

Introduced by Senator Pan

June 25, 2020

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 92—Relative to racism as a public health crisis.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S DIGEST

SCR 92, as introduced, Pan. Racism as a public health crisis.
This measure would recognize racism as a threat to public health.
Fiscal committee: yes.

1 WHEREAS, Racism is the systemic subordination of members
2 of targeted racial groups who have historically have had relatively
3 little social power in the United States by members of the racial
4 group who have more social power. Racism in the United States
5 is informed by over 400 years of Black slavery, European
6 colonialism, and American neo-imperialism; and
7 WHEREAS, Racism, as a negative social system, is supported
8 by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values,
9 institutional structures, practices of society, and laws and
10 regulations imposed by government; and
11 WHEREAS, Through the “Three-Fifths Compromise,” racism
12 was embedded as a founding principle in the United States
13 Constitution — an ugly stain that continues to haunt our nation
14 and that we must confront and actively dismantle; and
15 WHEREAS, Public health is the science of protecting and
16 improving the health of people and their communities by promoting
17 healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and
18 detecting, preventing, and responding to infectious diseases; and

1 WHEREAS, Many government policies, institutional practices,
2 and individual actions continue to be imbued, both consciously
3 and unconsciously, with racist assumptions and practices that have
4 created unhealthy physical and social conditions for Black,
5 Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and thereby prevent
6 BIPOC communities from achieving good public health; and

7 WHEREAS, For instance, the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and
8 discriminatory housing policies against Black people have
9 restricted the ability of Black families to build generational wealth,
10 in comparison to white families, leading to income inequality.
11 Income inequality and poverty have been well researched to be
12 negative social determinants of health. Children who grow up in
13 poverty, and especially those who are BIPOC, are more likely to
14 be exposed to risk factors for obesity, elevated blood lead levels,
15 and experience more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); and

16 WHEREAS, Racism in government policies, institutional
17 practices, and income inequality also results in BIPOC
18 communities being more likely to live near polluters, breathe
19 polluted air, and be impacted disproportionately by the effects of
20 climate change. Breathing in dangerous substances in the air has
21 been linked to asthma, other chronic respiratory illnesses, and
22 some cancers. In California, Blacks and American Indians have
23 significantly higher prevalence of asthma and are more likely to
24 experience an avoidable hospitalization due to asthma; and

25 WHEREAS, BIPOC communities experience racial disparities
26 in accessing health care and receiving quality care. For example,
27 Black women are three to four times more likely to die from
28 pregnancy-related causes than White women. Research indicates
29 these disparities persist in spite of income differences and can
30 often be attributed to Black women receiving discriminatory care,
31 such as health care providers dismissing symptoms raised by Black
32 women or racist assumptions about pain thresholds experienced
33 by Black people; and

34 WHEREAS, Black transwomen suffer from employment,
35 housing, and educational discrimination and police brutality that
36 result in the most acute health disparities. Government policies,
37 such as recent federal actions that encourage homeless shelters,
38 social services, educational institutions, and health care providers
39 to discriminate against transgender people and overlook the

1 deleterious impacts of racism, actively prevent Black transwomen
2 from accessing services critical to achieving optimal health; and

3 WHEREAS, On an individual physiological level, studies show
4 that chronic stress from individual and systemic acts of racism and
5 discrimination trigger high blood pressure, heart disease,
6 immunodeficiency, and result in accelerated aging; and

7 WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic, the ensuing economic
8 crisis, and recent protests against institutional violence committed
9 against Black communities again highlight the racial injustices
10 and health disparities that have long threatened BIPOC
11 communities; and

12 WHEREAS, In California, Blacks and Latinos are more likely
13 to have existing health conditions that makes them more susceptible
14 to contracting COVID-19, experience more severe symptoms, and
15 suffer from higher mortality rates. Some studies indicate that Black
16 and Latino seniors, regardless of geography or income, are more
17 likely to reside in skilled nursing facilities that have suffered from
18 a COVID-19 outbreak; and

19 WHEREAS, BIPOC tend to work in essential jobs that may
20 lead to a higher likelihood of being exposed to COVID-19 or in
21 jobs that have an inability to work remotely and, therefore, are
22 more severely impacted by the economic crisis; and

23 WHEREAS, Racism results in the underinvestment of social,
24 health, and educational services in BIPOC communities and an
25 overinvestment of disproportionate and inappropriate policing by
26 law enforcement; and.

27 WHEREAS, Racism threatens to endanger the health of
28 individuals, the community, and public health; and

29 WHEREAS, Accordingly, a growing list of cities and counties
30 in California, and across the country, have taken the first steps in
31 acknowledging the long-standing impacts of systemic racism by
32 naming racism as a public health crisis; and

33 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*
34 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature declares that racism is a
35 public health crisis; and be it further

36 *Resolved*, That the Legislature encourages residents of California
37 to join in raising awareness and heightening public knowledge of
38 the crisis and the long-standing impacts of systemic racism; and
39 be it further

1 *Resolved*, That the Legislature intends to, and urges the Governor
2 to, approach laws and regulations with an antiracist, Health-in-All
3 policy equity-driven focus that interrogates whether policies play
4 a role in upholding or dismantling racist systems and to secure
5 adequate resources to address the crisis; and be it further
6 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of
7 this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

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