



Legislation Text

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Clerk 06/17/2020

A RESOLUTION declaring racism a public health crisis.

WHEREAS, racism has deep and harmful impacts that unfairly disadvantages Black, Indigenous and People of Color ("BIPOC") and unfairly advantages people who identify as white, and

WHEREAS, racism harms every person in our society and is the root cause of poverty and economic inequality, and

WHEREAS, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," as King County's namesake, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, and

WHEREAS, whether intended or not, racism becomes ingrained in institutional policies and practices, creating differential access to opportunities and resources, and causes disparate outcomes in all aspects of life affecting health, and

WHEREAS, by maintaining the status quo and existing systems of power and privilege based on our country's long history of and continued persistence of white supremacy, institutional policies and practices do not need to be explicitly racist in order to have racist impacts on residents, and

WHEREAS, culture across institutions and systems is critical, and the legacy of racist policies and practices continues to exist even once the policies and practices have been changed, and

WHEREAS, reversing the legacy of institutional racism calls for an understanding of the intersectional nature of power and oppression that amplify adverse effects on people who experience more than one form of marginalization, such as race, gender and disability, and a commitment to anti-racist policies and practices, and

WHEREAS, decades of data collected by Public Health - Seattle & King County have demonstrated

how BIPOC communities are affected by both acute impacts, such as gun violence, and chronic impacts such as higher rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, maternal and infant mortality, underweight babies and shorter, less-healthy lives overall, and

WHEREAS, King County residents of color have deep wells of resilience and strength, and BIPOC communities are less likely to experience other health conditions, such as suicide, Alzheimer's disease and drug and alcohol-related conditions than their white counterparts, and

WHEREAS, King County residents of color are more likely to experience inequities in education, access to jobs, earning power, adequate and safe housing, higher rates of policing and involvement in the criminal legal system, and overall quality of life, and

WHEREAS, the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 on our BIPOC communities is a present-day demonstration of the systemic racism in institutions and systems that have not valued and supported human life equitably, and

WHEREAS, we recognize that historically and currently King County has been complicit in maintaining and perpetuating structural racism, and that as an institution the Board of Health must stand in support of dismantling oppressive systems grounded in white supremacy, and

WHEREAS, King County government and Public Health - Seattle & King County have expressed a commitment to developing stronger and better resourced partnerships with community organizations and leaders to disrupt and dismantle racism and protect the health and well-being of our BIPOC residents, using quantitative data, including data about racial inequities, along with voices and knowledge of community leaders and residents to get to solutions that work and that are sustainable, and

WHEREAS, in 2008 the King County Executive joined with Public Health - Seattle & King County to launch the Equity and Social Justice Initiative, and later in 2010 the King County Council passed equity and social justice ordinance, and now the current Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan leads with racial justice, and

WHEREAS, across the country local governments have taken action to declare racism a public health crisis including the cities of Boston, Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, Franklin County, Ohio, the Indianapolis City-County Council in Indiana, and the Tacoma-Pierce County Board of Health, and

WHEREAS, the Board of Health is committed to addressing racial equity and health disparities in all forms and at all levels, which are the individual, institutional and systemic levels, across the county;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Health of King County:

A. The Board declares racism a public health crisis;

B. The Board supports King County and Public Health - Seattle & King County immediately in the work to advance a public health approach in addressing institutional and systemic racism;

C. The Board commits to assessing, revising, and writing its guiding documents and its policies with a racial justice and equity lens including the Board of Health Code and annual workplan; and

D. The Board members commit to ongoing work around race and equity such as participating in racial equity training, engaging and being responsive to communities and residents impacted by racism, especially Black and Indigenous communities, as partners in identifying and implementing solutions, establishing an agreed upon understanding of racial equity principles to work towards antiracist policies and practices and to serve as ambassadors of racial equity work.