



The California Preterm Birth Initiative  
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Dear Dante,

It is my absolute pleasure to write this letter of support as you pursue a wide range of employment and consulting opportunities to advance racial equity within for- and not-for profit institutions grappling with efforts to increase diversity and inclusion. I have seldom met someone with such deep knowledge, empathy, and understanding of the human condition. Through this letter, I hope to persuade readers that collaborating with you offers a real chance to accelerate anti-racism work within their organizations.

As you know, I am the Principal Investigator for the UCSF California Preterm Birth Initiative (PTBi-CA), a multi-year philanthropically-funded transdisciplinary research program rooted in community partnership and focused on achieving racial equity in birth outcomes. We work in three counties in California (San Francisco, Oakland, and Fresno) to conduct a wide range of discovery and implementation science research. Over the past 5 years, we have grown to a staff of 40, and have made real strides in recruiting a diverse workforce, with over half of our team self-identifying as Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC). However, we have been less successful in recruiting senior faculty of color. And it has become abundantly clear that being a more diverse team or having as its mission to eliminate racial disparities in preterm birth does not automatically confer a more inclusive, nor more equitable environment. UCSF, like many large academic institutions with a preponderance of white leaders (including myself) often perpetuate a culture of white supremacy which creates unwelcome spaces for BIPOC employees. Approximately two years ago, we made a commitment to better understand the challenges that BIPOC staff were facing and to do something about it. To create a truly inclusive space required us (in particular the white staff and staff with white privilege) to learn how we are, often unwittingly, complicit in preventing staff of color to thrive. What we learned from you not only changed our understanding of the staff of color's experience but also influenced our larger research and community-focused agenda.

After completing our first year of racial equity training with a different trainer, PTBi's Executive Director, Alexis Cobbins, suggested we reach out to you based on your strong reputation for teaching and facilitating organizational change in the area of racial equity. What became clear during our first meeting and the subsequent workshops you led is that you are a gifted trainer and extraordinary thought leader who puts his heart and soul into this work. To bring the group to a place of true authenticity, you began by bringing your true authentic self. I will never forget the vulnerability you shared with us. Our previous trainer was good, but, frankly, **I had no idea what we were missing and what this work could be until meeting you.** For our group's second year of this work, you recommended that we split into affinity groups (BIPOC and people with white privilege) and you planned our program with a white co-facilitator. We met monthly as separate caucuses, and came together as a full team during quarterly meetings. I've heard from our BIPOC staff that the process created a safe space for them to be open with their colleagues and themselves-- a space to process and discuss their experiences and their pain-- all without fear of losing their jobs. Our individual and joint sessions were often difficult, but that was because they were real and addressed the micro and macroaggressions that BIPOC staff faced daily, and revealed the white fragility that staff of privilege experienced, including me. Together, you helped us learn how to be more comfortable being uncomfortable.

Mid-year, you led a two-day intensive workshop for the full group focused on reviewing an uncensored, and not white-washed version of American history—a life-changing



experience for me. It marked the first time that I gained a true understanding of the origins of anti-Blackness in this country and how deep-seated it is. What made the training so powerful is that you focused not only on increasing our knowledge, but used historical narrative to create an emotional experience of oppression that provoked a level of empathy that I have not experienced before. For the staff of color, you created a safe and welcoming space to openly voice their concerns and their hopes for a different environment at PTBI. Over the subsequent months, we've had intense and often challenging conversations, and throughout, you've been a supportive guide while reinforcing the importance of accountability and the need to craft an anti-racism agenda advanced by all of us. You were always reachable and accessible when we had questions or stumbled and needed additional guidance. You have become an ally and friend to PTBI and have set our organization on a course for real change. I don't know how one could have greater impact!

I am certain that you will continue to have many opportunities, both professional and personal, to help move people and their institutions towards racial justice. Dante, you are a changemaker. I am rooting for you to be able to touch more organizations to help them on their anti-racism journeys. Without hesitation, I recommend you for any future work with groups or individuals who are interested in following this path. You have my full support and I invite you to offer my name as a reference. I am happy to speak with any potential clients or employers to answer their questions ([larry.rand@ucsf.edu](mailto:larry.rand@ucsf.edu) or my cellphone at 415-999-1508).

With my warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Larry Rand', written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Larry Rand, MD**

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