

Statement on Black History Month 2023

Every February, our nation honors the sacrifices and contributions that Black people have made to enrich our communities. Black History Month is an opportunity for all of us to reflect and acknowledge the meaningful and robust achievements of the Black community that are too often overlooked. This year's theme is "Black Resistance," recognizing the perseverance, strength, and courage Black people have, and continue to, display in the face of oppression, violence, and discrimination.

Since even before the founding of our nation, generations of Black people have had to fight for the equality and freedom that have long been denied to them due to slavery, Jim Crow, housing discrimination, over-incarceration, and other racist policies propagated by our public and private institutions. All of us are familiar with influential Black leaders that inspired movements of change, including Harriet Tubman, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Frederick Douglass, and many more. Yet the often unsung heroes of civil rights are the thousands of Black Americans who showed up to protest in their local community, used their voice to speak out against injustice, and challenged prejudice in both small and big ways.

As we commemorate the achievements of the Black community, both large and small, it is important to recognize the formidable Black leaders in our own community working tirelessly on behalf of economic and societal equity and justice. While there are too many to recognize, this Black History Month, I want to acknowledge the work of two such leaders, Tomiquia Moss & Joe Wilson. Tomiquia Moss is the Executive Director of All Home, a regional non-profit advancing solutions to disrupt poverty and homelessness and create new economic mobility pathways for extremely low-income people in the Bay Area. Tomiquia has decades of experience working on solutions to homelessness, including as the former CEO of Hamilton Families, a role which I also previously held. She has long been a fierce advocate for underserved communities, and her accomplishments in affordable housing have been an inspiration to all, including myself. Joe Wilson is the Executive Director of Hospitality House, an organization that serves people experiencing homelessness in the City's Tenderloin, Sixth Street Corridor, and Mid-Market neighborhoods. Joe's affiliation with Hospitality House started when he was a resident in the Hospitality House shelter in 1983. However, for the next 35 years, Joe found a passion for helping those struggling with homelessness and poverty. Joe helped found the Coalition on Homelessness in 1987, and leveraged his own experience to grow within Hospitality House - as a volunteer, peer staff, program manager, and ultimately, Executive Director. Joe's spirit and dedication are the epitome of compassion and perseverance. We are grateful to them both for their service.



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While it is important to celebrate our victories and the leaders who helped achieve them, we must also acknowledge the work that is yet to be done. This year's theme feels acutely relevant in light of the tragic murder of Tyre Nichols. His death, along with the many Black men and women who experience violence at the hands of those whom we entrust to uphold the law and keep us safe, is a stark reminder of the systemic racism that continues to plague our society. Every day, Black people are confronted by injustice from police brutality, economic inequality, health disparities, and even homelessness. We cannot let prejudice prevail — lives hang in the balance.

In the spirit of this year's Black History Month theme, I call upon all within the ECS network to stand up for what is right. This month is a time of celebration for our friends, family, and neighbors in the Black community, and as we uplift Black culture, history, businesses, and everything in between, we must also stand beside them in the face of adversity.

In solidarity,
Beth Stokes