


PROCLAMATION



City and County of Denver

Proclamation No. 20-0543 Recognizing Racism as a Public Health Crisis

WHEREAS, racism is rooted in the foundation of America, beginning with chattel slavery in 1619; most of the Black experience in America has been endured under slavery and Jim Crow which allowed preferential opportunities for White Americans while subjecting people of color to hardships, disadvantages, and violence in every area of life and creating a legacy of inherited trauma across generations; and

WHEREAS, racism manifests in distinct ways across other social intersections including gender identity, sexual orientation, class, disability, immigration status and age, and collectively reinforces the racial hierarchy throughout these intersections which weakens the strength of our entire humanity; and

WHEREAS, structural racism has resulted in race as a social determinant of health, with persistent racial disparities in criminal justice, housing, education, healthcare, employment, worker protections, climate, food access, and technology, and Center for Health Progress has reported that data shows race, income, and ZIP Code have a bigger impact on your health than your behavior, your medical care, or your genetic code; and

WHEREAS, social determinants of health have a disproportionate impact on communities of color, including increased exposure to lead, poor air quality, lack of safe places to recreate, lack of mental health services and lack of educational and career opportunities; and

WHEREAS, Denver's legacy of redlining is well-documented, and following decades of disinvestment, neighborhoods that were redlined have higher poverty rates, lower social mobility, more indicators of social decline, and when mapped have long been referred to as Denver's inverted-L, a well-established indicator of neighborhoods that are disadvantaged and have more communities of color directly tied to redlining; and

WHEREAS, the current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the racial disparities within Denver's Black and Latinx communities ranging from health care access to risk exposure, and there is a clear correlation between maps showing rates of COVID-19 hospitalizations and neighborhoods with high social vulnerability, both aligning with Denver's infamous inverted-L; and

WHEREAS, more than 100 studies have linked racism to negative health outcomes, including research supporting that the cumulative experience of racism throughout one's life can induce chronic stress making Black populations particularly susceptible to chronic health conditions that lead to otherwise preventable deaths; and

WHEREAS, the police brutality and murders against Black citizens across the United States, including recent victims George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade and countless others have contributed to an environment that is persistently unsafe for our Black communities, serving to uphold both systemic inequities and psychological burdens that worsened this public health crisis; and

WHEREAS, although there is no epidemiologic definition of "public health crisis," the health impacts of racism clearly exemplify the definition proposed by experts from the Boston University School of Public Health, which is that "The problem must affect large numbers of people, it must threaten health over the long-term, and it must require the adoption of large-scale solutions"; and

WHEREAS, public health institutions' responsibilities to address racism include reshaping our discourse and agenda so that we all actively engage in racial justice work; and

WHEREAS, with support from community partners it is the City of Denver's responsibility to address racism directly in our work, our programming, and our policies, including seeking solutions to reshape the discourse and actively engage all residents in racial justice work.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER:

Section 1. That the Council of the City and County of Denver acknowledge that the effects of intergenerational racism are a public health crisis in Denver and the United States, and advocate for racial justice as a core element of Denver's policies, programs and procedures. We support the expansion of documented equity decision-making frameworks that are transparent to the public, agency organizational work plans to address and correct embedded policies that discriminate and perpetuate racism, educational efforts to address and dismantle racism, including how racism affects individual and population health, providing tools to assist members of local government to engage actively and authentically with communities of color, and to apply an anti-racism lens to their outreach with all communities.

Section 2. That the Clerk of the City and County of Denver shall affix the seal of the City and County of Denver to this proclamation.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL June 8, 2020

PRESIDENT