



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Erie County Office of Health Equity would like to begin this report by acknowledging that we, as Erie County residents, are on the land of Indigenous peoples. Traditionally, these lands were home to many nations, including the Neutral, Erie, Wenro, Huron, and other peoples. Today, these lands are still regarded as the traditional homelands of the Seneca and other Haudenosaunee peoples. We respect the treaty rights of the Six Nations—the Seneca, Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Tuscarora—and the obligation of the United States and New York governments and American society to adhere to them.

We would like to honor the legacy of the many ancestors and elders who made this land their home and infused it with their spirit for thousands of years. We also honor the Original Peoples who remain on the ancestral homelands of Turtle Island and who have survived centuries of colonialism, genocide, and land theft. We honor those whose lives have been impacted by historical and intergenerational trauma across lifespans and generations, including land dispossession, forced relocation, and forced assimilation through boarding schools like the Thomas Indian School, which was located on the Cattaraugus Territory in Erie County. Finally, we honor those who are not here, but who might have been, were it not for this history of violence.

With hearts and minds focused on healing and truth, we remember the powerful example of democracy and federalism set by the Haudenosaunee, embodied in the Great Law of Peace. Through this inspiration, we commit ourselves to advocate for inclusion and acknowledge and address past atrocities. May we all aspire to a world of reconciliation, guided by the example of the Haudenosaunee themselves, so that our weapons of war are buried forever and mutual respect and equality prevail among all peoples and nations.

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# ENSLAVEMENT & LABOR ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Erie County Office of Health Equity (ECOHE) respectfully acknowledges our debt as a society to the people past and present whose labor was and continues to be stolen through unjust practices, including the exploited labor of incarcerated people. We acknowledge our debt to the enslaved people, primarily of African descent, whose labor and suffering built and grew the economy and infrastructure of a state that did not abolish the practice of enslavement until July 4, 1827 [3]. While not a Southern state, New York had the largest population of enslaved people of any Northern state and was second to last in abolishing the practice [4].

Erie County, established in 1821, became an integral part of the journey to freedom for enslaved Black people via the Underground Railroad. The homes, businesses, and land of abolitionists were used to assist the enslaved making their way to Canada to live as free people. Landmarks such as Freedom Park are historical hallmarks of the Underground Railroad [5]. The very land on which the Edward A. Rath Building is built was the former home of abolitionist and attorney George W. Jonson [5].

Ramifications from the practice of enslavement in our country are still present today, visible in the systemic racism perpetuated in our institutions, in the segregation of our residents, the exploited labor of incarcerated people, and in many of the inequities in the social determinants of health and health disparities experienced by their descendants. The spirit of freedom embodied by our ancestors, enslaved and free, persists as well, visible in our social justice movements, increased awareness of historical and ongoing inequities, and advocacy for change. The ECOHE will embrace and embody this same spirit of freedom to help eradicate the systemic racism, poverty, and oppression plaguing so many of our Erie County communities.



# COMMUNITY RECOGNITION & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Erie County Office of Health Equity (ECOHE) would like to take this time and space to recognize and acknowledge the often overlooked and forgotten work of community in the fight for equity and justice. Everyday community members, community activists, and organizations have been engaging in equity and justice work long before the term became commonplace. Most of the staff of the ECOHE have their roots in community work and bring that framework to this government setting.

Governments, corporations, organizations, and people in positions of power have a history of erasure, historical revision, and appropriation of the work of others as their own innovation, rather than naming and uplifting and adopting community-grown solutions. We must be purposeful in acknowledging and crediting frameworks and foundations, and intentional in acknowledging the roots upon which we build and grow.

Following in the footsteps of cultures documenting their journeys through storytelling and oral history passed through the generations, we seek to keep the work of those that came before us alive. We are the descendants of people that may never be named or credited for their contributions, yet the work we do is imbedded in our DNA, an intergenerational wealth of knowledge beyond measure.

To name a few community organizations and leaders in this space would be to miss the multitude. There are so many contributors to this work, most of whom have no title or office. The progress our Erie County community has made is rooted in the efforts and accomplishments of countless individuals and community organizations.