



**WAKE COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**
**Resolution Recognizing Systemic Racism and
Discrimination, Our Shared Duty to Address it, and
Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis**

WHEREAS, racism is rooted in the foundation of the United States of America, beginning with chattel slavery in 1619; the largest portion of the Black experience in America has been endured under slavery - originally enshrined in the Constitution of the United States itself - and subsequent Jim Crow laws, 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 and discrimination 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, the Wake County Board of Commissioners recognizes that racism and discrimination are detrimental to our society and therefore are critical priorities necessitating systemic changes in all areas of local government. Racism and discrimination cause harm to individuals and communities, and Wake County's collective prosperity depends on equitable access to opportunity for every resident; and

WHEREAS, racism and discrimination weaken all of society by producing and perpetuating poverty through intentional and unintentional policies that create barriers to economic mobility; and

WHEREAS, racism and discrimination have multiple dimensions, including individual racism that is internalized or interpersonal, and systemic racism that is institutional, intergenerational and structural; and

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

WHEREAS, social determinants of health have a disproportionate impact on communities of color, including food deserts, lack of safe places to recreate, lack of mental health services and lack of equitable educational and career opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the adverse impacts of racism and discrimination on health are well-documented. Chronic stress caused by racism and discrimination triggers many adverse health outcomes, including high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and accelerated aging, all of which are high in the Black and Brown community. There is also evidence suggesting that the racism endured by Black mothers contributes to the high maternal and infant mortality rate. In Wake County, Black babies are more than twice as likely to die as White babies in infancy; and

WHEREAS, Black people in Wake County are nearly twice as likely not to have health insurance, and Latinx/Hispanic persons are roughly four times more likely not to have health insurance; and

WHEREAS, research shows that social determinants — the conditions in which an individual is born and in which he or she lives, works, and recreates — are key drivers of health inequities. It has been proven that significant gaps in life expectancy exist among various zip codes in Wake County. For generations, communities of color have faced vast disparities in job opportunities, income, and inherited family wealth. They are less likely to have housing security, healthy food, and green spaces, ultimately leading to otherwise preventable deaths; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed systemic issues in our society related to health access, housing and food insecurity. As of June 30th, our Latinx/Hispanic population makes up about 10% of our population but 45% of our confirmed cases. Our Black population comprises 20% of our population but 24% of our confirmed cases. Accordingly, Black and Latinx/Hispanic persons account for approximately 30% of Wake County's population but yet 69 % of our confirmed cases; and

WHEREAS, Wake County strives to serve vulnerable populations in an equitable manner--as demonstrated by our investments in public education, housing affordability, social and economic vitality programs, and our recent initiatives on maternal and infant mortality, the WakeWorks program, and Live Well Wake--we are committed to the ending systemic racism and discrimination in our communities; and

WHEREAS, Wake County is a model employer, providing benefits such as parental leave, paid family illness leave, a living wage policy, in addition to strong health insurance and retirement benefits, which help lower-income and underserved populations. In the pursuit of social justice, Wake County has also enacted policies such as "Ban the Box" and a strong anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunity policy; 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 largescale solutions”; and

NOW, THEREFORE, THE WAKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS RESOLVES that racism is a public health crisis and must be treated with the same urgency and funding as any other public health crisis. The Wake County Board of Commissioners is committed to dismantling racism and discrimination by promoting racial equity through board goals and policies developed through a lens of diversity, inclusion, and equity and encourages other local, state, and federal entities to do the same.

ADOPTED this the 6th day of July, 2020.

Gregory D. Ford, Chair
Wake County Board of Commissioners