The cover features a large, stylized graphic with a rainbow gradient (green, yellow, orange, red) that curves across the top and right sides. The background is a blue-tinted photograph of a city skyline with a river and a bridge in the foreground.

Race Equity Advisory Council Annual Report

2020-2021

Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council
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Introduction to Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council

Introduction

The mission of the Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC) is to strengthen the county's goal of disparity reduction and to advise the county board and county administration on the county's vision and strategy focused on reducing racial disparities and advancing racial equity throughout Hennepin County¹.

REAC was created by Hennepin County board resolution 19-0387R1, adopted December 12, 2019. REAC shall "Report recommendations regarding strategies and ideas targeting reducing racial disparities for the residents annually to the County Board."² This document serves as REAC's annual report and is focused on civic engagement; Hennepin County's disparity reduction domains of housing, justice and health, community engagement and staffing. Recommendations REAC made to the County Board of Commissioners about the county's climate action plan on December 14, 2020, about the American Rescue Plan Act funds (ARP) on April 15, 2021 and a response to the police killing of Daunte Wright on April 19, 2021 are in the appendix.

Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC) members

REAC began meeting in August 2020 and meets monthly. Its current members are Amani Stumme-Berry, Biiftuu Adam, Debjyoti Dwivedy, Deran Cadotte, Johnathon McClellan, Larry Hiscock, Mahogany Ellis-Crutchfield, Miamon Queeglay, Mukul Nautiyal, Sheila Webb, and Tekia Jefferson. REAC acknowledges past members Alexis Murillo, Farhia Mohamed, Isaak Rooble, Latasha Jennings, Lissa L Jones, and Paul Beshah.

REAC uses a committee structure to do its work. The Climate Action and Racism as Public Health Crisis committees have ended. Currently there are four committees which started work in December 2020 and meet twice a month. In the past year, members have contributed over 700 volunteer hours to the work of this council.

¹ Race Equity Advisory Council Charter: Mission/Purpose

² Race Equity Advisory Council Charter: Activities and Responsibilities

Executive Summary

Introduction

Hennepin County is focused on intentionally confronting and overcoming barriers that disproportionately impact residents of color. Hennepin County has dedicated leadership and resources to drive the reduction of racial disparities and support self-sufficiency.

The Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council is generally tasked with examining inequities present in the seven domains within the County Board of Commissioner's purview. The domains are education, employment, health, housing, income, justice, and transportation. Additionally, the REAC is sometimes invited to provide advice on real-time events, County reports, and other County undertakings. All of these have informed the REAC's reporting subject matter focus and capacity.

This year, the REAC is reporting on six focus areas: civic engagement, housing, justice, health, Hennepin County staffing, and community engagement.

Community engagement overview

REAC cannot stress enough the importance of community engagement. A wealth of information was gathered through just a few roundtables and meetings with community leaders. We recommend the following

1. Make information about equity efforts, including REAC's work, available through one click such as a "popular link" or under "Residents" or "Your Government" because currently the Hennepin County website is very difficult to navigate and find information about disparity reduction and racial equity.
2. Leverage technology and social media to engage the public early in decision-making and policy development processes through user -friendly interfaces that allow asynchronous feedback.
3. Inform the public about opportunities to provide feedback to county programs and policies by disseminating information in a language that they can relate to and in understandable actional formats rather than large reports.
4. Respond to the public's need for information by using all methods available; continue to use old methods such as paper communication, flyers, television, community meetings, outreach through partners and trusted messengers, in addition to newer methods such as social media, internet, email lists, group chats, etc. A diverse staff is crucial to these efforts.

5. Community engagement is central to reducing disparities caused by racism. Valuing and creating opportunities for those most impacted to participate in creating solutions for themselves includes renumeration commensurate with payments that the county makes to consultants and removing barriers to participation such as reimbursement for loss of income.

Civic engagement overview

Active civic engagement, especially voting, contributes to the health, economic vitality and resilience of local communities.³ However, some communities face barriers to civic engagement, as evidenced by the United States Supreme Court's affirmation of voter restriction legislation and Hennepin County data indicating lower voter registration in several precincts with predominately Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) residents. Therefore, the Civic Engagement Committee has identified supporting these communities in having access to voter information and education as an important area of focus to increase civic participation.

