

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES

June 5, 2020

Dear Community Members:

We began this letter months ago as an update of the work of the Mayor's Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities Task Force (IRSI); however, the results of the last week dictate a revised letter.

Nationwide and local rebellions over the past several days have demanded justice for the recent unjustified killing of Black and Latinx by law enforcement (and former law enforcement officials). These events have also ignited a heightened national dialogue about racism's disastrous impact on our society.

Locally, as in other parts of the country, our Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) community members are in a multi-pronged crisis. They are facing disproportionate loss of livelihood, disproportionate exposure, infection and death rates to COVID -19, disproportionate difficulty to continue their children's education during a pandemic, and disproportionate exposure to and deaths from police brutality.

Through IRSI, a few years ago we embarked on a new chapter to eliminate institutional racism and systemic inequities in Austin. For the last several years, we have partnered with community leaders from grassroots and C-suites to cull a list of [recommendations](#), prioritize these recommendations, and develop respective implementation plans. There have been series of recent events:

- The disparate impact of the coronavirus on Latinx and Black communities,
- Difficulties serving the needs of the those experiencing homelessness,
- Recent accusations of racism and racist behavior at the Austin Police Department (APD), and
- A confirmation of racial profiling within APD data on motor vehicle stops from 2015-2018.

These events have justifiably captured the attention of our community for the last several months. So with the undergirding of the collective wisdom of hundreds of community leaders, we will leverage this new wave of righteous indignation. We believe it is our opportunity to bring our collective wisdom shaped by the voices of hundreds of community leaders to the forefront and as we move on to the next phase of our journey.

Thank you to each of the working groups, steering committees and working group co-chairs for their hard work and commitment to the value and mission of the IRSI Task Force. The journey together has been long and at times challenging. We were charged with doing what we believe is the hard work and heart work needed to make transformative and sustainable change in our community.

There is still much to be done, while progress is in the works, such as:

- Placed-based planning in Colony Park;
- A regional workforce plan to assist 10,000 financially disadvantaged individuals secure middle-skill jobs by 2021;
- Equity assessment of every City department;
- Racial equity training of over three thousand community and industry leaders; and
- The opening of Austin Community College's Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Center.

After discussions with the working group leaders, the IRSI co-chairs, community leaders, and Mayor Adler, there was consensus that for the next phase to be successful an infrastructure was necessary to oversee the implementation of the IRSI's recommendations. So in partnership with several organizations and individuals, including Leadership Austin, Anti-Defamation League, Community Action Network, Austin Independent School District, Austin Justice Coalition, the City of Austin's Equity Office, Equidad ATX, Austin Health Commons, Austin Community College, and Houston Tillotson's University, we will create a non-profit association to serve as an umbrella organization for some of the anti-racist work in our region.

The association will set goals, promote and steward anti-racist strategies—including IRSI recommendations--and measure progress.

While we rev up for this next phase, we invite you to do so as well. Now is the time to engage beyond optical allyship. In this moment we ask that you:

- Educate yourself on the history of what has led to current actions in Austin (see [NAACP info](#)),
- Take your cues on action from communities of color,
- Operationalize your training on courageous conversations;
- Activate now on systemic reform in your institution and in the civic space;
- Encourage people to read and act on the IRSI [report](#); and/or
- Prepare your networks, pocket books, and voices for Phase Two of our journey.

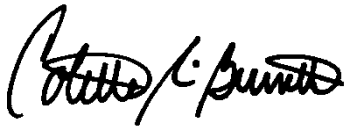
Our work together has always been about dismantling institutional racism. We will be in touch with each of you about the specifics of how you can help as we launch the next phase.

And, we will leave you with this question: Upon reflection, how are you eliminating institutional racism and system inequities? Why or why not?

Feel free to email your responses to kazique.prince@austintexas.gov.

Thank you, again, for your ongoing commitment and we look forward to co-laboring with you.

Sincerely,



Colette Pierce Burnette, Ed.D.



Paul Cruz, Ph.D.

Co-Chairs, Mayor's IRSI Task Force
