

## Racial Justice Alliance Public Action Advisory on the Burlington Declaration that Racism Is a Public Health Emergency

Thursday, July 16, 2020

We, of the Racial Justice Alliance provide the following Advisory to provide assistance to businesses, nonprofits and agencies in eradicating systemic racism.

The Vermont Racial Justice Alliance stands with the City of Burlington supporting the Declaration that racism is a health emergency. This declaration is in response to centuries of racial oppression in this country. This oppression has and continues to exist in Vermont and yes, in Burlington. Though this oppression has and continues to include heinous incidents of impactful overt racism, our work focuses on an aspect referred to as systemic racism. We offer a working definition of systemic racism as a step in providing a common jump-off point to engage in discussion and beginning the work.<sup>1</sup>

“Systemic racism includes the complex array of antiblack practices, the **unjustly gained political-economic power of whites**, the **continuing economic and other resource inequalities along racial lines**, and the **white racist ideologies and attitudes created to maintain and rationalize white privilege and power**. Systemic here means that the core **racist realities are manifested in each of society’s major parts** [...] each major part of U.S. society--the economy, politics, education, religion, the family--reflects the fundamental reality of systemic racism.”

Health (both individual and public) must be understood to be impacted both directly by systemic racism as well as from the underlying racial disparities caused by systemic racism in the areas of housing, education, employment, the justice system and economic development. The Vermont Attorney General and Human Rights Commission Task Force on Act-54 Racial Disparities in State Systems Report and Recommendations, dated December, 2017 details findings on racial disparities across all systems in Vermont.<sup>2</sup> Notable is the fact that pre COVID-19, the median wealth of a Black family was 1/13<sup>th</sup> of that of a white family.

The most important thing to understand about systemic racism is that its eradication must start and end with [as stated by the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King] a “radical redistribution of political and economic power”

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<sup>1</sup> *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, & Future Reparations*, Joe Feagin and Kimberly Ducey

<sup>2</sup> <https://hrc.vermont.gov/sites/hrc/files/publications/2017-12-15%20Report%20and%20Recommendations%20Act%2054%20Final.pdf>

Organizations, businesses, and agencies must:

1. implement a programmatic approach to eradicating systemic racism; and
2. designate a person responsible for eradicating systemic racism, reporting to the chief executive; and
3. provide sufficient data, policy, training and outreach support for the function of systemic racism mitigation; and
4. undertake a comprehensive review of their practices of collecting high impact, high discretion, racially disaggregated data; and
5. create data dashboards to enable management of progress; and
6. implement a fairness and diversity policy; and
7. conduct initial and ongoing systemic racism mitigation training;
8. conduct racial impact assessments of all existing and emerging policy; and
9. review hiring, appointment and promotion processes through a racial equity lens; and
10. integrate systemic racism mitigation as an integral component of employee evaluations

The Declaration of racism as a health emergency is component of a larger strategy put forth by the Vermont Racial Justice Alliance referred to as Operation Phoenix R.I.S.E.

**Operation Phoenix Mission:**

Transform the lives of black and brown people by investing in their lives, holding space for their culture, providing them opportunity and ensuring the equity they deserve to thrive.

**R.I.S.E.**

Restructuring Public Safety  
Implementing Cultural Empowerment  
Securing Equal Opportunity  
Expanding Racial Equity, Belonging and Inclusion

#riseBTV  
#OperationPhoenix

Contact us for recommendations on resources your organization can use to eradicate systemic racism.

Vermont Racial Justice Alliance  
<https://vtracialjusticealliance.wordpress.com/>  
[Info@justiceforallvt.org](mailto:Info@justiceforallvt.org)  
802.532.3030