On the backdrop, a major public health emergency and related changes that have placed significant stress in our daily lives, recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery by police officers, along with the extensive history of ongoing police brutality and racism in our country has brought an immeasurable amount of pain, grief, and frustration to our communities, especially for people of color and more specifically to members of our Biology Students of Color (BIOSOC) organization.These recent events serve as a devastating reminder of the repeated injustices and striking disparities prevalent in our society. We recognize these tragedies as yet another example of the byproduct of deep-rooted and multidimensional systemic racism and inequalities that have disproportionate and traumatic effects on people of color.

While current unrest and protests are focused on police brutality and racism in the general society, our organization acknowledges that the very policies, practices, and procedures through which the scientific community operates have similarly been rooted in bias. It is, therefore, our duty to address both the horrific past and current reality of racism and implicit biases encountered by people of color in society, the higher education landscape, and among the institutional framework of the university if we hope to build an inclusive environment that recognizes and respects people of all backgrounds and experiences. While we acknowledge the University’s efforts through programs such as the HHMI Inclusive Excellence, recognizing and denouncing the internal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural dimensions of racism that exist outside and inside JMU as well as listening to the voices and experiences of students and faculty of color will be critical to follow through with making long overdue and hopefully long-lasting changes.

President Alger released a statement on May 31st calling for building a better tomorrow together. While earnest, this letter fell short of mentioning the names of the individuals that we have tragically lost due to the unlawful murder by police officers. Nor does the statement explicitly denounce racism and white supremacy or even adequately portray the acknowledgment and value of black students and staff. We ask that other university officials, department heads and deans to release a statement that models the statement by the JMU College of Arts and Letters and others, in which you address the current events and recognize that these are part of a historical pattern, denounce racism and the tragic killings, openly acknowledge and value the people of color in our community, and outline how your group, school, or department will combat racism to create real institutional change at JMU.

Sincerely,

BIOSOC