



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 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, despite well-established national research data that White and Black Americans use drugs, sell drugs and engage in other criminal activity at approximately the same rates, in Buncombe County Black Americans have an incarceration rate that is nearly four times greater than White Americans; 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. That effort succeeded in dramatically reducing the average daily population by nearly 40%, or 158 people, and both Black and White detainees were released, but unfortunately the disparity in the remaining jail population increased; 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

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 Justice Resource Advisory Council by and through the Racial Equity Workgroup has 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 gathering data that demonstrates significant inequitable outcomes for those in our local jail; and

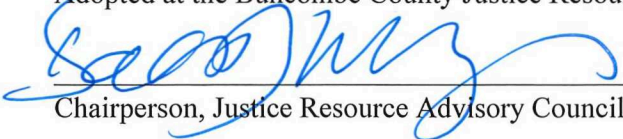
WHEREAS, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners 2020-2025 Strategic Plan identifies equity as a foundational focus area, with a commitment to developing systems, policies, and practices that support equity for all people and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.

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

1. Acknowledge and assert that structural and systemic racism is a public safety emergency affecting our entire community.
2. Engage intentionally and actively with 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 in racial equity, structural and systemic racism and implicit bias with a goal of training at least 75 percent of system staff 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 in all of our systems.
5. Implement courageous, innovative, and holistic solutions that enhance community safety and reduce racial disparities across our criminal justice system, from point of incident to re-entry.
6. Commitment to ongoing collaboration and sustainability of recent jail reduction efforts to include but not limited to, use of citations when possible, early participation by defense counsel and prosecutor, and efficiencies in case processing.
7. Use a racial equity tool to review and revise local criminal justice policies, procedures, and practices that create disparate outcomes.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. Develop a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of systemic and structural racism on violence in communities of color and the community at large.
11. 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.
12. Employ thoughtful solutions that build trust and partnership with the community, law enforcement, court and correctional systems.

Adopted at the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council Meeting on July 10th 2020.



Chairperson, Justice Resource Advisory Council