Recommendations

1. Continue and enhance Hennepin County's voter outreach and education by focusing on low-engagement precincts.
2. Use Hennepin County precinct-level data on voter registration and racial composition to target efforts and resources for greater engagement with BIPOC communities.
3. Develop a program to provide education to felons regarding voting restoration.
4. Collaborate with local BIPOC organizations to recruit and educate BIPOC community leaders to do pop-up voting information and education forums, focus groups and workshops. Partner with non-traditional and smaller agencies that are involved in the community to offer people more choices that they can relate to.
5. Fund and create civic engagement and voter education programs for high-school students.

Housing overview

REAC's Housing Committee members are appreciative of the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Hennepin County commissioners and administrators to strengthen existing efforts and encourage new approaches to advance racial equity through housing in our region. Historically, local government has been a core driver in creating the racial inequities in housing and therefore should take a proactive leadership role in providing programs, making strategic investments, advancing policy and influencing the marketplace.

³ Nonprofitvote.org

The Housing Committee sought input from individuals knowledgeable in housing to inform our recommendations. The input gathered and complexity of the challenges in the housing marketplace exceed what we were able to address in our first report.

The recommendations fit into three broad areas: the County as a leader in housing strategy, the County as a BIPOC wealth-creation facilitator, and the County as a primary actor in renters' rights and protections.

Recommendations

1. Shift from a reactive to a proactive leadership role in the regional housing marketplace while continuing to provide critical housing supports to our neighbors experiencing the greatest housing instability. Hennepin County is best positioned to convene, build consensus, and mobilize regional resources to advance a cohesive strategy of the scale needed to meet the challenges we are experiencing.
2. Support strategies that build wealth, from both a reparative and future-owner frame in BIPOC communities.
3. Counterbalance the trend of outside investors who may further increase racial wealth disparities.
4. Acknowledge the value renters create and protect them with a mandated right to counsel in eviction proceedings, rental registries, and support for habitability enforcement, among others.

There are well-documented links between housing and health outcomes.⁴ Our ability to make progress in the area of housing will have an impact on life expectancy, overall health, and multiple other social determinants of health as well as on the productivity of county citizens.

Justice overview

Justice involves many systems that have a disproportionately negative impact on communities of color. The events of the past year have shown the importance of addressing equity in these systems for the wellbeing of the non-white residents of Hennepin County. The Council responded to the tragic killing of Daunte Wright through a memo to the board (Appendix 4); those suggestions and concerns are still valid.

This year the REAC Justice Committee focused on learning about the work of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office (HCAO) and the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office (HCSO), victims'

⁴ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20180313.396577/full/>

rights, and bail reform. Black and Indigenous men are disproportionately represented on probation and in our correctional system and this inequity in turn has a negative impact on these communities and exacerbates racial disparities.

Except for one meeting, most of the information obtained by this committee has been from public sources and written responses. Next year, the committee plans to have in-person meetings with staff from these offices to better understand what the county is doing. The committee requests more complete responses to our concerns and questions, and transparency from the leaders of these systems. The committee received basic written responses or partial responses, and no meeting invitations were accepted to learn in-depth about the work in these systems. To begin the work of addressing inequities in these systems, the committee requests the following:

1. Better understanding among leaders of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office and Public Defender's Office about what the REAC Justice Committee does and how we can collaborate to address the racial inequities in these systems.
2. Transparent, comprehensive, and timely responses to requests from the REAC Justice Committee including detailed data and all information requested.
3. Individualized, strength-based, trauma-informed treatment for individuals struggling with opioid use disorder that allows the client agency to decide if medication or treatment is the best option for them.
4. Establishment by the HCSO of a basic standard for medical services for all individuals in judicial custody.
5. Abolishing cash bail and establishing a fund to mitigate racial inequities in incarceration exacerbated by poverty.
6. Continue and enhance the initiatives of Jerald Moore and Judge Mark Kappelhoff in the area of juvenile justice and the work of the Youth Justice Council.
7. Legislative advocacy and county leadership for banning less lethal weapons against civil rights protestors and addressing systemic inequities in laws that govern the Sheriff's Office and the judicial system.

Health equity overview

Where we live, play, and work matters for our health and wellbeing. Structural racism is the root cause of inequities, and these inequities are not signs of a system malfunction; they are the by-product of systems functioning as intended. Historical and current policies related to economic stability, employment, income, housing, safety, incarceration, food stability, access to education, transportation, health care, neighborhood demographics and physical environment, community

and social context all contribute to the wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities⁵. Hennepin County is in a strong position to lead innovation and change, convene all stakeholders, set policy, and allocate resources to each of these social determinants to address the racial inequities that continue to be perpetuated by these systems.

