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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NONPROFIT COALITION COMMENDS CLEVELAND CITY COUNCIL FOR PASSAGE OF RESOLUTION TO DECLARE RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Next steps will address structural racism issues and poorer health outcomes affecting people of color through community-wide efforts supported by public and private sector advocates

CLEVELAND, OHIO: A coalition of six nonprofit organizations, representing Racism is a Public Health Crisis Working Group, today commended Councilman Blaine Griffin and Cleveland City Council for unanimously passing a resolution earlier this week declaring racism a public health crisis. Racism is a Public Health Crisis Working Group is led by six partner organizations, including Birthing Beautiful Communities, First Year Cleveland - a public/private coalition at Case Western Reserve University, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Cleveland Branch (NAACP Cleveland Branch), United Way of Greater Cleveland, Urban League of Greater Cleveland and YWCA of Greater Cleveland. These organizations worked closely with Cleveland City Council for more than a year to advance the declaration which Mayor Frank Jackson is expected to sign soon.

"For too long, systemic racism has been a public health crisis in Cleveland and, as a community, we have a shared responsibility to do something about it," said Blaine Griffin, Cleveland City Councilman and one of the resolution's main sponsors. "This resolution acknowledges racism exists and has caused irreparable harm to African Americans which is a good first step but there is a lot more work to be done to ensure all Clevelanders see and feel real change. I look forward to building out our internal and external partnerships with Racism is a Public Health Crisis Working Group and the community to ensure this declaration is more than just words and becomes entrenched in the soul of the city of Cleveland."

The legislation requires the city to create various working groups to develop and implement inclusive strategies to promote equity and eliminate structural issues that create racial disparities. Such disparities include reduced access to education, jobs with living wages, earning power, stable housing, health care and overall quality of life.

These disparities contribute to poorer health outcomes overall among African Americans, including higher rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, infant and maternal mortality. The U.S. Office of Disease Prevention also recognizes that discrimination has a negative impact on health in a community. The coronavirus pandemic has served to further magnify these disparities as the latest overall mortality rate for African Americans is 2.4 times as high as the rate for Whites and 2.2 times as high as the rate for Asians and Latinos, according to the non-partisan APM Research Lab.

"The question now is, will our white allies step up to the challenge?" said Margaret Mitchell, President and CEO of YWCA. "It is going to take black, white, and brown people coming together to push back against 400 years of systemic injustice."

“As everyone is asking what they can do, let’s examine our consciences, our organizations, our business and personal practices to ensure we’re acknowledging and addressing racial inequity wherever we see it,” said Marsha Mockabee, President and CEO of Urban League. “When faced with the ugly that may surprise us, let’s summon the courage to transform.”

“Racism is a pandemic of the worst kind that has plagued our city for too long as broken systems and indifference have allowed these injustices to perpetuate,” said Augie Napoli, President and CEO at United Way. “We have a significant opportunity to right many wrongs perpetrated against the African American community to ensure inclusive prosperity exists for all.”

Racism is a Public Health Crisis Working Group’s advocacy efforts over the last year include significant milestones that led to Cleveland City Council’s official declaration this week, including:

- The 400 Years of Inequity Summit hosted by First Year Cleveland and YWCA in November 2019. Nearly 600 attendees committed to eliminating racial disparities. The Summit memorialized the legacy of slavery, connecting the history to modern day racial inequities and outlining the tools necessary for local governments to act on creating a more equitable future. The action of declaring racism a public health crisis in Cleveland was first called for at this Summit.
- During a presentation to Cleveland City Council’s Health and Human Services Committee in January 2020, leaders of the organizations representing Racism is a Public Health Crisis Working Group requested the Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis.
- Ongoing educational efforts by the Racism is a Public Health Crisis Working Group continued throughout 2019 and 2020 among public health officials, including the Health Commissioner for Franklin County Public Health and the President and CEO of National Institute for Children’s Health Quality, to recognize the adverse effects of racism and join a growing body of officials willing to declare racism a public health crisis.

Mitchell and Mockabee co-lead the Racism is a Public Health Crisis Working Group, working alongside their nonprofit partners and Cleveland City Council to advance the initiatives outlined within the resolution.

In May 2019, Milwaukee, WI became the first U.S. city to declare racism a public health crisis. Since then, other county, city and statewide resolutions have passed in Illinois, Missouri, and Pennsylvania with more expected to follow across the nation. In Ohio, declarations were made on May 12, 2020 by Franklin County Public Health and on June 2, 2020 Columbus Public Health and the Columbus City Council declared racism a public health crisis. At the time this news release was issued, Democratic lawmakers in Ohio have also proposed legislation to declare racism a public health crisis at the state level.

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