

HENNEPIN COUNTY

MINNESOTA

Board Action Request 20-0242

Item Description:

Hennepin County Declares Racism a Public Health Crisis - offered by Commissioner Conley and Commissioner Fernando

WHEREAS, Hennepin County's mission is "to enhance the health, safety and quality of life of our residents and communities in a respectful, efficient and fiscally responsible way," and that Hennepin's first stated overarching goal is that "People are healthy, have access to quality health care and live in a clean environment" [*Hennepin County Government (2020)*, Retrieved from <https://www.hennepin.us/your-government#overview>]; and

WHEREAS, "Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities. This work is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing and responding to infectious diseases. And that public health is concerned with protecting the health of entire populations" [*CDC Foundation (2020)*, Retrieved from <https://www.cdcfoundation.org/what-public-health>]; and

WHEREAS, "Public health professionals try to prevent problems from happening or recurring through implementing educational programs, recommending policies, administering services and conducting research," highlighting that "a large part of public health is promoting healthcare equity, quality and accessibility" [*CDC Foundation (2020)*, Retrieved from <https://www.cdcfoundation.org/what-public-health>]; and

WHEREAS, as of June 19, 2020, Hennepin County's "Public health data" webpage contained 35 published PDF "fact sheets on various health topics that affect Hennepin County," and of the 34 fact sheets that include race/ethnicity data, 29 fact sheets (85%) report findings that express health disparity along lines of race/ethnicity [*Hennepin County Government (2020)*, Retrieved from <https://www.hennepin.us/your-government/research-data/public-health-data>]; and

WHEREAS, preliminary data in Hennepin County related to COVID-19 also show a health disparity. Black residents make up approximately 13% of Hennepin's population, however account for about 40% of the confirmed COVID-19 cases. Conversely, white residents make up approximately 72% of the population and about 44% of the confirmed cases. Additionally, among these confirmed cases, Black residents median age is 40 and white residents median age is 61 [*Daily Incident Brief 5.22.2020 (2020)*, Retrieved from *Hennepin Incident Command*]; and

WHEREAS, the American Public Health Association (APHA) states that "Racism is an ongoing public health crisis that needs our attention now" [*American Public Health Association (2020)*, Retrieved from <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-equity/racism-and-health>]; and

WHEREAS, more than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes [*Institute of Medicine (2003)*, Retrieved from <https://www.nap.edu/read/10260/chapter/11>]; and

WHEREAS, editors for Merriam-Webster confirmed they will "revise the online entry for racism." Editors commented that "the usage of racism to specifically describe the intersection of race-based prejudice with social and institutional oppression" is increasing, and that they "will make the idea of systemic or institutional racism even more explicit in the [revised] wording of the definition" [*The New York Times (2020)*, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/us/merriam-webster-racism-definition.html>]; and

WHEREAS, "the vast and persistent inequities experienced by Black, indigenous and communities of color are the result of a complex and intersecting set of racial rules that have been strongly shaped by our nation's long history of systemic exclusion and racism[;] that this history has a lingering impact today and that policies that attempt to ignore this legacy too often serve to compound inequality." [*Roosevelt Institute (2016)*, Retrieved from <https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Structural-Discrimination-Final.pdf>]; and

WHEREAS, as of June 19, 2020, eleven United States counties have passed resolutions declaring racism a public health crisis to be systematically addressed [*Milwaukee County (Milwaukee, WI)*, *Franklin County (Columbus, OH)*, *Dallas County (Dallas, TX)*, *Summit County (Akron, OH)*, *Montgomery County (Dayton, OH)*, *Mecklenburg County (Charlotte, NC)*, *Kalamazoo County (Kalamazoo, MI)*, *Douglas County (Omaha, NE)*, *Montgomery County (Rockville, MD)*, *King County (Seattle, WA)*, *Pierce County (Tacoma, WA)*]; therefore

Resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners declares racism a public health crisis that affects the entire County; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Hennepin County's policy position will include advocating for relevant policies that improve health in Black communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Hennepin County will support local, state, regional, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism; will seek partnership with local organizations that have a legacy and track record of confronting racism; and will promote community efforts to amplify issues of racism to engage actively and authentically with communities of color wherever they live; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Hennepin County Board directs Administration to incorporate racism and this public health crisis into 2021 Budget Hearing materials; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Hennepin County Board directs Administration to provide a written memo to the Board no later than three months after the passing of this Resolution, to communicate an implementation timeline for the following items:

1. Acknowledge that Hennepin County's current public health fact sheets present a clear picture of health disparity along lines of race/ethnicity.
2. Recognize that this data-based health disparity along lines of race/ethnicity is significant, and has direct impacts from birth to death to the individual, as well as to their family and community members.
3. Shift approach from incremental improvement centered on service-delivery to clients, to a comprehensive approach that incorporates systemic, structural, or institutional changes that may respond to the health disparity presented with a commensurate response.
4. Develop clear goals and objectives specific to achieving health-related outcomes in Hennepin's stated mission, vision, and goals along lines of race/ethnicity.
5. Develop a consistent methodology for data collection, reporting, and analysis related to race/ethnicity for future public health data fact sheets, in order to continue transparency with the publishing of reports and to inform recommendations to decision-makers.
6. Conduct an assessment of internal policy, procedures, and goals for the purpose of forming recommendations that may demonstrably improve health outcomes related to race/ethnicity, with engagement opportunities from Hennepin's workforce groups and the newly established Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC).
7. Conduct an assessment on how a public health lens or approach may connect to or improve other work within Hennepin County, such as housing, income, education, public safety, emergency response, criminal justice, sexual violence, and more.
8. Develop a recommendation, based on a public health intervention model, for standards and implementation of any future Hennepin County anti-racist community initiatives and proposals.
9. Conduct an assessment related to all human resources, vendor selection, and grant management activities with a racial equity lens, including reviewing internal processes and practices, such as hiring, promotions, leadership appointments, and funding.
10. Recommend reporting mechanism and cadence options to the Board of Commissioners, jointly or in mutual partnership with REAC (several existing models to consider within other CAB bodies).