



Legislation Text

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A MOTION declaring racism a public health crisis and endorsing the declarations of the King County executive, public health - Seattle & King County and the King County board of health.

WHEREAS, racism has deep and harmful impacts that unfairly disadvantages Black, Indigenous and People of Color ("BIPOC") and unfairly advantages people who identify as white, and

WHEREAS, racism harms every person in our society and is a root cause of poverty and economic inequality, and

WHEREAS, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," as King County's namesake, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, and

WHEREAS, whether intended or not, racism becomes ingrained in institutional policies and practices, creating differential access to opportunities and resources, and causes disparate outcomes in all aspects of life affecting health and well-being, and

WHEREAS, by maintaining the status quo and existing systems of power and privilege based on our country's long history and continued persistence of white supremacy, institutional policies and practices do not need to be explicitly racist in order to have racist impacts on residents, and

WHEREAS, systemic racism is manifest in the culture that exists within and across institutions and systems and the racist effects of policies and practices of those institutions can persist even once they have been changed, and

WHEREAS, reversing the legacy of institutional racism calls for an intentional commitment to anti-racist policies and practices and an understanding of the intersectional nature of power and oppression that

amplify adverse effects on people who experience more than one form of marginalization, such as race, gender, sexual orientation and disability, and

WHEREAS, a public health approach to ending racism calls for eliminating disparities, promoting health, and eliminating disease, taking into consideration data on social determinants of health including socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood and physical environment, employment and social support networks to identify interventions to preserve and promote well-being of whole communities, and

WHEREAS, King County residents of color have deep wells of resilience and strength, and some BIPOC communities are less likely to experience other health conditions, such as suicide, Alzheimer's disease and drug and alcohol-related conditions than their white counterparts, and

WHEREAS, as a result of racism, BIPOC are afforded fewer chances to access opportunities and experience inequities that affect education, jobs, earning power, economic mobility, food access, adequate and safe housing, transit access, higher rates of policing and involvement in the criminal legal system and overall quality of life, and

WHEREAS, decades of data collected by public health - Seattle & King County have demonstrated how systemic racism contributes to BIPOC communities experiencing both acute impacts such as gun violence, and chronic impacts such as higher rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, maternal and infant mortality, underweight babies and shorter, less-healthy lives overall, and

WHEREAS, the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 on our BIPOC communities is a present-day demonstration of the systemic racism in institutions and systems that have not valued and supported human life equitably, and

WHEREAS, housing is one of the best-known social determinants of health and according to a 2017 report on housing by the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, generations of BIPOC families have been disenfranchised through government authorized practices such as the Federal Housing Administration's program of redlining and the systematic exclusion of Black veterans from receiving low-interest mortgages

guaranteed through the GI bill, which contributes to the lack of generational wealth in Black communities shown through data indicating that while seventy-one percent of white families live in owner-occupied housing, only forty-one percent of Black families and forty-five percent of Hispanic families do, and

WHEREAS, according to data from the Sentencing Project, Black people are 5.9 times as likely to be incarcerated than whites, one in three Black men can expect to go to prison in his lifetime and, according to data of known police killings analyzed by Mapping Police Violence, Black people have been twenty-eight percent of those killed while they are thirteen percent of the population, and

WHEREAS, we recognize that historically and currently King County has been complicit in maintaining and perpetuating structural racism, and that as an institution King County must stand in support of dismantling oppressive systems grounded in white supremacy, and

WHEREAS, King County government has committed to intentionally leading with racial justice to confront the historical and racial inequities that continue to exist in our community and our organization, and

WHEREAS, in 2008 the King County executive joined with public health - Seattle & King County to launch the equity and social justice initiative and later, in 2010, the King County council passed an equity and social justice ordinance and the 2016-2022 Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan leads with racial justice, and

WHEREAS, across the country local governments have taken action to declare racism a public health crisis including the cities of Boston, Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, Franklin County, Ohio, the Indianapolis City-County Council in Indiana and the Tacoma-Pierce County Board of Health, and

WHEREAS, the King County council is committed to addressing racial equity and health disparities in all forms and at all levels, which are the individual, institutional and systemic levels, across the county, and

WHEREAS, the King County council stands with the residents of King County to declare racism as a public health crisis, and endorses the declarations of racism as a public health crisis made by the King County executive and public health - Seattle & King County on June 11, 2020, and the board of health in its declaration

of racism as a public health crisis passed by resolution on June 18, 2020;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Metropolitan King County Council:

The council:

A. Declares racism a public health crisis;

B. Commits to maintain and incorporate into its work a public health approach to addressing institutional and systemic racism across King County government, and to rectify historic and current day trauma and disproportionality;

C. Recognizes that eliminating racist policies and practices and the conditions that result in disparate access to resources and opportunities based on race requires engaging and being responsive to communities and residents impacted by racism, especially Black and Indigenous communities, as partners in identifying and implementing antiracist solutions, policies and practices;

D. Commits to using its authority 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; and

E. Commits 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, including ensuring appropriate levels of oversight and accountability for law enforcement and eliminating policies and practices that result in overpolicing, increased engagement with the justice system and violence directed towards communities of color and marginalized communities.