



Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

Request for Board Action

Meeting Date: 8/4/2020

New Business

Department: County Manager's Office

Presenter(s): DK Wesley, Assistant County Manager

Contact(s): DK Wesley, Assistant County Manager; Tiffany Iheanacho, Justice Services Director & Zo Mpofu, Community Health Assessment & Improvement Coordinator

Subject: Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health & Safety Crisis

Brief Summary: Over the last year, staff and partners who are members of both the Health & Human Services (HHS) Board and the Justice Resource Advisory Council (JRAC) have worked to review and evaluate the racial disparity data in both the areas of public health and criminal justice. This review has included discussions around structural and systemic racism as well as historical and current policies and procedures that generate disparate outcomes, most specifically for communities of color. Examples of those disparate outcomes include, but are not limited to:

- In Buncombe County, 20.64 percent of White homeowners experience housing cost burden, while 39.4 percent of Black homeowners experience cost burden. Similarly, in our county, 12 percent of White children compared to 24 percent of Black children, and 40 percent of Hispanic children live in poverty (US Census/ACS, 2016).
- In 2016, 13.7% of Whites experienced poverty in Buncombe compared to 27.2% of Blacks and 36.4% of Hispanics (Buncombe CHA Data, 2018). The average per capita income for Whites was \$28,480 compared with \$15,335 for Blacks and \$13,121 for Hispanics (Buncombe CHA Data, 2018).
- Life expectancy is on average is 5.9 years shorter for Black residents of Buncombe County (73.4 years) compared to White residents (79.3 years) (Buncombe CHA Data, 2018).
- Black babies are at 3.8 times higher risk for dying before their first birthday than White babies (Buncombe CHA Data, 2018).

- Death rates are higher for Black residents of Buncombe County compared to White residents across many major causes. Overall, the rate for all causes is 38% higher for Blacks (Buncombe CHA Data, 2018).
- Blacks and Native Americans have an incarceration rates 3-4 times higher than whites (JFA, 2018).
- In 2019 Black American residents of Buncombe County make up 6.3% of the population, 25% of the jail population, and 69% of gun violence victims. During this time period Black people represented 20% of the bookings into the detention facility and on average Black people who were released were in pretrial custody 4 days longer than whites (Buncombe Performance Management, 2020).

The HHS Board and JRAC recognize that these are complicated issues that cannot be resolved by any specific sector alone; but will require intentional and deliberate actions and changes through multiple systems and levels of government. Despite this acknowledgement, the bodies determined it both appropriate and necessary to acknowledge structural racism as the core cause of these disparities and make commitments to realize change via proclamations declaring racism a public health crisis and a public safety emergency, respectively. Furthermore, a formal request was made to the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners (BOCC), as the highest policy making body in the County, to support the proclamations by passing a comprehensive declaration that includes not only health and justice related commitments but also includes the other critical factors – including planning/development, housing, community engagement, economic development and just as important evaluations of our internal policies and procedures: like staffing, human resources, finance.

This request was submitted to the BOCC at its July 21, 2020 Commissioner’s Briefing, along with a total of 18 letters of support from HHS community and partner agencies. The BOCC accepted this request and committed to finalizing the resolution for a vote at its August 4th regular meeting.

Recommended Motion & Requested Action: Approve the Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health & Safety Crisis

County Manager’s comments and Recommendation: County Manager recommends approval.