Dream. Flourish. Succeed.

October 19th, 2023

Dear Peralta Community,

As the Ethnic Studies Department at Laney College on occupied unceded Lisjan Ohlone Territory, it is imperative we acknowledge what is happening in Gaza and the larger historical legacy of settler colonialism and apartheid at home and abroad. The escalating brutalization of Palestinian people must be met with an urgency that our academic disciplines often leave us ill equipped to address.

Like Ethnic Studies scholars before us, we turn to the people on the ground, those who live in impacted communities and now more than ever, the youth who have literally sacrificed their bodies to be heard. We listen to their calls to action and support their direct organizing. In so doing, we also recognize that many of these impacted communities are right here at Laney College in the Peralta Community College District. Popular discourse of those in Gaza lack historical context and critical Palestinian subjectivities, leaving our Arab and Muslim students as potential targets of blame, hate and violence. We must fiercely protect our Laney students from this Islamophobia. The compassion and care for our Laney College students must be inclusive of children and young people who face extermination in Gaza.

It is also very important to understand that our Jewish students can be marginalized for their support of Palestinian peoples. Often, aggressions from the state of Israel are mistakenly understood as being endorsed by all Jewish people across the diaspora. We reject anti-semitism, but must also refuse the appropriation of anti-semitism as justification of the escalating violence in Gaza.

In Ethnic Studies, we teach the histories of marginalization, brutalization of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) by militarized police, settler colonialist policies and their fallouts, violation of basic human rights and dignity of BIPOC, and related issues. Epistemologically, we approach these themes in ways that honor the histories and lived experience of peoples who are largely ignored, marginalized and misrepresented in Western academic canons. Key to this work is critically engaging with

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constructions of nation states, militarism, borders, capital, and racial formation, and honoring the various ways people resist for self-determination and freedom.

Many students, teachers and scholars who challenge hegemonic constructions of knowledge, nation and power are targeted and accused of being subjective and one sided. This creates environments where students and faculty who stand for human rights and racial justice, are afraid to publicly address, much less condemn, contemporary realities of genocide, apartheid and settler colonial occupation. In turn, faculty members are intimidated into self-censorship and relinquish their academic freedoms.

In this critical watershed moment, our department stands for Palestinian self-determination and the futurity of Palestine. As a department, we are committed to deepening our own professional and pedagogical toolkits to meet this moment. We call on other departments and faculty to also self-reflect and acknowledge the training and education necessary to navigate contentious topics. We call on our campuses to develop spaces and curriculum that support our Arab and Muslim students. We call on our District to prioritize and allocate resources that enable faculty, staff and students to sustainably learn, dialogue and engage with Arab and Muslim experiences locally and globally. We call on our communities to listen and support the youth and grassroots activists who have been engaging in critical community organizing and decolonizing work for decades such as:

- Arab Resource and Organizing Center
- Palestinian Youth Movement
- Jewish Voices for Peace
- Middle East Children's Alliance
- Palestinian Children's Relief Fund

In solidarity with Palestine and the liberation of oppressed peoples around the world,

Laney College Ethnic Studies Department