

## **RESOLUTION 2020**

### **Declaration of Racism is a Public Health Crisis**

WHEREAS, race is a social construct with no biological basis; and

WHEREAS, racism is a social system with multiple dimensions, including individual racism, which is internalized or interpersonal; and

WHEREAS, systemic racism, which is institutional or structural, is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks; and

WHEREAS, systemic racism unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and depletes the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources; and

WHEREAS, racism is rooted in the foundation of America. From the time chattel slavery began in the 1600s, to the Jim Crow era, to the declaration of the war on drugs that eventually led to the mass incarceration of Black people, racism has remained a presence in American society while subjecting Black people to hardships and disadvantages in every aspect of life; and

WHEREAS, racism, including implicit and conscious bias, causes persistent racial discrimination in Criminal Justice, Social Capital, Voter Suppression, Education, Transportation, Employment, Food Access, Mental Health and Health Behaviors, Socioeconomic Status, Environmental Exposure, Access to Health Services, Housing, and Public Safety; and

WHEREAS, historical racism in Florida has impacted Black Floridians including Black residents of St. Petersburg. As early as 1870, St. Petersburg County citizens voted against a state measure giving Blacks the right to vote, in 1913 the Democratic Party conducted a “whites only” primary, and in a 1930s city charter had provision for a white primary. Three lynchings have been documented as occurring in St. Petersburg: John Thomas, December 25, 1905; John Evans, November 12, 1914; and Parker Watson, May 9, 1926. During the 20th century discriminatory housing practices, known as redlining, along with deed restrictions prohibited Black people from living in certain areas and locking neighborhoods into concentrated poverty. Loans in these neighborhoods were unavailable or awfully expensive making it difficult for most Black people to buy homes setting the stage for the persistent racial wealth gap that exists today. A 1931 city charter forbade white people from living or operating a business in the Black community while banning Blacks from doing the same in white neighborhoods. In 1936 the city council approved a resolution making all African Americans live west of Seventeenth Street with the southern boundary being Fifteenth Avenue South. In 1937 the Ku Klux Klan marched through Black

neighborhoods to keep them from voting on a referendum. In 1954 Dr. Robert Swain broke the Fifteenth Avenue South “redline” by opening a dental office on the south side of the street.

WHEREAS, in 1965 twelve African American police officers sued the City of St. Petersburg for the right to patrol all neighborhoods in the city. In 1967 the *St. Petersburg Times* newspaper ended the publication of the Negro news pages. In 1968, the city sanitation workers went on strike for better working conditions, better pay, and benefits.

WHEREAS, the city experienced racial disturbances in August of 1968 and again in 1996 and most recently, the marches for peace, justice, and equity for Black lives held for more than 130 days with a Rally Against Hate in 2020.

WHEREAS, Black citizens across the state of Florida have been limited to areas with restricted access to healthy foods, disproportionate amount of convenience and liquor stores, clean water, and other essential resources, leading to a variety of other health issues, including reduced life expectancy, higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, and higher rates of lead poisoning; and

WHEREAS, for more than 400 years, racism has existed in America. However, in the 21st century, we are seeing an increased incidence of police brutality, the result of racism and the disproportionate impact on Black people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Black people are dying in larger-than-expected, record numbers from both; and

WHEREAS, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, Black people have higher prevalence of chronic illnesses and stress, are more likely to be employed in enclosed areas, lack access to health care causing them to die from COVID-19 at higher rates than white people. In Pinellas County, Black people make up 11 percent of the population, yet they are 2.14 times more likely to be infected than their white neighbors, are nearly 2.23 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 1.18 times more likely to succumb to COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, Black people are disproportionately suffering in-part due to long standing, unaddressed health disparities as well as systemic racism and other socioeconomic inequities. Indicators of health disparities include Black infant mortality, which is 11.5 % compared to White infant mortality at 5.2%; prevalence of diabetes; collectively, Blacks have the highest death rate and shortest survival of any racial class or ethnic group for most cancers; and many Black residents state that they lack access to health care; and

