

CONFRONTING RACISM AND IN SUPPORT OF BLACK LIVES

1 WHEREAS, foundational to our work must be the belief in justice for all, and that
2 the fight for fairness, justice and dignity must encompass everyone—regardless of
3 race, religion, gender, language, national origin or sexual orientation; and

4 WHEREAS, more than 400 years after Africans arrived upon these shores where
5 they and their descendants were enslaved for nearly 250 years, and more than
6 150 years after the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted citizenship
7 and equal protection under the law to all, followed by another century of Jim
8 Crow laws, and 66 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme
9 Court ruling affirmed and extended that promise, Black Americans continue to
10 struggle for full protection under the law and to be recognized as full human
11 beings deserving of basic human rights instead of being treated as subjects; and

12 WHEREAS, in the 1890s, journalist and civil rights activist Ida B. Wells decried the
13 horrors of lynching and condemned the nation for its inaction, saying: “. . . there
14 has been no single effort put forth by the many moral and philanthropic forces of
15 the country to put a stop to this wholesale slaughter.” Almost 130 years later,
16 Black men, women and children are still fighting for the right to live safely and
17 free from harm in their homes and communities, and a new generation of young
18 African Americans is witnessing the barbarity of lynchings and perpetual genocide
19 in modern times; and

20 WHEREAS, on Feb. 23, 2020, 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was shot and killed by
21 two white assailants in a small Georgia suburb while he was jogging. For more
22 than two months after his murder, Arbery’s family mourned in silence while his
23 killers remained free. The killers were arrested only after the release of a video of
24 the murder sparked public outrage and gained national attention. Almost one
25 month later, social media alerted the nation to the killing of 26-year-old Breonna
26 Taylor, who was shot to death on March 13, 2020, as she slept in her home. She
27 was struck by eight shots fired by police who entered the wrong home to serve a
28 warrant. On May 25, 2020, 46-year-old George Floyd was murdered by a white
29 Minneapolis police officer who knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes
30 while Floyd begged for his life, repeatedly saying, “I can’t breathe,” and then, “I’m
31 about to die;” and

32 WHEREAS, the tragic and violent loss of these Black lives and, absent video and
33 protest, the racial bias with which these cases would have been handled has
34 exposed the deep unhealed wounds of systemic racism and left many to ask if
35 Black lives will ever matter in America; and

36 WHEREAS, through their unions, collective action and collective bargaining,
37 working people have used our collective voice to help better the lives of working
38 people and our communities by increasing pay, improving working conditions and
39 by promoting policies that confront inequality, that improve the pillars of
40 opportunity—such as public education, healthcare and housing—and that
41 improve the quality of life in our communities; and

42 WHEREAS, the perpetual climate of hate and racial animus, fueled and
43 emboldened by President Trump, and his allies, is a reminder of the great
44 unfinished work of this nation, the labor movement and our union to ensure that
45 the promise of justice and liberty is a reality for all people; and

46 WHEREAS, at a time when a global health pandemic is exposing and exacerbating
47 long-standing and persistent inequities in health, education and economic
48 security, these murders underscore the destructive impact of systemic racism, a
49 culture that enables white nationalism and white supremacy and the resultant
50 violence on African Americans, other people of color, Native Americans, and other
51 vulnerable groups such as transgender and gender nonconforming individuals.
52 These evils have extracted a costly toll on our nation, as a divided whole; and

53 WHEREAS, as a union, we cannot be silent and will not be silent in condemning
54 the brutal murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and many
55 others; and

56 WHEREAS, the American Federation of Teachers has acted in many ways to
57 combat racism—from expelling segregated locals to, more recently, establishing a
58 Racial Equity Task Force charged with addressing the crisis of anti-Blackness and
59 its harmful effects, especially on Black males—and supporting the reform of
60 school discipline policies, such as the harsh and punitive disciplinary practices,
61 known as “zero tolerance,” that resulted in the loss of valuable instruction time
62 through increased suspensions and expulsions that had a disproportionate impact
63 on Black and Brown students; and

64 WHEREAS, to date the AFT has encouraged locals to make their own decisions,
65 based on local needs and conditions, on policing in schools; and

66 WHEREAS, the AFT supports the Justice in Policing Act of 2020, legislation
67 promoted by the Congressional Black Caucus and introduced by Democratic
68 leaders in the House and Senate that would ban chokeholds, guaranteed
69 immunity, and establish a national database to track police misconduct, and
70 prohibit certain no-knock warrants, and other steps to address police brutality:

71 **RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers renews its commitment to**
72 **end systemic racism in America, particularly in the criminal justice system, and**
73 **to fight to ensure fair and equitable treatment of people of color, as well as**
74 **members of other marginalized communities; and**

