We can show them that we believe in them and show them what respect looks like. We're the ones who came through the past, and we're responsible for sharing our knowledge. They are our resources to do the actual change-making."*

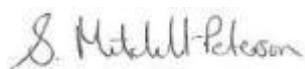
*In order to achieve something, you have to understand it first. Try to learn as much about the world you live in, try to understand what you want from your future. You have to set up some kind of path of action in order to improve your condition, and you have to be disciplined.*

*We must be our neighbors' keepers. Caring about each other can go a long way to build understanding, equality, and justice. It starts with a level of respect and friendship with each other. Little Brothers has always been united in this spirit. We are united in this same spirit."*

Our elders are fearful, distressed, and grieving. They are also hopeful, encouraged, and resilient. I believe we can all relate to this mix of emotions right now. And through friendship, we're given a chance to deepen our understanding and respect for one another. We will continue our work of connecting people who come from all ethnic, racial, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds and orientations in friendship.

Thank you for joining us as we bear witness to life and recognize and celebrate the singular value of each one.

Sincerely,



Simone Mitchell-Peterson  
Chief Executive Officer  
Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly, Chicago Chapter

