



Committee: Directly to Council
Committee Review: N/A
Staff: Cecily Thorne, Chief of Staff
Purpose: To introduce agenda item – no vote expected
Keywords: #RacismIsAPublicHealthEmergency

AGENDA ITEM # 3.5
Date: June 9, 2020
Introduction

SUBJECT

- Resolution – Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis
- Sponsor – Full Council

EXPECTED ATTENDEES

- None

COUNCIL DECISION POINTS & COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

- To introduce resolution: no vote expected

DESCRIPTION/ISSUE

An emerging body of research demonstrates that racism itself is a social determinant of health. Scientists now see race as a social, cultural, and/or political construct wherein racial segregation has real consequences on health and health disparities.

SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

- NA

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

TO: Councilmembers, Chiefs of Staff

FROM: Councilmember Will Jawando

DATE: June 4, 2020

SUBJECT: Resolution: Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis

Racism causes persistent discrimination and inequitable outcomes in many areas of life. An emerging body of research, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, has found that racism itself is a social determinant of health. As we see the dire effects of COVID-19 on African Americans, it is time we focus on the direct link to this crisis - racism.

On June 9th, I will be introducing a resolution declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis. The resolution is tied to the social construct of race and how it affects our society. There is a biological basis to distinguish racial groups; instead, they see race as a social, cultural, and/or political construct wherein racism has real consequences on health and health disparities.

Health disparities have been amplified during the COVID-19 crisis as African Americans have the highest number of recorded cases and deaths. This is true across the United States, in the state of Maryland and in Montgomery County, where African Americans account for 1 in 4 of all COVID-19 deaths, despite only representing 19% of all residents.

As a full Council, we have taken significant steps to promote racial equity, social justice and inclusion throughout County government. This is supported by County legislation including the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act, the Law Enforcement Trust and Transparency (LETT) Act, Policing Advisory Commission, the Community Policing Law, the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act and the Remembrance and Reconciliation Commission. This resolution declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis is the next urgent step we must take as we recommit to promoting racial equity and eliminating health disparities in Montgomery County.

Thank you for your support.

Resolution No.: _____
Introduced: _____
Adopted: _____

**COUNTY COUNCIL
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Lead Sponsor: County Council

SUBJECT: Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis

Background

1. The Montgomery County Council has a demonstrated track record of promoting racial equity, social justice, and inclusions in all aspects of County government to narrow disparities in opportunities by race and ethnicity. This commitment is exemplified in the development and execution of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act, the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, the Law Enforcement Trust and Transparency (LETT) Act, Policing Advisory Commission, the Community Policing Law, and the Remembrance and Reconciliation Commission.
2. These laws and initiatives identify racism as a root cause of disparities and inequities by race and ethnicity that cause poverty and diminished economic activity.
3. Race is a social construct with no biological basis that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance, ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period.
4. Racism is a social system with multiple dimensions that include individual racism that is internalized or interpersonal; systemic racism that is institutional or structural; and a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks.
5. Racism unfairly disadvantages specific individuals and communities while unfairly giving advantages to other individuals and communities and undermines society as a whole through the waste of human resources necessary to promote prosperity and development in Montgomery County and elsewhere.
6. Racism causes persistent discrimination and disparate outcomes in many areas of life, including housing, education, employment, and criminal justice; and an emerging body of research demonstrates that racism itself is a social determinant of health.

7. Compared to White residents, Black residents experience dramatically higher rates of unemployment (7.5% v. 3.3%), poverty (11.2% v. 4.0%), dropout (6.3% v. 2.1%); and lower rates of homeownership (42.5% v. 73.2%), college attainment (44% v. 65%), and annual household incomes (\$73,000 v. \$119,000).¹ Further, Black residents are twice as likely as their share of County residents to be arrested (43.9% v. 19.8%).
8. Racism and de facto segregation in our County have exacerbated a health divide resulting in African Americans having lower levels of health insurance, higher levels of infant and maternal mortality than White residents and to also die of heart disease, strokes, and breast cancer.² African Americans also have higher levels of low birth weights, are more likely to be overweight or obese and to have adult diabetes.³
9. A contemporary example of health disparities resulting from racism is highlighted in the Covid-19 data for the County where African Americans account for 20% of all residents, but 25% of Covid-19 deaths.⁴
10. More than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes, including one authored by our own Montgomery County Health Officer and the Foundation for The National Institutes of Health.⁵
11. The Montgomery County Council as the Board of Health stands with the residents of our County and our partners at the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services and its Office of Public Health to declare that racism is a public health crisis that warrants strategic coordination and action among public agencies and stakeholders.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following actions:

1. The Council asserts that racism is a public health crisis affecting our entire County and commits to understanding how racism has impacted past work and creating new policies that lessen that impact.
2. The Council commits to becoming an equity and justice-oriented organization, with the Council and its staff leadership continuing to identify activities to further enhance racial equity and social justice and to ensure the application of anti-racism principles across Council leadership, staffing and contracting.

¹ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/RevisedOLO2019-7.pdf>

² Ibid; <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/Resources/Files/MaternalInfantHealthReport.pdf>

³ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/Resources/Files/Reports/PopHealthReportFINAL.pdf>

⁴ <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/RightNav/Coronavirus-data.html>

⁵ <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/10260/unequal-treatment-confronting-racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-health-care>

3. The Council commits to promoting racial equity and social justice through all policies approved by the Council and educating and training Council staff on how racism and other systems of oppression can affect health care, the delivery of human and social services, economic development and public safety.
4. The Council will continue to advocate locally and nationally for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, and supports local, state, regional, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism.
5. The Council will further work to solidify alliances and partnerships with other organizations that are confronting racism and encourage other local, state, regional and national entities to recognize racism as a public health crisis.
6. The Council commits to collaborating with local communities to search for more ways to counter systemic injustices by supporting community efforts to amplify issues of racism and engage actively and authentically with communities of color throughout the County.
7. The Council will promote and support policies that prioritize the health of all people, especially people of color by mitigating exposure to adverse childhood experiences.
8. The Council will support on-going racial equity and social justice training with the goal of reaching all Legislative Branch agency leadership and staff.
9. The Council will encourage racial equity and social justice training among all community partners, grantees, vendors and contractors.
10. The Council will identify clear goals and objectives, including periodic reports to the public, to assess progress and capitalize on opportunities to further advance racial equity and social justice in decision-making.
11. The Council's strategic actions to combat racism and social injustice will be consistent with and guided by the Racial Equity and Social Justice Law.
12. The Council supports all additional efforts in Montgomery County, the State of Maryland, and nationwide to address racism and public health disparities due to racial and social inequities.
13. The County Council calls upon the Governor, the Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, and the Maryland Senate President to join with us to declare racism as a public health crisis and to advance racial equity and social justice in all policies of the State of Maryland.

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Selena Mindy Singleton, Clerk of the Council