The information and suggestions in this report encourage and challenge the county to be proactive rather than reactive, recognize and leverage its strengths and power and step into the role of convenor, thought leader, change leader and manager, and leverage its authority and resources (human and capital) to build more equitable systems that can support BIPOC communities to become healthy and resilient.

Recommendations

1. Engage a reproductive justice framework to support BIPOC women to maintain bodily and child-raising autonomy
2. Strive for concordance in BIPOC infant medical care and BIPOC care professionals
3. Continue to educate health care professionals about social determinants of health
4. Expand and leverage County relationships such as the Hennepin University Partnership to advance an equity frame
5. Weigh in on the County's perspective on less-lethal weapons

Hennepin County staffing overview

REAC reiterates the need for racial diversity at all levels, all departments and programs of Hennepin County to advance transformational change that can eliminate racial disparities. It is impossible to ignore the repercussions from the lack of diverse voices at the table when some of the largest disparities in the country exist and persist in Hennepin County.

Hennepin County as an employer should be a proactive leader in recognizing the value of community knowledge and lived experience, and of hiring from BIPOC communities to create racial equity and resilient communities.

REAC received employee demographics from the county which surfaced gaps in data gathering, analysis and transparency. Staff indicated that existing reporting requirements do not necessarily

⁵ Kaiser Family Foundation: Beyond Health Care: The Role of Social Determinants in Promoting Health and Health Equity Figure 1: Social determinants of health. (<https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/beyond-health-care-the-role-of-social-determinants-in-promoting-health-and-health-equity/>)

align with the emphasis of REAC. For instance, pay equity reporting is tied to gender versus race. Also, there is a challenge in comparing similar types of work and staff experience. The existing policies and practices are not designed to provide data to inform a proper baseline or potential interventions, or to document progress towards racial equity.

Recommendations:

1. Diversify staff at all levels to reflect the communities served.
2. Provide the data that REAC requests completely and transparently. Almost all REAC committees have outstanding data requests from different departments.
3. Examine equity in remuneration for BIPOC staff.
4. Develop diverse staff where there are gaps so there are community ties and cultural knowledge within the county.
5. Engage in proactive recruitment — invest in diverse resources to promote job opportunities to communities of color such as the People of Color Careers website.

Conclusion

We, as the Race Equity Advisory Council, have spent the inaugural year of our council exploring the concerns of the community voices within our own board, listening to the equity work currently being done by those within the Hennepin County system, and communicating with Hennepin County residents and organizations. This work has been critical as we begin to understand the duties that we have to the commissioners who have appointed us and as we carve out the responsibilities we have to our fellow county residents. This report is a summary of a few key issues and recommendations that we have for the county. The work of racial equity, the work of disparity reduction, and the work of inclusion is heavy. This work is hard, and it is not work that this council takes lightly. This inaugural report is a primer for the work to come, a foundation set in 12 months by a team of concerned citizens who wish to push Hennepin County to be an example of equity, diversity, and inclusion. It is essential to the appointed members of REAC that we as an advisory council provide support and recommendations around expeditious change within the county system.

The council would like to express deep gratitude for the multitude of work, presentations, and time given to our council by county staff. As a new council we are greatly appreciative of those departments and individuals who assisted in the advancement of our work.

REAC would also like to acknowledge the community members and organizations that engaged with us, who allowed us to draw upon their collective and individual experiences and wisdom. This report does not reflect ALL of the learnings from these meetings. What has been shared will continue to inform our work and will be used for future reports to the Board.

The Race Equity Advisory Council members thank the Hennepin County commissioners for their admission of harm being caused and desire to make change within Hennepin County by creating, staffing, and interacting with REAC. Our council is a symbol of hope that those in leadership at the county are serious about reducing disparities caused by racism in Hennepin County.

The Race Equity Advisory Council members thank the Hennepin County commissioners for the opportunity and responsibility to advise and make recommendations to reduce disparities caused by racism in Hennepin County. REAC members are committed to supporting and encouraging bold action for transformative change.

