**Juneteenth Congressional Briefing:** Inequality And The Disproportionate Impacts Of Covid Response On Black Disabled Communities. The briefing was presented in collaboration with Re

**Transcript:** Justice Shorter

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- life and freedom in this country, so we are extremely excited to have all of you here. I just want to ask people to give me a little bit of grace I am listening to my computer. I am blind and so there may be some momentary gaps doing my small remarks here today so please just be patient with me. I also live next to a fire station, which is quite fitting since I worm on disaster issues. You may hear some sirens. I'll do my best to shield you from the sound but I did not want to do this presentation from my closet. As a lesbian, I've come out of the

closet I don't want to go back in! So I wanted to do it from my side where I could be a little bit more comfortable in setup.

So I just wanted to remind folks of that as I start. So as I mentioned before I want to focus on freedom. And when I think about freedom, I think about a freedom that is embedded and equitable and efficient access to health care testing and treatment for Black people, who make up around the 13% of America's population, and yet we account for around 21% of coronavirus cases in this country. And that's according to kind of the recent statistics that have come out from the CDC. When I think about freedom, I hope that we can all one day safer freedom that tastes like clean drinking water, the absence of which is a human-caused disaster that remains a critical issue in Flint Michigan and in other communities of color across the country. I envision a universal understanding of the physical and emotional freedom that can be gained from accessible and affordable housing - the ability to live in the community in areas where housing is available outside of flood plains and that are built with durable materials that are more likely to withstand severe winds and storm surges. I think about freedom in a way that truly prioritizes power for those of us who are electricity-dependent, especially during hurricanes and wildfires, when electricity grids are more likely to be damaged or when services are likely to be disrupted. I think about an intersectional freedom that first can be expended in and pass that 35-year life expectancy for black trans women, but also a freedom that provides transgender and non-binary folks with equitable access to bathrooms and shelters and services and resources, that supports before during and after disasters of all kinds.

But we can't talk about Juneteenth without referencing the Thirteenth Amendment was constitutionally solidified the abolishment of slavery- except as a punishment for a crime - whereof the party was duly convicted. When you have a policing system that was born out of slave patrols there is no wonder as to why we as black people are still being hunted surveilled overly convicted and killed. Hatred is hazardous, discrimination is disastrous and police brutality is an ongoing crisis in this country.

Like myself, many are starting to understand police brutality- the problem of police brutality- through the prism of the Emergency Management continuum so that includes aspects such as prevention and preparedness, Response and relief recovery and resilience all-hazards mitigation. And in doing so- we're understanding this in a way that kind of brings forth this emergence of new creative conversations that are fostering new ideas, such as you know brutality prevention plans and community response and peer support team, respite centers and pop-up shops where mental health workers are provided and water and snacks are provided to protesters. Folks are trying to understand how can we examine police brutality through more multi-agency coordination as a means of mitigating future risk of Black people being killed by the police and how can each governmental agency be activated to provide more holistic support rather than this kind of militarized show-of-force, which only further harms communities that are already reeling from the impact of this crisis?

Folks are trying to reimagine our public education system in ways that teaches racial and disabilities justice- through curriculums and content that has been created by Black indigenous people of color -both with and without - disabilities. We both also trying to make sure that these individuals who have created the content are properly compensated and included in any measures to kind of infuse those ideals and those theories and those frames and those thoughts into our public education system. And that's a beautiful thing. So as we look at these

concurrent disasters- I've mentioned many things here- here I've mentioned it in terms of wildfires and hurricanes and access to water and looking at this in terms of housing in terms of access to services and support - and that's kind of the kind of more granular view that we wanted to start off with. And I'll hold off, for a bit on getting down into the weeds in terms of being your institutional approaches, because I know my sister Dr. Miles will hit on that a bit more, but as we spoke a little bit earlier about the carceral system it's important to note that according to the Marshall project over around 46,000- over 46,000 inmates and prisoners and people in jails and prisons across this country have been infected with the Coronavirus as well.

So we're dealing with multiple things giving us at once- to the extent that people are trying to find ways to not only fight for justice but to also prioritize our joy so as we try and strive to celebrate today we want to do that in a way that realistically reviews all of the different aspects that are literally killing us but also all of the different ways that we will reclaim our space and that we will be claimed our joy and our capacity to move forward in this country all of these things all of these approaches and so many more signals to me that hope is still on the horizon, and that sincerely gives me joy.

I'll close out by simply saying a quote here from Erica Alexander and she's an actress who commonly says this and absolutely love it she says that "The past is painful. The present is precarious. But the future- the future will be free." And that is not a question it is a declarative statement and so I hope that all of you will join us on our continued journey for collective liberation in this country that's all from me. Thanks so much. Valerie, back over to you.