



Allegheny County Council

County of Allegheny
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Legislation Text

File #: 11490-20, **Version:** 1

Motion of the Council of Allegheny County recognizing racism as a public health crisis.

WHEREAS, race is a socially constructed hierarchical categorization scheme with no biological basis that was created and is maintained to privilege those classified by their heritage, phenotype, linguistic traits, and other social markers as White; and,

WHEREAS, racism is a social system with multiple dimensions, individual, interpersonal, institutional and structural, and is the stratification of resources (including but not limited to public infrastructure, educational opportunities, first responder services, commercial contracts, individual job offers, healthcare, interpersonal social capital) across the hierarchical racial classification scheme such that Whites, as a collective, maintain more material, political and cultural resources than groups classified as people of color, particularly Black and Indigenous populations; and,

WHEREAS, racism manifests in distinct ways across other social classifications (e.g. gender, class, (dis)ability, immigration status) it collectively reinforces the racial hierarchy which weakens the strength of the whole society through unrealized human resources and social strife; and,

WHEREAS, racism causes persistent racial discrimination in housing, education, employment and criminal justice; and an emerging body of research demonstrates that racism is a social determinant of health; and,

WHEREAS, more than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes; and,

WHEREAS, in the 2019 study “Pittsburgh’s Inequality Across Gender and Race,” for example, the University of Pittsburgh found that “[f]or Pittsburgh’s Black women, 18 out of every 1,000 pregnancies end in a fetal death. This is compared to only 9 out of every 1,000 White pregnancies...By itself, this inequality is startling. Yet, even more striking is the fact that Pittsburgh’s Black fetal mortality is higher than Black fetal mortality in 94 percent of similar cities.”; and

WHEREAS, in that same study, the University of Pittsburgh drew the following conclusion regarding differing health outcomes for different populations: “[a]s is true nationally, women in Pittsburgh live longer than men. Yet, the extent to which this is true differs across racial groups. On average, White women live 8 years longer than White men while Black women only live 6 years longer than Black males. Additionally, both White women and men live longer than Black women, Black men, and AMLON men. This summary indicator illuminates clear racial inequality in Pittsburgh.”; and

WHEREAS, it is accordingly the judgment of Council that, within Allegheny County, disproportionately high excess death rates exist for African Americans at every stage of life, and our mortality rate for infant children of black women is dangerously high and,

WHEREAS, African-American identities are intersectional and LGBTQIA+ communities face some of the greatest disparities in terms of health, employment, housing, and safety; and,

WHEREAS, Allegheny County must address persistent disparities in health outcomes, and the social, economic, educational and environmental inequities that contribute to them; and

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

WHEREAS, while there is no epidemiologic definition of “crisis”, the health impact of racism clearly rises to the definition proposed by Galea: “[t]he problem must affect large numbers of people, it must threaten health over the long-term, and it must require the adoption of largescale solutions”;

The Council of the County of Allegheny therefore hereby moves as follows:

Allegheny County Council hereby acknowledges that racism and its intergenerational effects are a public health crisis in Allegheny County and the United States, and supports the following statements to advocate for equitable policies and inform our public discourse on racism within the County:

1. Racism is a public health crisis affecting our entire society.
2. It is incumbent upon the County to continue creating internal policy and procedures to ensure racial equity is a core element of Allegheny County, and in collaboration with other relevant parties, to communicate results of assessments, and determine appropriate intervals for reassessment.
3. It should be the policy of Allegheny County to continue identifying specific activities to increase diversity and to incorporate antiracism principles across leadership, staffing and contracting.
4. It should be the policy of Allegheny County to incorporate into organizational work plans educational efforts to address and dismantle racism, expand the understanding of racism, and how racism affects individual and population health, and provide tools to assist members of local government to engage actively and authentically with communities of color.
5. The County should advocate for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, including the “Black Mamas Matter” policy agenda, and should supports local, state, and federal initiatives that advance social justice, while also encouraging individual advocacy to dismantle systemic racism.
6. The County should expand its efforts to build alliances and partnerships with other governmental agencies and organizations that are confronting racism and those supporting and contributing to African American arts and culture, and should encourage other local, state and national entities to recognize racism as a public health threat.