We acknowledge the leadership of Commissioners and Administration in allocating ARPA funds towards programs to address the needs of diverse communities; especially Commissioner Conley for \$10 million to advance maternal health efforts in our communities, focusing specifically on the birthing outcomes of Black and Indigenous mothers and Commissioner Fernando for \$1.3 million for expanding voter engagement.⁶ We also acknowledge all of the funding allocated for housing. We encourage the county to continue to advance change that will bring racial equity with ARPA funds.

Transformative change needed to address some of the widest and most persistent disparities in the nation requires proactive and bold vision and actions. We encourage the County to gather the needed data that will allow it to focus on changing its systems to respond to the needs of a changing community, to be transparent so the public can see the true state and inform ways to affect and take risks to be innovative and proactive so all the residents in Hennepin County can thrive.

We believe the County can do better for BIPOC communities that experience the worst disparities and we want to be partners in creating healthy, thriving communities in Hennepin County.

⁶ As of the writing of this report, ARPA funds were still being allocated so the REAC is unable to review and provide recommendations.

Community engagement

REAC wishes to stress to the County Commissioners and County Administration the importance of engaging with community, especially early in the decision-making process. It is important that partnerships are created with individual community members, not just community organizations. It is also important that communities feel part of solving the issue, not just in giving a perspective on proposed solutions.

To reach as many individuals as possible, those old-fashioned ideas related to grassroots community engagement cannot be lost in times of technological advancement – such as passing out flyers, mailings to every household (including those in shelter), and door knocking. Remember that the community members that county dollars mostly serve are those with limited resources, so they are not likely to have access to transportation, funds, and technology.

What is even more important is to continue that engagement by reporting back to communities when decisions are made. Being heard has to be shown in action. REAC has the following recommendations, questions, and observations:

Recommendations and Observations

- Demonstrate Financially the Importance of Varied Community Voices: Pay community members for their expertise and time to ensure a broad array of viewpoints, rather than representation by the same people over and over again. People considered "experts" are reimbursed at very high levels. Community members are "experts" of what would work for their community and their needs. The REAC lost dedicated members wanting to contribute to change because a promised stipend was revoked, and they could not afford to lose income. Not reimbursing community members results in the absence of vital voices from solutioning.
- Include community engagement in contracting. State and federal funds require public engagement; require community engagement for county contracts, too. This will promote responsive services and creativity towards new ways of delivering services.
- Grow Election Teams: During the last elections, a tiny county election team was very effective in engaging certain populations. Consider expanding the team and increasing outreach to traditionally unregistered voters so they understand the importance of voting.

- **Keep In Mind the Student Population:** Start engaging students in high school on all issues. One way is to fund after-school activities, so students are aware of their voting rights, the importance of having their voice heard, and how matters such as climate change impacts them.
- **Knowledge about Government is Critical:** Many people are not aware of the different levels of government and the role of the city, county, park district, etc. Create a centralized access point for residents. Alternatively, engage in education and outreach that help residents understand how government works. Citizen Academy is one way to provide this information. Invest in well informed and engaged residents so solutions are meaningful and effective.
- **Partnership with Cities:** The County is the largest local agency; build relationships and partner with cities to develop ability to respond comprehensively to resident concerns.
- **Create New Partnerships:** Identify new organizations to partner with to increase choices for residents who distrust established organizations.
- **Technology does have its benefits:** In the current virtual environment, technology is a great way to communicate with residents through social media and portals that store recordings. However, there is no feedback loop for residents to interact with the county. Create asynchronous engagement opportunities so residents can participate in issues that impact them. Also, create portals for interaction with people affected by policies decisions.
- **Multimodal Communications will Expand the County's Reach in the Community:** Engage in actions such as setting up events in schools/parks/churches/fairs to obtain input. Also, use chalk boards in public spaces, suggestion boxes (physical and electronic) in community centers, health care facilities, county buildings. Further, have business and contracting information fairs in zip codes with high poverty. Partner with non-traditional community fairs, community colleges and other spaces with higher BIPOC presence such as MEDA, AMAC, and AWC to publicize contracting opportunities and process so solo and small BIPOC business and vendors understand the process and get support to increase their opportunities. Do not depend solely on the county website.
- **County Website has it Challenges:** Look at other counties' websites including neighboring ones and create a more user-friendly and simpler website.
- **Continue to invest in avenues that expand community engagement:**
 - Contract with community DEI specialists to assess where outreach is lacking and create communications; they are nimbler and not constrained by government policies.
 - Create an innovation fund so small businesses can work with the county and the county can assume the risk while businesses adapt and develop their administrative and service

capacity. Small businesses and service providers can be nimbler and more creative in serving residents than larger established organizations.

