

Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health & Safety Crisis

WHEREAS, Racism is a social system with multiple dimensions: individual racism is internalized or interpersonal; systemic racism is institutional or structural, and is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks. This unfairly disadvantages specific individuals and communities, while unfairly giving advantages to other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources^{1 2}; and

WHEREAS, Racism is a threat to public health and safety, and is a paramount social determinant of health, shaping access to the resources that create opportunities for health, including justice, public safety, housing, education and employment, and is a persistent barrier to health equity for all Buncombe County residents; and

WHEREAS, the Buncombe County Health and Human Services Board adopted a proclamation declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis; and

WHEREAS, in addition to having an independent influence on the social determinants of health, racism in and of itself has been proven to have broad-reaching and direct negative impacts on individual health outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the NC Institute for Medicine, Healthy NC 2030 Report (HNC2030), notes “the root cause for the health disparities we see in populations of color is the historical and continued structural racism that has resulted in inequitable opportunities for healthy lives”; and

WHEREAS, the Buncombe County 2018 Community Health Assessment notes, Black babies are 3.8 times more likely to die in the first year of life than White babies, and where life expectancy is on average is 5.9 years shorter for Black residents when compared to White residents; and

WHEREAS, the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council adopted a proclamation declaring Racism a Public Safety Emergency; and

WHEREAS, in November 2018, the American Public Health Association declared law enforcement violence a public health problem; urging governments and law enforcement agencies to review policies that can lead to disproportionate violence against marginalized populations; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina Executive Order No. 145 (June 9, 2020) proclaims that a fair and equitable criminal justice system, free from racism and bias, is necessary to maintain the safety and well-being of the State of North Carolina; and

¹ Jones CP. Confronting Institutionalized Racism. Phylon. 2002; 50(1/2):7---22.

² American Public Health Association. Racism and Health. Available at: <https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/2020/racism-is-a-public-health-crisis> Accessed May 2, 2020.

WHEREAS, Chief Justice Cheri Beasley declares “disparities that exist as the result of policies and institutions; racism and prejudice have remained stubbornly fixed and resistant to change”; and

WHEREAS, institutional and systemic racism in housing, education, economic, health, and criminal justice policies and practices have caused deep disparities, harm, and mistrust; In 2019 Black American residents of Buncombe County make up 6.3% of the population, 25% of the jail population, and 69% of gun violence victims; and

WHEREAS, in Buncombe County, 20.64 percent of White homeowners experience housing cost burden, while 39.4 percent of Black homeowners experience cost burden. Similarly, in our county, 12 percent of White children compared to 24 percent of Black children, and 40 percent of Hispanic children live in poverty; and

WHEREAS, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners 2020-2025 Strategic Plan identifies equity as a foundational focus area with a commitment to systems, policies, programs and practices that supports and integrates equity and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion; and

WHEREAS, the County Manager has established a cross-departmental Equity & Inclusion staff workgroup to design, coordinate and organize a community - informed Equity Action Plan that includes an equity data governance collaborative to collect, monitor, evaluate and publicly display relevant data.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners assert that racism is a public health and safety crisis affecting our entire County and should be treated with the urgency and funding of a public health and safety emergency. Looking at racism in this way offers policymakers, county management, criminal justice stakeholders, health officials, and others an opportunity to analyze data and discuss how to dismantle or change problematic institutions. Buncombe County will seek to promote racial equity through policies approved by the Board of Commissioners and will encourage other local, state and national entities to recognize racism as a public health and safety crisis as well.

Adopted by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners on August 4, 2020.

COUNTY CLERK

COMMISSION CHAIR

Approved as to form:

COUNTY ATTORNEY