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Statement by Dr. Gail C. Christopher, Executive Director, National Collaborative for Health Equity

AMERICA URGENTLY NEEDS TRUTH, RACIAL HEALING, AND TRANSFORMATION TO BRING UNITY, EQUITY AND RACIAL HEALING TO OUR NATION

“Today, the National Collaborative for Health Equity (NCHE) enthusiastically applauds the House Resolution urging that a United States Commission on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) be established. As cited in the Resolution, a devastating belief in racial hierarchy has fueled injustices against populations of color for centuries. It has resulted in structurally-based inequities in America’s systems, particularly biased healthcare that diminishes our well-being, and patterns of discrimination in public policies and private practices throughout our society. NCHE believes that a TRHT Commission can help jettison the hierarchy of human value and launch a new era where all human beings are valued and have the capacity to see ourselves in one another.

“NCHE envisions a TRHT Commission that will facilitate racial healing and shape policies and practices that will change community narratives, broaden the understanding that Americans have for their diverse experiences, and encourage communities to unite and work together towards policies that benefit everyone. As a nation, it is imperative that we acknowledge the inequities of the past, their persistence today, and then act earnestly to heal the wounds and move forward. The TRHT Commission can lead our nation in addressing this unfinished business. Americans can come together, to collectively help change attitudes and beliefs, hearts and minds and transform our country into one that embodies equity and fairness for all people. The TRHT Commission can help us hold each other accountable as the healing work proceeds in our homes, workplaces, schools, neighborhoods and places of worship. We can make a solemn commitment to unifying the nation, rejecting racism, and finding strength, not resentment, in our differences.

“In recent weeks, as COVID-19 disproportionately infected and killed people of color, it has become even more clear that racism and the belief in a hierarchy of human value has accelerated barriers to health, housing, education and economic opportunities in communities of color, creating environments where the coronavirus can spread. Further, unarmed people of color continue to be targeted by citizens and law enforcement, and are being killed at alarming rates. But the US Commission on TRHT can help build a path towards real change for our nation, thereby helping eliminate conditions that are determinants of poor health outcomes. These conditions include residential segregation, concentrated poverty, low-wage jobs, food insecurity, environmental pollution and under-resourced school systems. The nation must collectively examine how the belief in a hierarchy of human value became embedded in the culture and structures of American society, including racial violence and police brutality. Together, we can work with civic, government, religious, community and private sector

leaders to design and implement effective actions to permanently uproot racism, replacing it with actualized principles, policies and practices of equity.

“This is a path towards assuring dignity and respect among populations, transforming societies to move beyond differing races, religions, ethnicities and conflict to embracing unity and a connected-approach towards creating environments where everyone, and especially children, can have equal opportunities and thrive. This work is all more urgent now, as most of our nation’s young children are children of color. Our collective futures are at stake.”

(The proposed U.S. Commission on Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) is informed by ongoing TRHT work on college campuses and in several US cities. Originally funded in 2017 by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and several other philanthropies, this model and framework for action was created by Dr. Gail C. Christopher while she served as senior advisor and Vice President for TRHT at the Kellogg Foundation. To schedule print or broadcast interviews with Dr. Christopher, please contact: Michael K. Frisby, 202-625-4328 or mike@frisbyassociates.com.)