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Milwaukee County Leaders Proclaim Racism is a Public Health Crisis

Following the lead from the Wisconsin Public Health Association, Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele and County Board Vice Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson, proclaim racism is a public health crisis, and are actively taking steps to achieve racial equity throughout Milwaukee County.

MILWAUKEE (April 4, 2019) – During National Public Health Week, County Executive Abele and County Board Vice Chairwoman Nicholson proclaim that racism is a public health crisis in Milwaukee County. Following the lead of the Wisconsin Public Health Association, this important recognition is the first step that will help us deepen our ability to achieve racial equity in the community by building on the progress already underway at Milwaukee County.

In 2016, the County Executive and County Board partnered to create the Office on African American Affairs to serve in an integral role, in recognizing and aiding in the resolution of Milwaukee County's racial inequities for the benefit of all of its citizenry, and for the region to achieve its full potential.

"It is Milwaukee County's responsibility to address racism, including seeking solutions to reshape the discourse, actively engaging all citizens in racial justice work," said Abele.

"Local government needs to take a leadership role and we intend to do so."

The Office on African American Affairs has made significant strides since its inception. For example, all Milwaukee County leaders have been trained on racial equity; with all 4,000 employees slated to be trained in 2019. A new racial equity ambassador program has been launched with nearly 60 employees – from leadership to front-line staff – participate in racial equity action planning for Milwaukee County. The County has been in the process of



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incorporating a racial equity lens into all its budget decisions.

“We understand that Milwaukee’s racial inequities are historical, complex and interrelated. That’s why we need everyone at the table as we work to move the needle towards empowerment and employing good government strategies to tackle the comprehensive issues experienced by many African Americans in Milwaukee,” said Nicole Brookshire, Director of the Office on African American Affairs.

More than a hundred studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes. In Wisconsin, the highest excess death rates exist for African Americans and Native Americans, at every stage in the life course. Our infant and maternal mortality rates for African Americans are among the highest in the nation. Milwaukee County is the largest county in Wisconsin that is working with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), the national accrediting body as we begin our work to systematically address racial inequities.

“It’s imperative that we do the work to heal Milwaukee’s racial wounds. We’ll be on the right side of history as we re-write the text for what it means to grow up as a Milwaukeean. We cannot rest until every citizen is treated with dignity and respect and this resolution is a step in that direction,” said County Board Vice Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson.

The resolution resolves that Milwaukee County:

- Assert that racism is a public health crisis affecting our entire society
- Assess internal policy and procedures to ensure racial equity is a core element of Milwaukee County, led by the County Executive and Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, in collaboration with the Office on African American Affairs, Racial Equity Ambassador Workgroup, and other relevant parties
- Work to create an inclusive organization identifying specific activities to increase diversity across its workforce and in leadership positions



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- Incorporate inclusion and equity into organizational practice, offer educational trainings/activities to expand employees' understanding of how racism affects individuals, the health of marginalized populations, and provide tools to assist members to engage actively and authentically with communities of color
- Advocate for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, and support local, state, and federal initiatives that advance social justice, while also encouraging individual employee advocacy
- Encourage other local, state, and national entities to recognize racism as a public health crisis