



Aug. 4, 2020

Media Contact:

Riverside County Joint Information Center 951-955-5087

Public contact: 2-1-1

Board of Supervisors vote 5-0 to declare racism as a public health crisis

Board also unanimously approves listening sessions on county services and budget

Riverside County Board of Supervisors unanimously agreed Tuesday (Aug. 4) that racism is a public health crisis and vowed to take steps to deal with the issue.

The 5-0 vote took place after supervisors heard from several community members who supported the resolution, which indicated that “systemic racism causes persistent racial discrimination in housing, education, employment, transportation, and criminal justice.”

“America is blessed with incredible diversity that makes us unique and is one of our strengths. But systemic racism in our country continues to limit opportunities for communities of color in ways that damage physical and mental health even across generations,” said Supervisor Chuck Washington, Third District. “The time to address health disparities is long overdue.”

Among the planned actions in the resolution, supervisors agreed to seek more diversity in the county’s workforce and in leadership positions; implement solutions to eliminate systemic inequality in all external services provided by the county; and enhance public education to increase understanding and awareness of systemic inequality and its impact.

“This action reaffirms our commitment to address the health disparities among communities of color,” said Kim Saruwatari, director of Riverside University Healthy System - Public Health. “Systemic racism impacts communities at so many levels and the effects can be devastating.”

The board also voted 5-0 in a separate agenda item to hold workshops, including listening sessions with the community and meetings among the board and county department heads.

The workshops will focus on county services and budget priorities, including public safety, behavioral health and social services.

“In the spirit of civil rights giant, Congressman John Lewis, I am proud of today’s historical vote within Riverside County to advance social justice, equity and community empowerment,” said Riverside County Board Chair and Fourth District Supervisor V. Manuel Perez. “Today, we passed two major efforts to fight racism and have listening sessions to look at how we fund and re-fund safety net services and meet the social needs of our communities.”

#