

A RESOLUTION DECLARING RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS IN WASHTENAW COUNTY

WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

JULY 1, 2020

Sponsored by: Commissioners Brabec, Jefferson and Scott

WHEREAS, race is a social construct predicated upon skin color and developed by grossly inaccurate biological evidence that unfairly unjustifiably created hierarchical categorization; and

WHEREAS, racism now manifests itself at several levels of our social system, from the African slave trade in America from 1619 -1865, to the denial and violation of Civil and Human Rights, to the killing of unarmed black people 1619 - 2020; and

WHEREAS, individual racism can present itself in many forms, conscious and unconscious, but often manifests in thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and actions; and

WHEREAS, institutional racism as defined by Clair and Dennis (**Sociology of Racism**, 2015) as “refers to particular and general instances of racial discrimination, inequality, exploitation, and domination in organizational or institutional contexts, such as the labor market or the nation-state. While institutional racism can be overt (e.g., firm with a formal policy of excluding applicants of a particular race), it is more often used to explain cases of disparate impact, where organizations or societies distribute more resources to one group than another without overtly racist intent (e.g., a firm with an informal policy of excluding applicants from a low income, minority neighborhood...). The rules, processes, and opportunity structures that enable such disparate impacts are what constitute institutional racism (and variants such as ‘structural racism’, ‘systemic racism’, etc.).”; and

WHEREAS, structural racism as defined by Lawrence and Keleher (**Chronic Disparity: Strong and Pervasive Evidence of Racial Inequalities**, 2004) as “*the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people*”; and

WHEREAS, the Center for Disease Control outlines criteria in order to determine public health problems. 1.) The health condition must place a large burden on society, 2.) That burden must be distributed unfairly, 3.) There must be evidence that “upstream” strategies could reduce the burden of the condition, 4.) Existing strategies do not adequately address the issue; and

WHEREAS, racism clearly meets the CDC’s criteria in order to be determined a public health problem; and

WHEREAS, racism is evident throughout our various systems including housing, transportation, education, employment, criminal justice, and access to health care; and

WHEREAS, in Washtenaw County we can clearly see disparities along racial lines; and

WHEREAS, there is a 10-year difference in life expectancy between Black residents and white residents, and a 17-year difference between Latinx and white residents, as well as geographic economic segregation;

WHEREAS, there continues to be devastating inequity with regard to infant mortality. In Washtenaw County, the overall infant mortality rate is 5.2 per 1,000 live births. In the white community, the rate is 3.0 per 1,000 live births. However, in the Black community, the rate skyrockets to 16.7 per 1,000 live births; and

WHEREAS, because of our recognized inequities, Washtenaw County has worked with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity to actively address these inequities as an organization and community through training, seminars and the culminating action of approval of a Racial Equity Policy in 2018 which created a Racial Equity Office; and

WHEREAS, this work resulted in the hire of a Racial Equity Officer who is tasked with implementing this work; and the current COVID-19 pandemic has again highlighted the disproportionate ways that Black and brown communities are impacted due to racism – serving to highlight racism as a root cause of poorer health and over representation in essential service sector positions which continues to disproportionately cause increased risk of exposure to COVID, severity of illness, and leads to devastation and death among people and communities of color. In Washtenaw County 40% of the hospitalizations due to COVID-19 are of Black residents while the population of Black residents is 12%; and

WHEREAS, declaration of racism as a public health crisis means that work with County departments, especially the Public Health Department and Racial Equity Office, will continue to be done intentionally and with the goal of ridding our county and County government operations of these inequities; and,

WHEREAS, in addition to working with County departments, work will be done with the community to ensure transparency and accountability; and

WHEREAS, the intentional use of the word crisis speaks to both the systemic nature of racism and the long-term commitment it will take to address the continued health impacts due to racism; and

WHEREAS, Washtenaw County departments and offices do strive to address this issue.

WHEREAS, the Health Department, with support of the Board of Health, determined that achieving health equity is a key strategic initiative and has dedicated increased staffing and resources to these long-term goals that include building equitable community-centered engagement practices, advocating for and maximizing resources for community impact, making data matter to address current and emerging issues, and strengthening and supporting an engaged workforce; and

WHEREAS, the Sheriff's Office understands the impact that the criminal justice system has had on perpetuating racial injustice and inequitable treatment and where they have worked tirelessly to become a leader in criminal justice reform by implementing industry leading community engagement efforts, utilizing a problem-oriented policing approach, designed a state

recommended model for police training, implemented a reentry for all model, instituted best practice policies related to Use of Force, partnered in the passage and implementation of the only mental health and public safety millage in the state of Michigan in order to redirect funding toward the intersection of public safety and behavioral health; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Community and Economic Development continues to reorient its work around racial equity including working toward the goals of the 2015 Housing Affordability and Economic Equity Analysis which highlighted racial and geographic disparities in the county, and the 2017 Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing process, that examined the history of segregation and inclusion and impact on communities today. OCED's work with the Continuum of Care around homelessness has focused on engaging people of color, who are disproportionately represented in the homeless community. In 2020, OCED will be also applying equity lens to changes within the Coordinated Funding Process for human services, and Economic Opportunity strategy for the county. OCED continues to harness both data, including the Opportunity Index, and community voice, in these and other initiatives; and

WHEREAS, even with the intentional implementation of these measures, racism continues to plague our community and the Board of Commissioners recognizes that more can be done.

NOW THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED, that the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners declares racism as a public health crisis in our county.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Board of Commissioners accepts and approves of the Washtenaw County Board of Health's resolution dated 6.30.2020, A Resolution Naming Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Confirming Our Collective Commitment to Health Equity in Washtenaw County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, to address this crisis, the Board of Commissioners has a responsibility to enact policy that shall include but is not limited to the following action items:

- increasing the budget for our Public Health Department
- increasing the budget for our Racial Equity Office
- setting and reviewing the County budget through a racial equity frame
- utilizing Community Based Budgeting
- enacting universal paid leave for employees, including but not limited to paid parental leave
- increasing the number of members of CABLE (Community Advisory Board for Law Enforcement) in order to have increased representation
- working with the Sheriff's Office to continually review the implementation and impact of the Use of Force policies
- continuing to work with the Sheriff's Office to ensure a holistic approach to public safety

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners calls on all local municipalities throughout the County to adopt similar resolutions thereby recognizing the grave impact that racism has on our residents throughout the County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners implores our local health systems (Michigan Medicine and Trinity Health) to address systemic racism and the social determinants of health here in Washtenaw County.

FINALLY, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Board of Commissioners commits to working with our County departments, residents, local non-profits, other governmental municipalities, school systems, and local business to continue to effectively and collectively address the inequities that exist in our community due to prevalent, persistent, and pervasive racism.