



## **A Letter of Endorsement from Higher Education Leaders in St. Petersburg /Pinellas for the St. Petersburg/Pinellas Higher Education for Racial Equity (SPHERE)**

Our home, in the City of St. Petersburg and the surrounding Pinellas County in Florida, presents as much limitless potential as the more than 40,000 students that matriculate across our four institutions. It's a bright spot on the state's western coast, an urbanized peninsula surrounded by sunshine and sandy shores. It's a place that has made strides, but has not begun to properly heal from the racial hierarchies set in place through colonization, slavery, Jim Crow, and the atrocities committed by the state and citizenry toward marginalized groups.

As the leaders of Eckerd College, St. Petersburg College, Stetson University College of Law and the University of South Florida- St. Petersburg, we believe collective action is the way forward to support the work necessary to right the wrongs of the past. We acknowledge the history of institutions of higher learning in perpetuating racial injustices and we assume the responsibility required for systemic change.

Over the last year, a team of staff and faculty across our institutions volunteered extensive energy to create the St. Petersburg/Pinellas Higher Education for Racial Equity (SPHERE) consortium and launched a Racial Justice Student Fellows program. In an effort to facilitate this necessary healing, we pledge our continued institutional support for the SPHERE consortium and to the consortium's pursuit of the official designation as a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) Center from the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

This letter affirms our commitment to continue progressing together toward the equitable future we seek. Formalizing our connection as a regional consortium empowers us to be change agents in Pinellas County, actively seeking to redress the wrongs, resource the people and restore the relationships destroyed by an inherited and institutionalized caste system. As a consortium, we also have the power to build more powerful relationships with community organizations already working on racial justice.

Each institution in this consortium serves a different higher education populace and the expertise and resources across our network are strong in each of the framework pillars. We wish to highlight our shared humanity, embrace positive narratives on race while developing our students, employees, the community, and move toward racial healing and transformation. We also seek to create an accessible space for sustained scholarship, conversation, service,



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education, activism and legislative advocacy around the topics of race and racial healing in order to build a more equitable collective future.

The TRHT model offers us a concrete framework from which we may build a community-focused, educationally-driven, cross-campus center aimed at disseminating the truth about Pinellas County's history, encouraging new scholarship on the effects of that history and fostering publicly-approved actions toward destroying the existing racial hierarchies.

Moving forward we commit to exploration of a model of collaboration that will require financial, fundraising and in-kind support from each of our institutions. We pledge to designate an official steering committee for this discovery process to steward our collective resources and refine a five-year plan of bold actions toward our desired outcomes for our students and neighbors.

Cooperatively we will continue the important work of illuminating and eliminating the shadows in our sunshine cities and beyond.

In unity,

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