- Fund and expand the capacity of community organizations that are already reaching diverse communities.
- Hire staff from the community with cultural knowledge and compensate that knowledge fairly like any other professional skill. Doing so will not only improve access to culturally specific solutions but also build community wealth, stability, sustainability, and resilience in culturally diverse communities. Furthermore, this is a valuable skill that the County must factor into compensation for new employees. Thus, the County will have culturally competent people trusted by the community who can be liaisons for the County and advocates for the community. More importantly, these employees will be role models for children in the community thus inspiring the next generation.

Questions to Discuss further Opportunities

- Utilization of the Racial Equity Impact Tool: The Racial Equity Impact Tool requires engagement with the public. What is the role of the community engagement team in the REIT and how often is public input sought early in the process?
- REAC/CAB Website: Since REAC is a council of community members speaking about the needs of the community, it is unclear why the Community would not have 24/7 access to the work REAC is engaging and its recommendations to the County Administration and Commissioners. REAC requests to continue conversations with Commissioners about a website where the public can easily access information about REAC, including meeting links, agenda, reports and communications and recommendations developed by REAC. Currently, it takes navigating through multiple layers to find meeting links and agenda, and REAC's work is not available to the community. There is considerable interest in the community about REAC, and we would like the community to access information easily.

Civic engagement

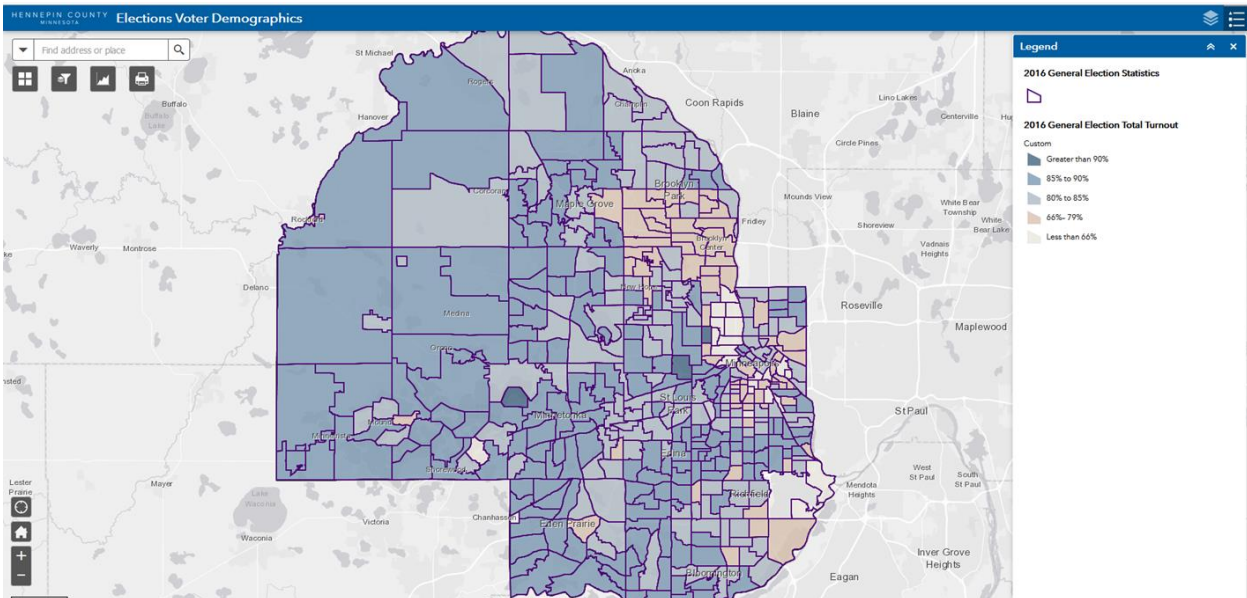
Active civic engagement, including voting, contributes to the health and economic vitality of local communities. People who vote are more likely to connect with neighbors, talk to elected officials, and engage civically in other ways.⁷

Engaging civically enhances the ability of a person to advocate for themselves and their communities. Strong social connections with neighbors and family members can lead to a greater quality of life and healthier communities, promoting community resilience. Voting gives those who feel disenfranchised and disconnected a sense of personal empowerment, giving individuals a chance to voice their opinions.

