

RESOLUTION NO. 20-124

**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF VENTURA
DECLARING RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND PLEDGING TO PROMOTE
EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND DIVERSITY IN HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT, HEALTH CARE, AND PUBLIC SAFETY IN THE COUNTY OF VENTURA**

WHEREAS, throughout the history of the United States, racism has manifested itself as discrimination and oppression directed toward Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, resulting in premature death and disability, health disparities, and racial and social inequities; and,

WHEREAS, the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, recent incidents that do not stand alone in our nation, have galvanized governmental entities around the country to assess the impact of racism on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, including in, but not limited to, the areas of housing, education, public safety, and physical and mental health; and,

WHEREAS, race is a social construct with no basis in biology, yet racism has unjustly persisted through our country's history based on flawed ideas that have developed around perceived differences in human beings based on appearance and color; and,

WHEREAS, racism is a social system with multiple dimensions, including individual racism, that is internalized or interpersonal, and systemic racism, that is institutional and structural. Systemic racism unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and depletes the strength of the whole society; and,

WHEREAS, numerous studies have linked racism to negative health outcomes, including research that the cumulative experience of racism throughout one's lifetime can lead to chronic health conditions and disparities in physical and behavioral health consequences such as depression, anxiety, hypertension, stroke, heart attack, diabetes, maternal death, premature birth, respiratory diseases, and autoimmune diseases; and,

WHEREAS, Ventura County Public Health Department statistics show that Black individuals have the lowest life expectancy of those living in our county by race/ethnicity at 80.1 years, with life expectancy for Latinx individuals at 83.3 years, White individuals at 83.7 years, and Asian-American individuals at 86.4 years; and,

WHEREAS, Black individuals have the highest average years of life lost due to cancer and coronary heart disease by race/ethnicity in our county; and,

WHEREAS, the Ventura County Health Care Agency's mission emphasizes both comprehensive care for our diverse community, especially those facing barriers, and commitment to primary care access, a vital component of community service given Ventura County Public Health Department data indicating that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Ventura County visit hospital emergency rooms for multiple chronic conditions at significantly higher rates than White people; and,

WHEREAS, the Ventura County Community Health Needs Assessment shows that the poverty rate for Black families in Ventura County is twice that for White families, while the poverty rate for Latinx families in Ventura County is more than three times the rate for White families; and,

WHEREAS, Black individuals are over-represented among those experiencing homelessness at 8%, while more than 65% of those in our county experiencing homelessness are People of Color; and,

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified disparities nationally and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that long-standing health and social inequities have resulted in increased risk of infection, severe illness, and death from COVID-19 among communities of color; and,

WHEREAS, CDC national statistics show that Black people have a 2.6 times higher percentage of COVID-19 cases, a 4.7 times higher percentage of hospitalization, and a 2.1 times higher death rate compared to White, Non-Hispanic people. These rates are similarly elevated for Latinx and Indigenous people; and,

WHEREAS, as public servants, the County of Ventura workforce is committed to both ensuring the health and safety of all in our county and to fostering a healthy community free of racism, intimidation, fear, and violence; and,

WHEREAS, the County of Ventura is committed to continue supporting collaboration between Ventura County Behavioral Health Department and Ventura County law enforcement agencies as part of the Crisis Intervention Team, which is considered the "Gold Standard" in de-escalation, use of force reduction, community collaboration, and mental health education for law enforcement; and,

WHEREAS, the most recently available Board of State and Community Corrections reports show incarceration rates of 53% for Hispanics, 5% for Blacks, and 39% for Whites. Incarceration rates, which include non-county residents, for the same time period are higher than the county's population demographics of 43.5% for Hispanics, 1.6% for Blacks, and 45.3% for Whites.

WHEREAS, we reaffirm that the safety of our community and its members is of the highest priority, and we support and commend the professionalism of the Ventura County Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, and Probation Agency, and their personnel, who each day serve our communities and are essential to their safety and well-being; and,

WHEREAS, the impact of racism on public health and safety deserves action from all levels of government as Ventura County Family Justice Center statistics show that People of Color are also disproportionately victims of crime; and,

WHEREAS, in 2016, the County of Ventura established a key CEO Community Liaison leadership position to support our continued commitment to prioritizing engagement, development of programs and open dialogue with community members concerning elimination of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, and a review and understanding of policies and procedures to further such purposes as set forth herein, all in the interests of promoting the safety and well-being of all people in Ventura County.

WHEREAS, in 2017, the County of Ventura established the employee Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force (Task Force) to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion in the County's workforce, workplace, strategic plan, programs, and services, and to ensure culturally competent, respectful outcomes for community members and the workforce. To date, Task Force initiatives have included the:

- Development and implementation of a mandatory cultural competency employee training program;
- Establishment of an online Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion library with resources and training materials promoting a variety of related topics;
- Creation of a Mentorship Program to discuss career paths, and to shape and support future leaders in the County's workforce;
- Establishment of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Council;
- Support for the addition of a County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer position to the County's leadership team, and for the incorporation of and identified Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion liaison in each agency and department;
- Continuation of the bilingual incentive premium that now includes over 20 percent of the County's workforce who aid in language accessibility in County services and information including Spanish and Indigenous languages; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors of the County of Ventura hereby:

- Declares that racism and social inequities have created a public health crisis affecting Ventura County and our entire country;
- Commits to becoming a more racial equity and justice-oriented organization in service to all communities in our county;
- Endorses the work of the County's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force to assess County of Ventura policies, procedures, and collaborations, to address the prevention of racism, and to develop equity, diversity, and inclusion as core components of the County's work in service to the community and for incorporation into the Ventura County Strategic Plan;

- Pledges to collaborate with the county's law and justice agencies and the community to establish an advisory group to help foster meaningful discussions and to identify public concerns related to policing policies and procedures with regard to matters such as hiring, training, and misconduct.
- Pledges to establish a working group of health care subject matter experts and community stakeholders to study the delivery and improvement of health care services for underserved populations, including allocation of resources and personnel practices;
- Pledges to continue to: a) incorporate equity, inclusion, and diversity into organizational practices; b) offer educational trainings and activities aimed toward expanding employees' understanding of how racism affects individuals and their health; and c) provide tools to assist our employees in best serving our community in a culturally competent manner;
- Pledges to advocate for relevant policies that will improve health among all Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; and
- Pledges to encourage other local, state, and federal entities to recognize racism as a public health crisis.

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Ventura County Board of Supervisors hereby pledges to support efforts to address racism as a public health issue and to work to improve public health disparities in our community.

Upon motion of Supervisor Bennett, seconded by Supervisor Huber, and duly carried, the Board hereby approves and adopts this resolution on the 10th day of November 2020.


Chair, Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura

ATTEST:
Michael Powers,
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura, State of California

By: 
Deputy Clerk of the Board

