

Dear Crisis Text Line Leadership, Staff, Board of Directors, and Clinical Advisory Board:

We, your current and former Anti-Racist Employees, are coming to you with our values at the front of our minds. We are coming to you with kindness, courage, and a deep desire for true operational excellence.

At this moment, when we are mourning and seeking justice for the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many more, we are also looking at ourselves. We are looking at you. We are looking at you because we think you know what will follow. This is not the first time the Board has been called on to address these concerns.

For the past few weeks, Crisis Text Line leadership has preached about anti-racism and taking action. The language used, co-opted from activist rhetoric, does not match the culture or decisions made by Crisis Text Line. We want to think that we are having these conversations and tackling the hard things not because they're hard, but because it's the right thing to do. But what we're seeing is a performance of allyship.

Right now, there is no culture of accountability within Crisis Text Line. The Crisis Text Line leadership is judge, jury, and executioner on what they deem to be racist, or wrong. There is a history of covering up toxic behavior with promises of change and no follow through. In order to truly change, we have to address the root causes of these issues.

Crisis Text Line has no true diversity in leadership. The retention rate for Black, Indigenous, People of Color on staff is less than a year. The climate towards BIPOC staff is hostile and dismissive. We cannot call ourselves an anti-racist organization until persistent and intentional racist behavior within this company is dismantled.

This is a call for anti-racist action. We have heard your language around anti-racism, and we want to assume your intentions are honest. However, we have yet to see true anti-racist action. Crisis Text Line is not an anti-racist organization.

The goal of this letter is to change that. We believe in the mission of Crisis Text Line, and we want to believe in the execution of that mission. **We ask you, using your power, to take concrete anti-racist actions to align the organization with anti-racism and act in genuine, concrete, and sustainable solidarity with Black, Indigenous, People of Color and all marginalized people.**

In this letter, we define goals that contribute to the pursuit of continual anti-racist practice. Each of these goals includes concrete, non-exhaustive action items to get us closer to those goals.

We are calling on you to take these actions immediately for our CCs, texters, and tech.

Create an anti-racist CC community.

Immediately dismiss CCs who exhibit racist behavior. This includes racist behavior we are made aware of in their lives on and off the Platform. CCs who behave like this are dangerous to our texters, CCs, and staff members.

Educate CCs on anti-racism. Our training includes sections on implicit bias and cultural competency, but once CCs are admitted to the Platform, there are no more mandatory re-education measures and nearly no accountability. In the present moment of visible police brutality, we are not currently reaching our community and ensuring they respond in compassionate, anti-racist ways. We are not asking for a one-time training. We are asking for mandatory, explicitly anti-racist education as an automatic response to world events.

Create an anti-racist texter experience by reforming Active Rescue policies.

Stop performing non-consensual Active Rescues by police. Texters know their situations best—their race, gender identity, citizenship status, diagnoses—and we cannot knowingly put them at risk of murder at the hands of police.

Decrease reliance on police for Active Rescues. Every other possible alternative should be explored, especially community resources and peer support programs. Our current tech infrastructure is designed to only look up PSAPs. That needs to be completely restructured to first provide community-based resources, such as [CAHOOTS](#) in Eugene, Oregon, and we need to extensively research and find those local resources. Only when a texter is in an area without any known community resources, they fully intend to complete suicide, and they actively consent to being exposed to a police officer would we send one.

Create an anti-racist tech experience for all.

Boycott Amazon and Salesforce.

We must explore alternatives to Amazon Web Services with the goal of disconnecting completely. Amazon [exploits its employees](#) and [partners with the police to increase surveillance](#). It also markets its [facial-recognition technology to ICE](#). Salesforce has a contract with Custom and Border Protections. When this was brought to public attention in 2018, the [CEO refused to break the contract](#). This is by no means an exhaustive list of tech companies directly aiding in the oppression of marginalized people. An easy way to start distancing from Amazon is to stop giving Amazon gift cards as incentives for staff and CCs.

We are also calling on you to take these actions to address racism and its impacts in the employee experience. This is where deep, systemic change needs to happen.

We have experienced Crisis Text Line claiming to be an anti-racist organization without prioritizing the work or wellbeing of its employees of color, particularly its Black employees.

However, when Crisis Text Line wants to perform its diversity efforts, it tokenizes the labor of these same employees to gain social and financial capital.

On June 1st, 2020, Crisis Text Line released a memo, “How We Contribute to Anti-Racism,” following the murder of George Floyd on May 25th and subsequent protests and advocacy efforts to demand justice. However, it does not mention Black Lives Matter, George Floyd, or anyone else murdered by the police, which disconnects it from present anti-racist movements. We have reason to believe this is done to preserve relationships with racist institutions (police) and individuals (CCs). Here, we want to focus on the “Org Health” section.

