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Citizen's Concerns about Racism in Natick

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To: Selectboard@natickma.org

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Dear Members of the Natick Select Board,

I hope this email finds all of you healthy and well. Today, I write to you all again as a concerned citizen after yesterday's public unfurling and [display of a Confederate flag](#) at the town's Memorial Day service. This vile act has rippled through our community – creating real, additional trauma for many of our BIPOC community members - and, again, brings negative attention to our town. What is it about Natick that white supremacy feels comfortable and welcome within our town's borders? Why, last September, did [a rally espousing white supremacist propaganda](#) feel welcome to come to our common and accost a group of our kids (including the striking of a Black child by one of the participants)? Why did a town elected official feel safe to organize for and participate in an insurrection against our democracy in order to maintain and strengthen white supremacy? The same elected official has shown no remorse and continues to give media interviews and organize events at her home. Why would she feel that this is acceptable in Natick? Why would a man and his family feel that it would be acceptable to bring and display a Confederate flag on our town common during a public, televised event? **The answer is that white supremacy and white supremacists have found Natick to be a welcoming space for their abhorrent acts and rhetoric.**

These recent, successive recent events call for direct action from our town leadership. Many of these racist incidents have been met with statements from the Select Board highlighting concern for all members of our community and our BIPOC community members in particular. I have listened to the Select Board make these well-intentioned statements several times in the past few months. Respectfully, these continued statements of support will ring hollow if they are not accompanied with action. Communities of color in Natick need to see direct action by their elected leaders. White community members need to see antiracist modeling at the highest levels. As representatives of our community, **I urge the board to acknowledge that racism is alive and well in Natick. I urge the board to acknowledge that the lived experience of BIPOC residents is very different from that of white residents. I urge the board to label racism a public health crisis in Natick.** These acknowledgements are necessary. We see racism within the broader community through the incidents highlighted above and we also see the effects of institutional racism in our town government with the lack of diversity in our elected bodies and appointed committees. We also see these effects with [the disproportionate arrest of BIPOC residents and visitors](#) by our police department – where one out of five arrests in 2019 and 2020 was of a Black person. Both years saw similar arrest rates for Lantinx residents and visitors as well.

Beyond statements of support for Natick's BIPOC residents, **I urge the board to publically invite input from BIPOC residents. I urge the board to make space and give platforms/forums for BIPOC residents to speak their truths if they so choose. I urge the board to listen and to give follow-up, public statements that acknowledge that the board has listened, understood and is taking direct action in response.** Our town is blessed to have a wealth of specialists and facilitators in racial justice who could lead these forums. I know that there is interest in these forums because I have heard members of the community ask the board directly for them during Public Speak in the past.

Again, I commend the Select Board for its actions following the murder of George Floyd and the creation of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force this past fall. This was an important first step to addressing

forms of institutional racism and bias and inequity that exist in every community in America and in Natick. **I urge you not to wait to hear back from the task force to act. The time to act is now.** If you wait to act, more racist incidents will occur and more trauma will be inflicted on BIPOC residents. Waiting signals to BIPOC folks that their continued trauma and suffering is tolerable until we (the white majority) are ready to act.

I thank all members of the board for their service to the town and I hope to see the board start the hard and challenging task of leading Natick to a more equitable and racially just place to live and work in for all of its residents and visitors.

Thank You,
Daniel Zitnick
65 Pine St.