The Social Work Hospice and Palliative Care Network (SWHPN) wholeheartedly rejects the killings of black and brown people by police. As social workers helping ease suffering at end-of-life, we cannot let racism and disparities in care go unchecked. We are here to support a more just, equitable system for all.

Our organization is comprised of nearly 1,000 hospice and palliative care social workers throughout the country. Our core work focuses on providing professional development, amplifying evidence-informed best practices, and advocating for improved policies and increased funding, so that all patients and families experiencing serious illness receive expert psychosocial care which alleviates their suffering, improves their quality of life, and facilitates their dying in accordance with their wishes.

However, until now, we have not explicitly spoken up about the impact that race, racism, and structural inequities have on our work. That is wrong. It should be impossible to offer webinars on advance care planning without also discussing who is and is not seeking hospice care in the first place. It should be impossible to gather each year for an annual assembly without noticing the lack of diversity in the room. This silence meant that we have missed the opportunity to amplify important voices, and to critically question the role of social workers in advancing social justice in the hospice and palliative care fields.

Moving forward, we are committed to ensuring this organization takes action and speaks up. The historical impacts of racism are felt in the inequitable suffering by African Americans, Native Americans, and other communities of color from COVID-19; in disproportionate rates of cancer; in the deaths at the hands of police. By speaking up to address racism in ourselves, in our clinical practice, in our research, and in our society, we are hoping to make tangible changes towards justice and peace.