



**BUNCOMBE COUNTY
JUSTICE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL**

*Leveraging best practices to increase system efficiency,
promote public safety, and community wellness*

Declaring Racism a Public Safety Emergency

WHEREAS, the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council has identified Reducing Racial Disparity as a critical priority and essential to ensuring a fair and equitable justice system for all; and

WHEREAS, institutional and structural racism in housing, education, economic, health, and criminal justice policies and practices have caused deep disparities, harm, and mistrust; African American residents of Buncombe County make up 6-8% of the population, present approximately 22-25% of the jail population, and 63-71% of gun violence victims; and

WHEREAS, despite well-established national research data that White and Black people use drugs, sell drugs and engage in other criminal activity at approximately the same rates, in Buncombe County Blacks have an incarceration rate that is nearly four times greater than Whites in Buncombe County; and

WHEREAS, in response to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the various parts of our criminal justice system worked together diligently and quickly to reduce the local Detention Center population for health and safety, and succeeded in reducing the average daily population by nearly 40%, or 158 people. Even in that process, however, the effects of structural racism were evident: the racial disparity in the jail population increased, with the percentage of African Americans increasing from 23% to 29%.

WHEREAS, North Carolina Executive Order No. 145 proclaims 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 there is a long history of structural inequity and racism in the criminal justice system, underscored by the recent officer-involved deaths of Black people; and

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, the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council by and through the Criminal Justice Racial Equity Workgroup have worked over the past year to engage in a thoughtful process of educating stakeholders about structural racism and racial equity, listening openly to citizens in our community most directly impacted by the justice system, and digging into data that demonstrates significantly inequitable outcomes for those in our local jail; 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, and practices that support equity for all people and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion; and

WHEREAS, the City of Asheville is engaging directly in a reform agenda for public safety, based on research and significant input from residents to fight racism wherever it is found within our systems, including recommendations to reform the Asheville Police Department, especially the recommendation of a fully staffed Community Engagement Division will be in place to respond to issues including neighborhood quality of life issues, substance abuse, homelessness + more.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council will:

1. Assert that racism is a public safety emergency affecting our entire community;
2. Intentionally and actively engage members of all communities, especially those most impacted by the justice system in every step of our process.
3. Train and educate criminal justice stakeholders with a goal of training at least 75 percent of criminal justice actors in racial equity and implicit bias training;
4. Facilitate continuous interaction between the City of Asheville, Buncombe County, and other local agencies and organizations to provide city and county wide involvement in achieving racial equity;
5. Implement courageous and innovative solutions that safely reduce and eventually eliminate disparities in our jail population; with a goal is to reduce the number of Black people to be a more accurate reflection of our community and implement holistic strategies that enhance community safety.
6. Use a racial equity tool to review and revise local criminal justice policies, procedures, and practices that create disparate outcomes.
7. Ensure complete and regular availability of specific race and ethnicity data that documents racial disparities that exist in the criminal justice system through collection, dissemination and remedies for gaps in that data to strengthen our collective understanding.
8. Conduct ongoing and enhanced analysis using all available data to understand the complexity of the interconnectedness of societal, environmental and behavioral factors that contribute to criminal justice involvement. This includes a

more comprehensive understanding of racism and its impact on violence in the community and the impact that it has on people and the community at large.

9. Implement changes in our diversionary programs and victim advocacy services to ensure that they are culturally competent, inviting, and accessible to African Americans and other people of color;
10. Employ thoughtful solutions that to build trust and partnership with the community, law enforcement, and court systems.

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