

Grateful for our community organizations, coming together for change

I am thankful for what feels like a tipping point, and am hopeful for the future, writes the executive director of the Lenny Zakim Fund.

By **Eric Esteves** Updated June 18, 2020, 10:12 a.m.



Social justice advocates hold a press conference outside Boston City Hall on June 9. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF



Eric Esteves RICHARD HOWARD

When I think about gratitude, I am compelled to simultaneously consider both the presence and absence of grace. The pandemic's impact on Massachusetts communities has been dire, worsened by the compounding burden of racism and structural inequity that spurred uprisings across the country.

I dedicate my gratitude to the intergenerational movement giving voice to those who are tired of having their worth and humanity continually devalued. I am thankful to those activists and organizers who were dedicated to fighting for social, racial, and economic justice before it became so vogue these past few weeks.

I am thankful for ...

... those who are helping us all to embrace the grace and spiritual healing so vitally needed.

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... thought leaders like Leon Smith of Citizens for Juvenile Justice, who advocates for a fair and effective juvenile justice system in Massachusetts to promote the healthy development of young people. Leon has a [nine-point action plan](#) for race equity and police accountability to confront and achieve a high level of transparency in the state's [disparate treatment](#) of Black and brown youth.

... educators like [Neema Avashia](#), a phenomenal civics teacher in the Boston public schools, who has jolted young people into becoming change agents for well over a

decade. These days Neema can be found helping to redirect pandemic EBT funds from families that don't need the extra support to families that do.

... community organizations like the Black Economic Justice Institute and Union Capital Boston, which served critical gap-filling roles by moving money and [resources](#) directly into the hands of those most impacted by the public health crisis and shutdown. Both agencies have worked tirelessly to provide gift cards, masks, gloves, and necessities to low-income families and individuals who were already among the region's most vulnerable.

... community activists like Leonard Lee, who — in an effort to reduce risk and exposure — distributed free masks directly to individuals, families, students, and essential workers in Boston's hardest-hit neighborhoods.

... social justice organizations like Families for Justice as Healing, which organizes formerly incarcerated women to create community wellness alternatives to incarceration that heal and rebuild families and communities. They have been fighting to [defund policing and incarceration](#) since long before the pandemic and uprisings, and are committed to evidence-based solutions that address poverty, addiction, and trauma.

... business leaders like Segun Idowu of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts, who channels James Baldwin's determined rage with his strategically deliberate advocacy for Black businesses to have a fair share of the hundreds of millions of dollars handed out in [city and state contracts](#).

... the fitness professionals behind Level Ground Mixed Martial Arts, TRILLFIT, and 4 Corners Yoga + Wellness who know that communities of color suffer from COVID-19 at much higher rates as a result of social determinants of health and are determined to do something about it. They're offering a mix of free and paid content virtually to existing and new clients with a range of abilities.

... [Lilly Marcelin](#) of the Resilient Sisterhood Project, who helps to provide access to equitable medical care and serves as a resource for Black women at the intersection of domestic and sexual violence in relation to reproductive health and rights.

... the creatives who have stepped up to curate virtual spaces for social connection in a time of physical distancing. Shout-out to the folks at Boston While Black, The Collier Connection, LiteWork Events, Queens Co., and the Fairmount Innovation Lab.

... Gloribell Mota of Neighbors United for a Better East Boston (NUBE), who led the coordination of a healthy and sustainable mutual aid network driven by volunteer bilingual neighbors and immigrants to ensure [language accessibility](#) and cultural competency while connecting with the most vulnerable.

... the Mass Redistribution Fund, which has supported [grass-roots groups](#) leading urgent relief and recovery efforts, while also supporting affected people to fight for policies that reduce harm and build toward broader economic and social overhaul.

... my friends who are exhausted, yet have continued to challenge their friends, neighbors, and colleagues to evaluate the resources available to them — time, talent, and treasure — and use their privilege to join the fight against structural oppression.

And I am thankful for what feels like a tipping point, and am hopeful for the future.

Eric Esteves is executive director of the [Lenny Zakim Fund](#).

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