



# NHCSL

THE NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

## EMERGENCY RESOLUTION No. 2020-03

### Declaring Institutional Racism a Public Health Crisis

Reported to the Caucus by the NHCSL Healthcare Task Force  
Rep. Louis Ruiz (KS), Chair

**Sponsored by Sen. Martín Quezada (AZ) and Sen. Linda M. López (NM)**

Unanimously approved by the NHCSL Executive Committee on behalf of the entire  
Caucus on September 18, 2020

1 **WHEREAS**, the American Public Health Association launched a National Campaign  
2 Against Racism, calling it a public health crisis;<sup>1</sup> and,

3 **WHEREAS**, while there is no epidemiologic definition of “crisis,” the health impact of  
4 racism clearly rises to a definition proposed by Dr. Sandro Galea, dean of the Boston  
5 University School of Public Health: The problem must “affect large numbers of  
6 people,” it must “threaten health over the long term” and it must “require the  
7 adoption of large scale solutions;”<sup>2</sup> and,

8 **WHEREAS**, racism is a social system with multiple dimensions and no biological  
9 basis, causing persistent racial discrimination in housing, education, employment and  
10 criminal justice; and,

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Benjamin, *Racism is an ongoing public health crisis that needs our attention now* (APHA May 29, 2020). Available at <https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/2020/racism-is-a-public-health-crisis>

<sup>2</sup> Sandro Galea, *Crying “Crisis”* (April 23, 2017). Available at <http://www.bu.edu/sph/2017/04/23/crying-crisis/>

11 **WHEREAS**, communities of color are disproportionately impacted by social  
12 determinants of health, such as increased exposure to environmental contaminants,  
13 poor air quality, lack of safe places to walk, bike or run and inadequate health  
14 education. This was one of the reasons we cited to adopt [Resolution No. 2019-21, Call](#)  
15 [for Research Funding to Investigate and Prevent High Air Pollution Days in Cities](#),<sup>3</sup>  
16 and [Resolution No. 2019-20, Equitable and Just Policies to Address Climate Change](#),<sup>4</sup>  
17 and,

18 **WHEREAS**, an emerging body of research demonstrates that racism is a social  
19 determinant of health, and more than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health  
20 outcomes;<sup>5</sup> and,

21 **WHEREAS**, institutional racism is systemic and structures opportunity and assigns  
22 value based on the social interpretation of how one looks which unfairly  
23 disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other  
24 individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society by wasting  
25 human resources; and,

26 **WHEREAS**, we addressed part of the discriminatory foundations of the racism-  
27 related educational achievement gap in our [Resolution, No. 2019-13, Integrating](#)  
28 [Ethnic Studies into K-12 Education](#),<sup>6</sup> called for further investigations in our  
29 [Resolution No. 2019-11, Addressing Chronic Absenteeism in Schools](#),<sup>7</sup> and addressed  
30 the race-related disparities of educational costs in our [Resolution No. 2019-25 Fair](#)  
31 [Policies to Address Student Loan Debt and College Pricing](#);<sup>8</sup> and,

32 **WHEREAS**, we addressed part of the effects of racial discrimination in the workplace  
33 in our [Resolution No. 2012-04, calling for Pay Equity for Women and People of Color](#),<sup>9</sup>  
34 and some indirect effects in our [Resolution No. 2019-10, Paid Medical and Family](#)  
35 [Leave](#),<sup>10</sup> and called specifically to address discrimination that can prevent completion  
36 of apprenticeships in our [Resolution No. 2017-13, Expanding Apprenticeship](#)  
37 [Programs](#);<sup>11</sup> and,

38 **WHEREAS**, we addressed the racially and ethnically disproportionate effects of the  
39 school-to-prison pipeline in Resolutions [No. 2005-01, Student Disciplinary](#)  
40 [Alternative Education Programs](#),<sup>12</sup> and [No. 2019-13, Calling for the Creation and](#)

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-21/>

<sup>4</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-20/>

<sup>5</sup> See in general, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *Racial discrimination and health*. Available at <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/racial-discrimination-and-health-david-williams/>

<sup>6</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-13/>

<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-11/>

<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-25/>

<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2012/2012-04/>

<sup>10</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-10/>

<sup>11</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2017/2017-13/>

<sup>12</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2005/2005-1/>

41 [Improvement of Restorative Justice Programs to Reduce Contacts Between Youth and](#)  
42 [the Justice System](#);<sup>13</sup> and,

43 **WHEREAS**, we addressed some of the many issues racism has caused in our criminal  
44 justice system in our Resolutions:

- 45 • [No. 2006-07, Calling For A New Bottom Line In Reducing The Harms Of Drug](#)  
46 [Abuse](#),<sup>14</sup>
- 47 • [No. 2016-11, Supporting Repeal of the Death Penalty](#),<sup>15</sup>
- 48 • [No. 2017-12, Providing a Legal Framework when Jurisdictions Decide to](#)  
49 [Decriminalize, Commercialize and Tax Cannabis](#),<sup>16</sup>
- 50 • [No. 2019-22, Curtailing the Use of Solitary Confinement, Guaranteeing Fair](#)  
51 [Visitation Rights to Inmates and Families, and Prohibiting Price-Gouging on](#)  
52 [Inmate Telecom and Tech Options](#);<sup>17</sup>
- 53 • [No. 2019-14, Reducing Recidivism Through Reintegration Policies](#);<sup>18</sup> and,

54 **WHEREAS**, a wealth of medical research suggests that racism plays an important role  
55 in the fact that African American women are more likely than any other race to give  
56 birth to premature babies, an issue we committed to address in our [Resolution, No.](#)  
57 [2019-16, on Maternal Health and Morbidity](#);<sup>19</sup> and,

58 **WHEREAS**, according to the CDC, the infant mortality rate among African Americans  
59 is significantly higher than the national average;<sup>20</sup> and,

60 **WHEREAS**, immigration policies that sanction institutional practices of  
61 discrimination, such as ethno-racial profiling and mistreatment, are forms of  
62 structural racism and everyday violence, an issue we have repeatedly denounced,  
63 particularly in [Resolution No. 2012-09, regarding the Supreme Court Ruling on](#)  
64 [Arizona SB 1070](#),<sup>21</sup> and [No. 2018-16, End the Separation of Migrant Families and](#)  
65 [Reject the Detention of Children and Families](#);<sup>22</sup> and,

66 **WHEREAS**, studies suggest that immigration laws that militarize communities and  
67 lead to everyday violence exacerbate racial health disparities, an issue we addressed

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<sup>13</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-03/>

<sup>14</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2006/2006-7/>

<sup>15</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2016/2016-11/>

<sup>16</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2017/2017-12/>

<sup>17</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-22/>

<sup>18</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-14/>

<sup>19</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2019/2019-16/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/infantmortality.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2012/2012-09/20170>

<sup>22</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2018/2018-16/>

68 in [Resolution No. 2017-18, Regarding the Impact of the Deferred Action for Childhood](#)  
69 [Arrivals Program on Educational Attainment and Community Stability](#);<sup>23</sup> and,

70 **WHEREAS**, “over two decades of research have shown that subjective or perceived  
71 exposure to racial or ethnic discrimination has deleterious effects on both physical  
72 and mental health for African Americans, and recent studies report similar findings  
73 for Asian Americans, Latinos, and other ethnic groups;”<sup>24</sup> and,

74 **WHEREAS**, a “growing body of literature highlights the destructive consequences of  
75 discrimination perceived at different time points throughout the life course, the  
76 linkage between parents and child perceptions, and the accumulative stressor and  
77 traumatic effect on mental health,” but “gaps remain in our understanding of the  
78 factors and mechanisms associated with perceived discrimination and mental health  
79 status;”<sup>25</sup> and,

80 **WHEREAS**, more epidemiological research is urgent to “explore both historical  
81 trauma and perceived interpersonal discrimination in order to disentangle the true  
82 effect of these constructs on mental health,” to study “the impact of discrimination at  
83 different critical periods in the life course and the accumulation of stress due to  
84 discrimination throughout life,” and to understand intergenerational racism that  
85 could “affect health outcomes of future generations as a consequence of accumulated  
86 and persistent exposure to stressors and the resulting disruption of physiological  
87 systems,” all of this in order to help “buffer... the effects of discrimination on mental  
88 health status”<sup>26</sup> as we work in parallel to dismantle institutional racism; and,

89 **WHEREAS**, our national responsibility to address racism in our institutions includes  
90 reshaping our discourse and agenda so that we all actively engage in racial justice  
91 work.

92 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the National Hispanic Caucus of State  
93 Legislators:

- 94 1. Declares institutional racism to be a public health crisis affecting our entire  
95 society; and,
- 96 2. Commits to continue working to create equity and justice-oriented  
97 governance; and,
- 98 3. Calls on state legislatures to develop work plans that include educational  
99 efforts to address and dismantle racism, expand state personnel's

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<sup>23</sup> Available at <https://nhcsl.org/resources/resolutions/2017/2017-18/>

<sup>24</sup> Anisa I. Vines, et al, *Perceived Racial/Ethnic Discrimination and Mental Health: a Review and Future Directions for Social Epidemiology* (Curr Epidemiol Rep. 2017 Jun; 4(2): 156-165). Draft available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5596659/>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

100 understanding of racism and how racism affects individual and population  
101 health and provide tools to assist personnel to engage actively and  
102 authentically with communities of color; and,

103 4. Commits to support policies that improve health in communities of color and  
104 local, state and federal initiatives that advance social justice, calling on state  
105 legislatures to do the same.

106 PURSUANT TO THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS PROCESS OUTLINED IN THE BYLAWS, THE  
107 NHCSL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED THIS RESOLUTION, ON  
108 BEHALF OF THE CAUCUS, AT ITS VIRTUAL MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 18, 2020.

