

Remarks of Dr. Stacy Deck, MHC Board Chair at the 2020 Annual Meeting

As we gather as a coalition and recommit to continuing the work of an organization that is cutting-edge, resilient, creative, and essential, I think it is fair to say that MHC's work is more critical than ever. This pandemic has drawn back the curtain, making our essential workforce more visible. We are thankful for first responders; nurses, CNAs and other medical professionals, teachers, social workers, grocery store clerks, restaurant cooks and wait staff, long term care professionals, and all members of our community whose job it is to serve. We do not pay them enough. As housing prices have risen while incomes have not, more and more of our neighbors struggle to pay the rent or mortgage. We need our neighbors—our public servants—and we want them to be able to live everywhere our community. This is why MHC exists.

Tonight, we are going to connect the dots between housing and health. As we do so, I think it is important to recognize the intersections of housing and health with other critical, societal factors. Race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, class, age, household composition, and so many other identities are associated with disparate—negative—outcomes that result from discrimination, oppression, and inequity. The Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health tweeted this morning, "Racism is a public health crisis... We cannot have a healthy world without a just world." This pandemic has merely amplified inequities that already existed and have existed for a very long time. Let us pause to remember those without access to safe, fair, accessible, and affordable housing simply because of who they are, and let us recommit ourselves to doing the work to build a more equitable community that welcomes and values everyone.

Tonight, let us take a moment of silence to remember those whose lives were stolen from them—most recently Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and David McAtee—and too many others who have been killed, who have lost a loved one, who fear for their lives. We must say their names. We must affirm that black lives matter. And we must do so much more.

MHC recommits tonight to the work for equity and fairness. As the moratoria on evictions, shut offs and foreclosures expire, we are readying ourselves and our community to ensure compassion and justice. In the past year, MHC has advocated with the Chief Justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court, the local District Court, the Public Service Commission, and local government for policies that stabilize families. We will continue this advocacy. Our future work will also include research to document disparate and unfair impacts as they occur.

MHC is also working with the University of Louisville Oral History Center to preserve historical accounts of black families' experiences of being denied access to homeownership because of overtly racist policies that excluded them from intergenerational wealth building. We cannot ignore this past as that calcified legacy is an impediment to justice.

Last week, May 27th marked the 52nd anniversary of the 1968 uprising in the Parkland neighborhood, just a few blocks from where David McAtee was killed. On that day,

demonstrators gathered at 28th and Greenwood to protest the reinstatement of a police officer who, unprovoked, had struck a prominent black businessman, Manfred Reid. As organizers gave speeches from atop a parked car, a police car drove through the crowd, some people threw empty bottles at the car, and the protest became violent. The incident sparked an uprising that would last through the weekend. Two young African American men were killed, hundreds arrested, and millions of dollars in property destroyed or damaged. Governor Louie B. Nunn called in the National Guard to restore order and patrol the streets during an imposed curfew. The chilling effect of this uprising still haunts West Louisville today. When we do not learn from our past, we are destined to repeat it.

I will conclude with two messages. On the eve of World War I and the Pandemic of 1918, Robert Frost wrote about “doing things over and over that just won’t stay done.” He said, “By good rights I ought not to have so much put on me, but there seems no other way... the best way out is always through.” Tonight, may we recommit to finding our way through this painful time and to creating a better future for everyone.

The other message are the words of Dr. King. In May 1967, Dr. King came to Louisville to advocate for changes to our segregated housing policies that enabled landlords to discriminate based on race. As he was speaking to a large crowd of white people, members of the audience screamed at him. A young girl spit at him and told him, “I hate you.” And then a rock was thrown at Dr. King. A witness stated that the rock was ““bigger than my fist [and] was thrown at horrible speed toward King. It was meant to kill him.” Dr. King picked up the rock and took it with him. That night, he carried it with him to the podium when he addressed a West End church, saying “Upon this rock, we are going to build an open city.” May we continue the work, may we not grow tired or discouraged, and may we build a better community on a foundation of justice for all.

Thank you.