We are calling on you to acknowledge this memo was misleading to our staff and CC community, and this lack of transparency contributes to racism. **We are calling on you to take these anti-racist actions for our organizational health.**

- 1) Leadership. While this point states the C-suite is “actively and proudly anti-racist,” the evidence for this is not clear. Any tangible effort to “diversify the C-suite” is not felt, as the three members it has gained this calendar year are white.
 - a) **Diversify C-suite.** By the end of 2020, C-suite should be prioritizing Black, Indigenous, People of Color and extend the same leadership opportunities given to their White counterparts.
- 2) ERGs. All efforts to create ERGs and seek executive sponsorship have been driven by lower-level employees, not C-suite. ERG creators, leaders, and members are not compensated for their work, and ERGs themselves do not have a clear budget for their own discretionary use. However, when advantageous for the organization, ERGs are used to bolster its reputation for diversity.
 - a) **Pay ERG Leaders.** Those involved in the development, maintenance, and growth of ERGs should have it incorporated in their workflow and be financially compensated for their work.
- 3) Day of Mourning. This was a single day, not a sustainable series of actions. Any momentum for follow-up from that day was generated by employees without any existing support or infrastructure.
 - a) **Schedule regular dialogue about anti-racist actions.** Black employees should not be required or expected to attend.
- 4) Funding. All employees were given \$200 with a light nudge to donate. Again, this was a single gesture, not a sustainable series of actions.
 - a) **Match donations to anti-racist organizations.**

Employees at Crisis Text Line are beholden to the mission of saving lives. But the quality of their work—and the state of their own mental health—is consistently compromised by the culture at Crisis Text Line. There is precedence for public humiliation, retaliatory firings, and little actual regard for work/life balance. Toxic positivity is promoted and encouraged, and anyone who comes forward with these concerns is dismissed. This creates an atmosphere of fear and

reprisal that is greatly harmful to its staff, and which has led to the departure of many employees, both voluntary and forced.

- 1) SBIs. SBIs are invoked as a catch-all for small pieces of intra-staff feedback, but are intentionally designed as a one-way form of communication. While breaking down feedback, whether positive or negative, into Situation, Behavior, and Impact may be laudable, its application in a format where the giver can provide feedback with the explicit expectation that the receiver is unable to respond reinforces entrenched power structures within the organization.
 - a) **Stop using SBIs.** Create forms of feedback that foster real two-way conversations between people.
- 2) “Assume best intentions”. While also laudable as an interpersonal social skill, assuming best intentions does nothing to acknowledge the harmful effects of harmful actions, regardless of intentions. One cannot equitably assume best intentions without also recognizing the very real impacts. This becomes especially important if, after first granting best intentions, harmful behaviors are not curtailed. Unexamined, this cultural practice becomes a shield for repeated (micro-)aggressions. This applies equally to staff and volunteers.
 - a) **Revoke “best intentions” once it is clear that “best intentions” are not being applied by bad-faith actors. Emphasize “be accountable for impact.”**
- 3) “Attitude issues” as grounds for dismissal. All too often, legitimate requests for institutional and cultural change within the organization are dismissed as employees having a “bad attitude,” creating spurious grounds for dismissal without any mechanism for redress or appeal.
 - a) **Actually adhere to the handbook.** The handbook states the following:
 - i) “REPORTING RESPONSIBILITY: It is the responsibility of all directors, officers, and employees to report violations or suspected violations of business standards, ethical standards, and/or applicable legal requirements (collectively, “Violations”) in accordance with this Whistleblower Policy. NO RETALIATION: No director, officer, or employee who in good faith reports a Violation shall suffer harassment, retaliation, or adverse employment consequence. An employee who retaliates against someone who has reported a Violation in good faith is subject to discipline up to and including termination of employment. This Whistleblower Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees and others to raise serious concerns within Crisis Text Line, prior to seeking resolution outside the organization.”
 - b) Create avenues to address grievances that do not result in retaliatory firings.
 - c) **Amend the handbook** to include a redress process for wrongful firing. The handbook currently states the following:
 - i) “Nothing in this employee Handbook should be construed as limiting the organization’s right to terminate an employee at any time with or without cause and with or without notice.”

- 4) Promotions are subject to a 3% pay raise cap on current compensation. While this is intended to limit highly-paid staff members from gaining too much, it also locks lower-paid employees into their current pay band, and there are no clear paths for advancement within teams. This is where we see systemic inequity. This has proven demotivating for employees and creates a lack of performance for people who really want to do the work. Non-Black and Brown employees oftentimes receive praise for doing the bare minimum while Black and Brown people are oftentimes are left out of important conversations and overlooked for projects. This results in Black and Brown employees receiving fewer opportunities and promotions than their counterparts.

- a) **Create equitable promotions policies with clear, reliable measures for accountability.**

Thank you for reading our call to action. We firmly believe Crisis Text Line leadership must seize this moment of collective pain, anger, and reflection to commit to anti-racism every day from this day forward.

Attached below are testimonials from current and former employees of Crisis Text Line. They come in these forms:

- 1) Glassdoor reviews.
- 2) Written testimonials.
- 3) Screenshots of messages as evidence for what we have described.
- 4) A copy of this letter.

What we present to you is a systemic, ongoing, and dangerous work culture for a company that prides itself on empathy and saving lives. This must be changed for the sake of current and former employees, our Crisis Counselors, and our texters. We hope our collective pain, anger, and reflection can change Crisis Text Line on a foundational and fundamental basis.

As the first action, we are calling on you to respond to this letter with:

- 1) **Your express and explicit commitment to follow through on these action items.**
 - 2) **Your expectation to be held accountable for these items.**
 - 3) **A town hall meeting invitation to discuss timeline and strategy.**

Respectfully,

Anti-Racist Employees at Crisis Text Line