The Civic Engagement Committee has determined it is of great importance to support the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in having access to voting information and education, especially since the Supreme Court has affirmed voter restriction legislation and several states have already passed or are pushing bills that will negatively impact options for marginalized communities. While voting information is certainly important, by itself it may not guard against the suppression tactics that we touch on. However, the efforts to increase voting information by various organizations and the county may provide opportunities for those groups to learn even more about specific policies that are limiting the capacity and perhaps interest various communities in participating in voting. This reciprocal learning process coupled with better data will further uncover some of the current policies that are creating disparities and help guard against future policies that may induce disparity.

Historically, systemic obstacles excluded the BIPOC community from having access to voting knowledge. Currently there are efforts to be more intentional about voter information and education. Various organizations are pushing strategies to increase awareness in BIPOC communities in light of recent voting bills being passed to support what many are saying is a form of voter suppression. Analysis of GIS voter data on Hennepin County's website shows that some precincts and cities with greater racial diversity have significantly lower voter registration. Although we don't have the most recent election data to support REAC's specified concerns, we have gathered preliminary data on Hennepin county's voter turnout in 2014 and 2016 to determine which communities have the lowest turnout. Although we cannot conclude the implications of this data, we believe the data warrants further exploration because the lower-turnout areas appear to be areas with higher percentages of non-white residents.

⁷ nonprofitvote.org



Voter suppression through lack of engagement, information or government inaction has commonly shown up as a pattern in the BIPOC community. The suppression of voting has often resulted in controlled, restricted, and reduced options. The act of suppression also limits their voice in relevant issues like child protection, housing, health care, public safety and justice, which have disparately impacted these communities. The hope is, the more informed these communities are, the more united the work is of dismantling disparities, resulting in improved outcomes in areas of education, employment, and income. It is the goal of REAC to take a sharper look at closing the gaps of disparities as they pertain to accessibility to voter information and education.

It is necessary to focus on transforming the way institutions and systems operate, engage, inspire, and influence universal change for the betterment of these communities.

REAC’s engagement with the community included a look at Hennepin County’s Voter Outreach and Education unit. The work of the department includes dedication to outreach and efforts in informing various populations from homeless, marginalized, and BIPOC communities.

In conversing with Nimisha Nagalia on March 10, 2021, it was apparent there is a shared agenda to set outcomes to increase BIPOC voting participation and education in Hennepin County.

At a roundtable meeting that the Civic Engagement Committee Chair facilitated on June 21, 2021 with the League of Women Voters, the local leagues expressed interest in connecting with BIPOC

communities within Hennepin County and intent to focus their outreach efforts to connect with these communities. The leagues also want to train and develop BIPOC leadership to offer voter information and education forums and workshops to racially diverse community members. The diversity, equity and inclusion committees from various leagues within Hennepin County proposed and agreed to meet monthly starting July 19, 2021, to discuss how they can increase the goal of supporting voter information and education in support of diverse communities.

In June 2021, the Civic Engagement Committee met with Nathan Graham from Hennepin County's GIS staff to review, navigate, and discuss the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data election demographics.

The strategy of collaboration is to change the narrative and provide more inclusive outlets that support BIPOC voices. The goal is to support additional awareness in the BIPOC community through intentional work to reach individuals and groups, as well as change the structure of how things have been done.

REAC's recommendations

REAC makes the following recommendations to Hennepin County to make purposeful attempts and deepen support for an agenda to decrease disparities in the delivery of voter information and education.

- Enhance the work Nimisha Nagalia is doing with Hennepin County's Voter Outreach and Education. The unit is an asset. Increased investment in staffing and accessible community spaces would allow the program to have more visibility and reach greater numbers of BIPOC residents.

Hennepin County has some of the highest voter participation in the country. However, as shown below, voter turnout is not even across the county. The table below displays the 10 wards with the lowest voter turnout for 2014 and 2016.

