

December 18, 2020

Franklin County Community-wide Letter

Our Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

As business and civic leaders in Franklin County, we pledge our commitment to an inclusive community that welcomes all, regardless of differences in race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, or any other way we define ourselves.

The individual perceptions and institutional practices that contribute to prejudice and bigotry are destructive and divisive to our community. We recognize not nearly enough has been done to attack the issues surrounding inequities and inequalities in Franklin County. Therefore, our pledge goes beyond a statement. We commit to take action.

We recognize that diversity and inclusion are multifaceted issues and that we need to tackle these subjects holistically to better engage and support all underrepresented groups within Franklin County. To do this, we believe we also need to address honestly and head-on the concerns and needs of our diverse community members and increase equity for all, including Blacks, Latinx, Asians, Native Americans, LGBTQ+, physical and developmental abilities, veterans, and women.

Collectively, as employers and as community leaders, we agree that we must do more.

This is not a public relations problem; this is a real problem. Real people are being hurt. Real people are being denied opportunity. Real people are forced to attend schools with concentrated poverty. Real people face suspicion, hostility, and hate. We can't know what is in anyone's heart, but we certainly know that individual and collective overt and subconscious social bias and intolerance too often manifests itself in our community.

Moreover, we know that diversity is good for the economy; it improves corporate performance, drives growth, and enhances employee engagement. Simply put, organizations with diverse teams perform better. For local employers to recruit and retain a talented and diverse workforce, we must cultivate a more welcoming, accepting community. Otherwise Franklin County will be left behind.

These things are hard to admit. We love Franklin County. It has many wonderful qualities. We work hard. We are generous and community-minded. We are faithful. We have booming distribution hubs, world-class manufacturers, rich history, friendly small businesses, gorgeous natural beauty, and terrific civic organizations.



But at the same time, there is a disease among us – a cancer that must be attacked – the cancer of division, fear and bias that holds us back as individuals and as a community. A diverse and welcoming community is not only just and right for all, but is the underpinning of the most dynamic and highest performing regions in our country.

We can do better. Indeed, we must.

We don't have easy answers on how to achieve a more equitable and inclusive community, and change won't happen overnight, but we commit to taking action for as long as it takes. We pledge to assess our own organizations through an equity lens. We pledge to adjust and implement policies within our organizations to embrace diversity. We pledge to support community groups working to address injustices across Franklin County. We pledge this in order to foster a more inclusive community where *everyone* feels welcome and has equitable opportunities to thrive.

On behalf of the staff, the Racial Conciliation Committee and Board of Directors of Luminest Inc.,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bonita Zehler".

Bonita Zehler, Executive Director
Luminest Inc.