

RESOLUTION 2020-10

TO DECLARE RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

WHEREAS, racism dates back to the foundation of America and has continued throughout our history, from the arrival of the first chattel slaves at the Jamestown Colony in 1619, which marked the beginning of two and a half centuries of legalized slavery, through Jim Crow laws that gave some people preferential opportunities while denying equal opportunities to people of color, to ongoing hardships and disadvantages that hinder their pursuit of the American Dream; and

WHEREAS, racism negatively impacts the lives of people of color and racism can be seen across systemic, institutional, and interpersonal levels, all operating over the course of time and across generations, and racism causes disproportionately higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, poor health, homelessness, incarceration, and economic hardships for all minorities, including African Americans; and

WHEREAS, there is clear data that racism negatively impacts the lives of people of color in Ohio; statistics compiled by the Centers for Disease Control show a national disparity between black and white infant mortality rates, and the State of Ohio has one of the highest black infant mortality rates; data collected by the Ohio Department of Health reveal that maternal mortality is two and a half times greater for black women in Ohio than white women and that black women are significantly more likely to experience severe maternal morbidity, which includes unexpected outcomes of pregnancy, labor, or delivery that result in significant short or long term consequences to a woman's health; Ohio Department of Health data indicate that black Ohioans have higher mortality rates for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer compared to other racial groups; the Health Policy Institute of Ohio reports that life expectancy for black Ohioans is almost four years below the life expectancy for Ohioans as a whole; the American Psychological Association reports that because of poverty and discrimination, racial minority children are more likely to experience traumatic events than white children, and that childhood trauma has negative impacts on academic, behavioral, and physical health outcomes; and preliminary data in Ohio suggests that African Americans are dying at a disproportionately higher rate from COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, racism is a social system with multiple dimensions including individual racism that is internalized or interpersonal, covert racism which is subtle and often socially acceptable, overt racism which is blatant and often unrepentant, and systemic racism which is institutional or structural and is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of value, which unfairly disadvantages specific individuals and communities, while unfairly giving advantages to other individuals and communities and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources; and

WHEREAS, more than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes, and the American Public Health Association (APHA) launched a National Campaign against Racism, the Canadian Public Health Association recognizes racism's contribution to disparate health outcomes, the American Medical Association states that racism contributes to health inequities in the United States, and the American Public Health Association has expressed that racism is a driving force of the social determinants of health due to the resulting inequalities in a number of matters, including housing, education, and employment; and

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

WHEREAS, the City of Westerville acknowledges that the health impact of racism in Ohio, and Franklin County and Delaware County is a crisis and rises to the definition proposed by Dr. Sandro Galea who notes: "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, the privileges that other Americans experience inhibits them from fully understanding how racism impacts Americans of Color, where the performance of simple tasks come with certain risk not experienced by others, and life events like getting a job, purchasing a home, buying a car, or just raising a family come with barriers that other cultures don't experience; and

WHEREAS, Westerville has a unique cultural history of acceptance, social justice, and outreach, including Benjamin Hanby's advocacy as an abolitionist and composition of Darling Nelly Gray in 1856, the location of several underground railroad stops including the Sharp Family homes, Otterbein University's history as one of the first universities in the country to welcome women and persons of color, and as home of the temperance movement when it successfully advocated the passage of a U.S. constitutional amendment, Westerville Sunrise Rotary's initiatives of Community Cultural Day and Hands Across Westerville, and the lasting impact of Leadership Westerville's Martin Luther King Legacy Project and its awards extending the legacies of William H. Fouse and Miriam Alston; and

WHEREAS, City Council previously passed Resolution 2019-11 to adopt an expanded City Policy recognizing the community's diversity of backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and experiences, supporting that diversity, and adopting a policy prohibiting discrimination; and

WHEREAS, Otterbein University was recently selected by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as the only institution in Ohio to host a Truth,

Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Center, which create positive narrative change about race, promote racial healing activities, and erase structural barriers to equal treatment and opportunity; and

WHEREAS, the members of Westerville City Council support the recent resolution drafted by the Franklin County Board of Commissioners declaring “Racism as a Public Health Crisis;” because we recognize that racism is real and as a community we have to work together to promote equity and eradicate racism; and

WHEREAS, this Council believes that it is now time to declare racism a public health crisis, because the disparities represent a public health crisis which affects individuals, families, and community, and we as a civil society have an obligation to raise awareness and make sure that every sector of our society work to reverse this crisis.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WESTERVILLE, OHIO:

Section 1. That this Council does hereby declare racism as a public health crisis impacting the City of Westerville’s residents, businesses, and institutions and recommits our full attention to improving the quality of life and health of members of our communities of color.

Section 2. That Westerville is committed to honestly and directly assessing health inequities in communities of color, including a systematic, data driven focus on poverty, economic mobility, and other factors that impact the social determinants of health.

Section 3. That the City will work to progress as an equity and justice-oriented organization, with City Staff reviewing existing systems with a racial equity lens and identifying specific activities to further enhance diversity and to ensure antiracism principles across the City’s leadership and staff and other endeavors.

Section 4. That the City will promote equity through policies approved by City Council and staff, and will enhance educational efforts aimed at understanding, addressing, and dismantling racism and how it affects the delivery of human and social services, economic development, and public safety.

Section 5. That the City will work to encourage racial equity among all community partners, vendors, and contractors.

Section 6. That the City will work to strengthen existing alliances and build new partnerships with other organizations that are confronting racism, including but not limited to Franklin County Public Health, Westerville City Schools, the

Westerville Public Library, the Westerville Area Chamber of Commerce, and Otterbein University and its Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Center and other departments, and the City encourages other local, state, regional and national entities to recognize racism as a public health crisis.

Section 7. That the City will support and promote community efforts that actively involve citizens on issues of racism and provide tools to authentically engage with communities of color.

Section 8. That the City will promote and support policies that prioritize the health of all people, especially people of color by mitigating exposure to adverse childhood experiences.

Section 9. That the City Manager is hereby directed to investigate, research, and recommend for Council's consideration appropriate strategies, policies, and procedures for substantial implementation of this resolution.

Section 10. That this Resolution is subject to further future implementation through appropriate actions by Council.

Section 11. That this Resolution shall take effect and be in force from and after the earliest period allowed by law.

Michael Heyeck
Chairman of
Council

Bruce E. Bailey
Director of Law

Mary J. Johnston, MMC
Clerk of Council