## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 10 | **Name:** | Sam Porter |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2020-0240 | **Date:** | July 14, 2020 |

**SUBJECT**

Proposed Motion 2020-0240 would declare racism a public health crisis.

**SUMMARY**

Proposed Motion 2020-0240 would declare racism a public health crisis and make related commitments and recognitions of the King County Council. The Proposed Motion would state three commitments of the Council as follows:

1. To implement a public health approach to address institutional and systemic racism across King County government,
2. To use Council authority to enact anti-racist policies and practices and eliminate policies and practices designed to oppress marginalized people, and
3. To implement and advocate for policies and procedures to ensure residents impacted by racism, especially Black and Indigenous communities, are not subject to violence at the hands of law enforcement.

The Proposed Motion would also make a statement recognizing that the elimination of institutional racism requires engaging and being responsive to communities and residents who are impacted by racism.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2010 the King County Council passed Ordinance 16948 which established definitions for the fair and just principle to be applied through the implementation of the countywide strategic plan. The 14 determinants of equity identified in Ordinance 16948 and codified in King County Code 2.10.210 provide a framework through which King County government can assess the potential equity impacts of government policies. As stated in King County Code, "these determinants of equity are the social, economic, geographic, political and physical environment conditions in which people in our county are born, grow, live, work and age that lead to the creation of a fair and just society. Access to the determinants of equity is necessary to have equity for all people regardless of race, class, gender or language spoken. Inequities are created when barriers exist that prevent individuals and communities from accessing these conditions and reaching their full potential."[[1]](#footnote-1)

The King County Council has incorporated equity and social justice principles into legislation over the years including levies that support human services, transportation, criminal justice, and budget appropriations.

Some local governments across the country have taken action recently to declare racism a public health crisis, in part to acknowledge the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on Black, Indigenous and people of color. A selection of jurisdictions that have made declarations of racism as a public health crisis in June 2020 can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. 2020 Declarations of Racism as a Public Health Crisis**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Jurisdiction** | **Title** | **Passed** |
| Cleveland City Council | Emergency Resolution 296-2020[[2]](#footnote-2) | June 3 |
| City of Columbus, Ohio | Ceremonial Resolution 0095X-2020[[3]](#footnote-3) | June 5 |
| Indianapolis City-County Council | Special Resolution No. 18, 2020[[4]](#footnote-4) | June 10 |
| Public Health—Seattle King County & King County Executive | Declaration[[5]](#footnote-5) | June 11 |
| Boston Mayor Martin Walsh | Executive Order[[6]](#footnote-6) | June 12 |
| Tacoma-Pierce County Board of Health | Resolution[[7]](#footnote-7) | June 17 |
| King County Board of Health | Resolution 20-08[[8]](#footnote-8) | June 18 |

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have suggested that structural racism is a cause of the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on people of color, specifically stating that:

"long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put some members of racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting COVID-19 or experiencing severe illness, regardless of age. […] As of June 12, 2020, age-adjusted hospitalization rates are highest among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native and non-Hispanic black persons, followed by Hispanic or Latino persons."[[9]](#footnote-9)

Public Health—Seattle & King County (PHSKC) released data on COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths by race and ethnicity in early May 2020 which shows that in King County, COVID-19 is disproportionally impacting communities of color.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**ANALYSIS**

Proposed Motion 2020-0240 would express the policy statement of the King County Council that racism is a public health crisis. The Proposed Motion would state that the Council recognizes that the elimination of institutional racism requires engaging and being responsive to impacted communities and residents. The Proposed Motion would also state three commitments of the Council as follows:

1. To implement a public health approach to addressing institutional and systemic racism across King County government.
2. To use Council authority to enact anti-racist policies and practices and eliminate policies and practices designed to oppress marginalized people.
3. To implement and advocate for policies and procedures to ensure residents impacted by racism, especially Black and Indigenous communities, are not subject to violence at the hands of law enforcement.

Proposed Motion 2020-0240 would express the King County Council's commitment to incorporate a public health approach to addressing racism. PHSKC has taken a public health approach to juvenile justice by defining and measuring the problem, determining the cause and risk factors, identifying ways to prevent youth involvement with the criminal justice system, and evaluating the strategies King County has implemented to reduce the use of secure detention. Proposed Motion 2020-0240 would indicate that the Council intends to utilize this approach to addressing institutional and systemic racism across County government.

The Proposed Motion would state the King County Council's commitment to enact anti-racist policies and practices that will meet human needs, promote healthy and strong communities, reduce structural inequities and advance equity and justice by eliminating policies and practices designed to oppress marginalized people. Given the wide scope of authority the Council has to enact policies across King County government, this could include policies and practices that pertain to transportation, public health, community and human services, permitting and land use, access to open space and parks, human resources and hiring, elections, and the criminal justice system.

Proposed Motion 2020-0240 would state the King County Council's commitment to implement and advocate for policies and procedures to ensure residents impacted by racism, especially Black and Indigenous communities, are not subject to violence at the hands of law enforcement. The proposed motion suggests this be accomplished through ensuring appropriate levels of oversight and accountability for law enforcement and by eliminating policies and practices that result in over policing, increased engagement with the justice system, and violence directed towards communities of color and marginalized communities.

Proposed Motion 2020-0240 would express the policy intent of the King County Council, but would not allocate funding or direct specific action to be taken. Additional legislation would be needed to implement the commitments identified in the Proposed Motion.

**AMENDMENT**

There is a title amendment T1 to Proposed Motion 2020-0240 that clarifies the intent of the motion as a declaration by the Council and also an endorsement of similar declaration of racism as a public health crisis by the King County Executive and Public Health—Seattle & King County.

**INVITED**

* Matias Valenzuela, Equity Director, Public Health—Seattle & King County

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Motion 2020-0240
2. Title Amendment T1
1. K.C.C. 2.10.210.B [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. City of Cleveland, Emergency Resolution No. 296-2020. <https://cityofcleveland.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4348675&GUID=32569022-4E96-4EDA-AF9F-398FE74D1179&Options=ID|Text|&Search=296-2020> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. City of Columbus, Ceremonial Resolution 0095X-2020. <https://columbus.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4549225&GUID=9B86550D-E90D-42A6-8EDD-57AFBBBEA953&Options=&Search=&FullText=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Indianapolis City-County Council Special Resolution No. 18, 2020. <https://www.indy.gov/api/v1/indy_proposal_document?content_type=application%2Fpdf&id=17024&name=PROP20-182&type=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Public Health Insider blog, "Racism is a Public Health crisis." Originally published on June 11, 2020. <https://publichealthinsider.com/2020/06/11/racism-is-a-public-health-crisis/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. City of Boston, "Mayor Walsh declares racism a public health crisis." <https://www.boston.gov/news/mayor-walsh-declares-racism-public-health-crisis> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department News, "Board of Health passes anti-racism, face coverings resolutions." <https://www.tpchd.org/Home/Components/News/News/168/286?backlist=%2f> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. King County Board of Health Resolution 20-08. <https://mkcclegisearch.kingcounty.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4567759&GUID=D003520E-882B-4570-B658-61B10CA2E5B2&Options=Advanced&Search>= [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)