75 **RESOLVED, that toward this end, the AFT will support community allies that are**
76 **spearheading this work, including but not limited to Black Lives Matter, Color of**
77 **Change and the NAACP; and**

78 **RESOLVED, that the AFT is committed to systemic, comprehensive reform of**
79 **American law enforcement and criminal justice. Our objective is to establish**
80 **systems of community policing in which police become part of a community and**
81 **reflect its demographic composition and are organized and trained to protect**
82 **and serve it. These systems of community policing must be free of all forms of**
83 **discrimination and disparate treatment in the enforcement of the law, and the**
84 **police should be under civilian command and authority; and**

85 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will fight to demilitarize policing, and otherwise**
86 **support national efforts to provide oversight of states through federal**
87 **legislation prohibiting police brutality; and**

88 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for cultural competency and implicit bias**
89 **training for police to encourage a better understanding between police and the**
90 **members of the communities where they work, as well as greater diversity on**
91 **police forces; and**

92 **RESOLVED, that the AFT believes all working people, including those in the**
93 **criminal justice field, have the right to organize as a union and bargain**
94 **collectively over the terms and conditions of their employment, but that**
95 **collective bargaining agreements—while offering protection against false**
96 **allegations—should never shield misconduct; unions should promote, as the**

97 **AFT tries to do, high professional standards for our leaders and our members;**
98 **and**

99 **RESOLVED, that the AFT is committed to supporting transparent legal**
100 **procedures for holding police officers accountable for misconduct and violations**
101 **of law. We believe in civilian review boards; independent prosecutorial entities**
102 **when police are charged with legal violations; protections for whistleblowers**
103 **and witnesses to police misconduct; and the elimination of other barriers to**
104 **identifying and reporting police misconduct, including body cameras and**
105 **appropriate identification; and**

106 **RESOLVED, that the necessary function of school safety should be separated**
107 **from policing and police forces. School security personnel should be trained as**
108 **peace officers and integrated within the school community, with a focus on**
109 **nonviolent resolution of conflicts with a minimal use of force. The AFT will**
110 **reconvene a unionwide conversation—including educators, students and**
111 **parents—on how to transform school security to help achieve a safe and**
112 **welcoming environment for students and staff, and not a militaristic police state**
113 **that has criminalized Black and Brown students; and**

114 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will encourage and support the efforts of teachers,**
115 **school support staff and our affiliates to address the needs of children who**
116 **experience trauma from this violence, and fight for the resources—including**
117 **additional staff, like social workers, counselors, nurses and restorative justice**
118 **coaches—that students and staff need; and**

119 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to advocate to fund our future through**
120 **the HEROES Act and other measures for school districts to hire and maintain**
121 **personnel to provide the social, emotional and instructional supports students**
122 **need, as well as programs that help students resolve conflicts peacefully, such**
123 **as peer mediation; and**

124 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for cultural competency and implicit bias**
125 **training for our local leaders and members, to encourage a better**
126 **understanding among students, patients, and the communities our members**
127 **serve; and**

128 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will call on local school boards to pass and enforce anti-**
129 **racist policies; and**

130 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for professional development to include**
131 **cultural competency, implicit bias and trauma-informed practices to support**
132 **students, patients, and the people and communities our members serve; and**

133 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will act to address racial disparities and violence in all**
134 **of our communities and in our union—at all levels, from the workplace to the**
135 **national office; and**

136 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will encourage our state and local affiliates to**
137 **participate fully in dialogues and efforts with our community partners and**
138 **allies; and**

139 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will encourage White allies to listen and to support and**
140 **protect Black, LatinX, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander Americans, LGBTQ,**
141 **and non-White indigenous families, neighbors and communities from racial**
142 **inequities, so as to advance and attain equal educational, health and economic**
143 **opportunities afforded to all in the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness; and**

144 **RESOLVED, that the AFT opposes President Trump’s threat to use the**
145 **Insurrection Act. Active-duty military personnel should not be utilized to**
146 **intimidate our communities, as he did on June 1 when peaceful protesters were**
147 **tear-gassed and fired on with rubber bullets; and**

148 **RESOLVED, that the AFT will work to support policies at the federal, state and**
149 **local levels that eliminate discrimination, profiling and violence, and denounce**
150 **“stand your ground” laws; and**

151 **RESOLVED, that as our nation prepares for the most consequential election**
152 **season in recent history, the AFT will commit to mobilizing and engaging our**
153 **members, friends and family members to vote for Joe Biden for president, and**
154 **for other lawmakers and elected officials at the national, state and local levels**
155 **who will work for all Americans, not just the privileged few. Our activism,**
156 **combined with our vote, will bring about real change.**