



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 10, 2020

Racism Declared a Public Health Crisis by County of Ventura Board of Supervisors

Ventura, CA – The County of Ventura Board of Supervisors has approved a resolution declaring racism a public health crisis. “The resolution is a pledge from the Board and the County to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity in housing, employment, economic development, health care, and public safety,” said Mike Powers, County Executive Officer. “The resolution also pledges that the County will work to become a more racial equity and justice-oriented organization in service to the community. It is our goal for this to become part of our culture to best serve our community.”

Over this past year, the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others have caused many people to unite in efforts to raise awareness and push for meaningful action that will lead to equitable treatment among all communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought into sharp focus systemic institutional and structural racism that inequitably impacts Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

The resolution discusses working collaboratively with community stakeholders, law and justice agencies, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, health care professionals, and others to address public concerns, review practices and effective allocation of resources. “We value our long-standing relationships with so many community stakeholders. It is those groups that we turned to for guidance in developing this resolution. We value their input and on-going partnerships,” added Powers.

The resolution will continue and enhance work that is already in progress. In 2016, the County established a CEO Community Engagement Liaison leadership position to support the County’s continued commitment to work with various community organizations, members and advocates regarding County services and programs. In 2017, the County launched the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force comprised of leaders from across County agencies and departments. The Task Force’s mission is to enhance and strengthen systems, programs, and learning in the County of Ventura to ensure that the County has the best practices to work effectively and leverage diversity with all team members, customers, and with the community, and to improve outcomes for community members, deliver culturally responsible services, and maintain successful partnerships with community organizations.

"This resolution acknowledges the historical injustices and inequalities inflicted upon black members of our community and all marginalized groups in this County. This resolution demonstrates this County’s commitment to justice and equity, in all of the ways injustice and inequity are present in our society. By



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approving and adopting this resolution, Ventura County is taking the first necessary step, of acknowledging that we have a problem,” said Rabiah A. Rahman, Esq., Vice President Black Lawyers of Ventura County. “This resolution demonstrates Ventura County’s commitment to the continuation of having difficult and uncomfortable conversations around race, justice and inequities. While it is not perfect, it is without a doubt a step in the right direction. I look forward to continuing our collaboration with community advocacy groups, law enforcement agencies and county representatives to create a truly safe and equitable society for all Ventura County residents. We can now start to build a bridge of trust to those who have historically been disenfranchised. It is my hope that we all continue to be actively engaged in doing the work of healing our community.”

To date, the Task Force has worked to develop and implement mandatory employee cultural competency training, created an online Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Library, created a Mentorship Program, established the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Council, supported creation of a County of Ventura Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer leadership position, and has continued the bilingual incentive premium for County employees to provide services in Spanish and Indigenous languages. The new Inclusion Officer is set to be announced later this month.

Over the past months, the County has hosted and participated in numerous public and employee forums regarding race and law enforcement. The County Executive Office hosted two employee forums in which approximately 900 County employees participated and has supported the initiative for each County department and agency to hold a forum for their employees.

“The proposed resolution is in line with our mission statement and we applaud the County of Ventura’s efforts in leading the way in becoming a County that denounces racism and has started the journey to dismantling it within the County of Ventura system. This resolution and the ongoing collaboration with community members is a first step in demonstrating the commitment and promise in addressing much needed institutional change,” said Cynthia Salas, District Director, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) District 17. “Your actions thus far demonstrate that it is not simply a statement of rhetoric but an intentional step towards transforming the County of Ventura. There is a lot of work to be done and LULAC District 17 looks forward to this journey with the County of Ventura. It is through working together and having the difficult conversations that we will overcome the most onerous of challenges. Doing better and being better means working together.”

The Sheriff’s Office has also participated in discussions with community organizations including Indivisible Conejo, and the League of United Latin America Citizens (LULAC). In addition, the County of Ventura hosted a community forum with panelists from Black Lawyers of Ventura County, National



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Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Public Defender, Ventura County Sheriff, District Attorney, County Executive Officer, and members of the Task Force.

With adoption of the resolution, the Board committed to carrying forward the following specific goals:

- To endorse the Task Force's work to review policies and procedures to prevent racism and further develop equity, inclusion, and diversity in County service and incorporating these components in the Strategic Plan
- To collaborate with community members and law enforcement agencies in establishing an advisory group to foster communication and identify public concerns related to policing policies and procedures
- To establish a health care working group with community stakeholders to study delivery and improvement of health care services to underserved populations
- To incorporate equity, inclusion, and diversity into County organizational practices to guide County employees in best serving the community in a culturally competent manner
- To advocate for policies that improve the health of the community
- To encourage similar resolutions by other governmental entities

“This resolution is the first step toward recognizing the need to openly acknowledge the existence of racism, that racism has many significant negative consequences, and that change in our institutional systems must occur,” said Rigoberto Vargas, Public Health Director. “Adoption of the resolution demonstrates the Board's commitment to lead the needed change in becoming a more racially equitable and justice-oriented organization in service to all communities within our County.”

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