WHEREAS, twenty-two percent of all children in Pinellas County and 43% of those are Black children grow up in poverty, complete less schooling, work and earn less as adults, are more

likely to receive public assistance, eat disproportionately more high-calorie and low-nutrition foods, and have poorer health outcomes; and

WHEREAS, more than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes, and there is clear data to illustrate that racism negatively impacts the lives of Black people in the City of St. Petersburg. The current COVID-19 crisis and ongoing protests against police brutality have helped to highlight now, more than ever, that racism, not race, causes disparities for Black Americans; and

WHEREAS, the privileges that other Americans experience often inhibit them from fully understanding how racism impacts Black people in America - for example the performance of simple tasks like driving while Black, walking/running in neighborhoods, wearing a hoodie, going to the store, eating ice cream in your own home, or just going to a park all come with certain risk not experienced by others. Concerned parents prepare their Black youth at an early age by having “The Talk” with their children in order to attempt to protect them; and

WHEREAS, local, state, and national leaders across the country are declaring racism a public health crisis or emergency; and

WHEREAS, in Florida only Hillsborough and Manatee Counties have made a declaration; and

WHEREAS, the American Public Health Association, National Association of County and City Health Officials, and the American Academy of Pediatrics have declared racism as a public health crisis, this Council believes that now is the time to do the same. The disparities caused by racism that we have outlined in this resolution represent a public health crisis which affects us all; and

WHEREAS, we as government body strive to create an optimal quality of life for all of our Black residents of St. Petersburg; and

WHEREAS, the City of St. Petersburg has worked diligently to promote racial equity, inclusion, and diversity in city government and the community in direct response to addressing traditional reactions to race as an identified stumbling block for career advancement and employment opportunities in our country; and

WHEREAS, the City of St. Petersburg has been designated as a City of Equity, City of Compassion, and a City of Peace; and

WHEREAS, the City of St. Petersburg was the first and only city in the nation to raise a flag outside city hall in honor of the father of Black History and to mark the beginning of Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, under the current administration, according to 2016 Census data, the city's Black unemployment rate has decreased significantly; the Black community's income grew; the Black poverty rate decreased significantly, and there has been a historically significant increase in Black employment and earnings; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the St. Petersburg City Council hereby declares racism as a public health crisis in the City of St. Petersburg that affects all members of our society on a local, state, and national level and requests action from all levels of government and society; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this City Council recommits its full attention to improving the quality of life and health of our Black City of St. Petersburg residents; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the St. Petersburg City Council advocates for relevant policies that improve health in the Black community, and support local, state, and federal initiatives that advance social justice, while also encouraging individual member advocacy to dismantle systemic racism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this City Council urges the City of St. Petersburg to move forward to assess our current and proposed ordinances, and internal policies and procedures, as well as their implementation, to actively work towards racial equity as a core element of our government, communicate the results of assessment, and determine the appropriate interval for reassessment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this City Council requests the Administration to consider expanding the Community Affairs Division of Human Resources to include a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion taskforce to engage residents, businesses and nonprofits to achieve community-centered solutions that address the legacy of racial injustices faced by Black communities, and identify specific activities to increase diversity and to incorporate anti-racism principles across membership, leadership, staffing and contracting in the City of St. Petersburg; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this City Council will seriously consider the findings and requests Administration to implement the recommendations of the Commission to Study Structural Racism in St. Petersburg; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this City Council supports on-going racial equity training with the goal of reaching all City of St. Petersburg leadership and staff and encourage racial equity training among all community partners, grantees, vendors and contractors; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this City Council urges other governmental bodies to declare racism as a public health crisis and to immediately take steps to intentionally address and support methods that will strategically reduce the long-term impact and public health disparities of systemic racism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the St. Petersburg City Council requests that the City Clerk forward copies of this resolution to the Governor of the State of Florida, Pinellas County's State Legislative delegation, Pinellas County School Board, and the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners.