

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Resolution HHH-21-04

A RESOLUTION ON ENDING RACIAL HEALTH DISPARITIES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

WHEREAS, novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a disease that can result in serious illness or death, the number of confirmed cases to over 5,000,000 and over 164,000 deaths as of August 12, 2020 creating deep disruptions to the nation's economy, homes, educational, civic, social, and religious institutions;

WHEREAS, to date 32,702 Black Americans are known to have lost their lives to COVID-19 through Tuesday, Aug. 4. as reported by APM Research Lab;

WHEREAS, according to APM Research Lab, Black Americans are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and have the highest death rate at 80.4 deaths per 100,000 compared to 35.9 deaths per 100,000, if Black Americans had the same death rate as White Americans 18,000 Black Americans would still be alive;

WHEREAS it is caused by a new strain of coronavirus not previously identified in humans and is easily spread from person to person, there is currently no approved vaccine or antiviral treatment for this disease;

WHEREAS, data suggests that African Americans are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 because many are considered part of the critical workforce by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and must continue to work;

WHEREAS, that includes caregivers, cashiers, sanitation workers, farm workers and public transit employees;

WHEREAS, according to 2019 data, African Americans are less likely than employed people in general to work in professional and business services – the sorts of jobs more amenable to telecommuting;

WHEREAS, driving to jobs alone isn't always an option, with approximately 34 percent of African Americans using public transportation on a regular basis compared to 14 percent of white people according to a 2016 report from the Pew Research Center;

WHEREAS, continued use of public transit during the pandemic brings African Americans in greater contact with infected people, and increases their risk of contracting COVID-19;

WHEREAS, a disproportionately high percentage of African Americans live in places that have seen outbreaks of COVID-19 and thus increases their exposure;

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Resolution HHH-21-04

WHEREAS, Census data from January 2020 show that only 44 percent of African Americans own their own home compared to 74 percent of white people;

WHEREAS, African Americans are at a higher risk of getting severely ill because of comorbidity issues like hypertension;

WHEREAS, according to the American Heart Association, 40% of African Americans have high blood pressure which is among the highest rates in the world;

WHEREAS, part of that is in direct correlation to African Americans exposure to air pollution which can be linked to chronic health problems including asthma, obesity and cardiovascular disease;

WHEREAS, African Americans have less access to medical care, which includes not having adequate health insurance, discrimination fears, and living further away from clinics and hospitals;

WHEREAS, according to the Century Foundation's December 2019 report, African Americans are more likely to be uninsured than whites and those who are insured, spend more of their income on premiums and out of pocket costs, about 20 percent more than the average American who spends about 11 percent;

WHEREAS, Census data, show that about 20 percent of African Americans live in poverty compared to 10 percent of white Americans as a result African Americans have been hurt disproportionately by some states' decision not to expand Medicaid as part of the Affordable Care Act;

WHEREAS, according to the Annual Review of Public Health, lack of preventive care means more African Americans are more likely than any other racial group in the United States to be hospitalized for asthma, diabetes, heart failure and post-surgery complications.

WHEREAS, epidemiologist Kiarra Kershaw of the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago said, "long-standing structural forms of discrimination that African Americans have faced in the (United States) are manifesting in what we're seeing with COVID right now"; and

WHEREAS, our Nation should put the health and safety of all citizens, communities, and businesses at the forefront and would benefit from a task force devoted to thoroughly studying and developing strategies to immediately address this troubling disparity and the historical and systemic inequities that underlie it.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Resolution HHH-21-04

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) calls on U.S. Congress to immediately establish a Task Force on Racial Disparities at Department of Health and Human Services to begin to study the disproportionate effects on racial and ethnic minorities and actions need to address such disparities, and include all pertinent federal departments;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL further believes that such a task force should perform outreach to ensure all stakeholders in impacted areas are informed, educated, and empowered, and that such outreach should include, but is not limited to, community leaders, partner organizations, tribal governments, local government officials, and other elected officials representing the impacted areas;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL believes that such a task force should examine removing barriers to accessing physical and mental health care, reducing the impact of medical bias in testing and treatment, environmental and infrastructure factors contributing to increased exposure during pandemics resulting in mortality, and developing long-term strategies for physical and mental health care following a pandemic;

BE IT FURTHER RESOVLED, that the NBCSL believes that Congress and state legislatures should establish a Special Committee in each chamber to examine federal and state laws relevant to combatting racial disparities during the pandemic and how to best address them;

BE IT FURTHER RESOVLED, that the NBCSL believes that Congress should not wait for the full results of the task force and should immediately allocate money to the Office of Minority Health at the Department of Health and Human Services to immediately begin to allocate the funding necessary so that states and localities can improve these disparities; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, and other federal and state government officials and agencies as appropriate.

SPONSOR(S): Representative London Lamar (TN), Representative Karen Bennett (GA), and Representative Debra Bazemore (GA)

Committee of Jurisdiction: Health and Human Services Policy Committee

Certified by Committee Co-Chairs: Representative David J. Mack, III (SC) and Senator Marilyn Moore (CT)

Ratified in Plenary Session: Ratification Date is December 3, 2020

Ratification is certified by: Representative Gilda Cobb-Hunter (SC), President