

## A Message from the Presidents of the AAPD and AAPD Foundation

June 8, 2020

We, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) and the AAPD Foundation are heartbroken, shocked, and horrified by the death of George Floyd as he was restrained by police in Minneapolis. While America has come a long way in becoming a multi-ethnic and multi-racial society where differences are appreciated and not feared, there is still a long ways to go. Racism in any form is abhorrent and ultimately most damaging to those children who experience it in their daily lives. It is apparent that far too often black people are treated differently than others in encounters with the police. The AAPD and the AAPD Foundation denounce acts of racism and violence that have and continue to occur across our nation.

The AAPD's vision is optimal oral health for all children. The AAPD Foundation is focused on providing a dental home for every child who currently lacks one. The AAPD Foundation has provided more than \$6.2 million in recent years helping community-based clinics provide dental homes to a diverse array of 550,000 underserved children. While pediatric dentists are the Big Authority on little teeth and we treat all children regardless of race, religion, or family income, we also recognize the many aspects of society that can prove harmful to children. All children deserve to grow up in a just and fair society. That is why for many years AAPD advocacy has focused on programs that provide dental insurance for low-income families. While programs such as Medicaid are not perfect, we continuously strive to improve and reform them.

Pediatric dentists are a broad and diverse community, and our pediatric dental residents are tremendously bright, talented, and caring people. While we are leading the way in gender equality, this does not mean that educational opportunities are equal for all. In too many areas, children are held back due to a variety of challenges: inadequate schools, lack of family support, lack of healthy food, lack of safe neighborhoods, racism, and sadly, in some cases, dangerous encounters with the police. As child advocates, we must be their voice. Our mission for well over a generation has been to remove dental disease from the list of inequalities that prevent children from becoming all they can be.

These are not easy challenges, but we all must work together to overcome them. You may ask, as a pediatric dentist, what can I do? There are many avenues for each individual to consider. Mentor or tutor children in need, especially those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds than yourself. Volunteer at schools in and outside of your own community. Become involved in advocacy for water fluoridation. Talk to your patients about careers in dentistry. Each of us must follow our own path for action, but all of us must unite in opposing racism and promoting a more just and fair society.

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