City	Ward	Precinct	2014 turnout	2016 turnout
Minneapolis	5	2	32.3%	57.84%
Minneapolis	5	6c	34.03%	58.36%
Minneapolis	5	8	32.81%	59.04%
Minneapolis	5	3	34.99%	60.17%
Minneapolis	4	3	34.03%	60.83%

Minneapolis	9	4	37.88%	60.94%
Minneapolis	5	7	31.24%	61.64%
Minneapolis	6	7	41.08%	62.51%
Minneapolis	6	6	36.99%	62.66%
Minneapolis	4	5	39.76%	62.80%
For Snelling		1	40.45%	63.09%
Minneapolis	2	10	31.62%	65.68%
Minneapolis	6	4	41.38%	65.76%
Minneapolis	2	4	38.08%	66.27%
Minneapolis	6	3	33.39%	66.41%
Minneapolis	9	8	36.08%	66.43%
Minneapolis	5	5	41.95%	66.43%
Minneapolis	4	6	41.77%	66.65%

Hennepin County has precinct-level information on voter registration and racial composition. Use this information to target efforts and resources for greater engagement with BIPOC communities.

This data can also be used as a proxy for high school engagement. Student engagement follows parental engagement. Current 9th graders will be ready to vote in the next election and we need to start educating them about the impact of their voice, the voting process, what different levels of government are responsible for and their role in creating a community that is well informed.

We commend the BAR that commissioner Fernando authored to add \$1.3M for voter engagement and we welcome this bold step by Hennepin County. We would like these funds to be focused on the areas with the least voter registration and voter turnout so that government policies are informed by all people impacted.

- Design a voting restoration program specifically for felons who are eligible. Provide education or mandate through diversion programs, offer classes or workshop per probation and parole conditions.
- Collaborate with local BIPOC organizations to recruit and educate BIPOC Community Leaders to do pop-up voting information and education forums, focus groups and

workshops. This group would also take the lead in recruiting diverse polling judges from the BIPOC community.

- Civic engagement and voter education programs for high schoolers.
- Use existing GIS data to target resources in areas with the least voter registration and participation.
- Facilitate conversations and take advantage of opportunities to inform about voter suppression laws and their impact on individuals and communities.
- Promote dismantling processes that support oppression, which increases stress and health risks. When people feel disconnected and helpless their mental health is impacted and this poses a public health risk as well.
- Deliver grassroots voter outreach to provide education to high-school students and BIPOC communities, and specifically target census tracts with the least registered voters.
- Contract with community DEI specialists to create a public service agenda to assess and identify what is and isn't working in the field of outreach.
- Build strategic partnerships with cities and with private and public agencies; lead countywide strategies and convene partners to engage and provide voter education; support funding and partnering with organizations that are already doing this work so they can expand capacity.
- Partner with non-traditional and smaller agencies that are involved in the community to enhance choices for the people.
- The Student Election Judge Program⁸ is exactly what we want for whole communities. This program offers students an introduction to invest civically and be a part of the voting process. It is an investment to create a program like this, which can extend to a standard to include more community members who are Black, Native American, Asian and Latinx. This program aligns with the goal to broaden training and opportunity for more people of color to become election judges and work in their community, while taking the lead in having a presence of diversity at polling places.

The recommendations below were included in REAC's memo about the American Rescue Plan.⁹

- Contract with community DEI specialists to assess where outreach is lacking and create communications; they are nimbler and not constrained by government policies.
- Fund and expand the capacity of community organizations that are already reaching diverse communities.

⁸ vote.minneapolismn.gov/election-workers/student-program/

⁹ Appendix C

- Identify new organizations to partner with. This will increase choices for residents who distrust established organizations.
- Contract with community organizations for voter outreach. Develop transparency in the County's interaction with residents.

REAC's future plans

- Engage and educate youth who will be eligible to vote in 2024.
- Focus on educating about the different levels of government and the power and impact of voting.
- Intersectionality of housing and voting participation: Highlight the negative impact on voting when people are displaced to a new community, such as not being able to register, unfamiliarity with new area, etc.

Housing

The housing domain team is focused on improving stable financing options. Hennepin County's five-year consolidated plan for housing and community development recognizes strategies to reduce disparate impacts on people of color in activities funded through that \$4.5M grant. Implementation of the supportive housing capital program addressing priority populations is also underway, and housing RFPs include strategies to address housing barriers beyond income.

Income and wealth inequality, racist housing practices in the 20th century and modern-day discrimination contribute to the gaps in homeownership. The competitive housing market could exacerbate disparities, Harvard University researchers noted in a recent report, because rising home prices that require large down payments prevent low-income households from buying.¹⁰ Hennepin County's efforts to address housing disparities are even more important now as the disparity gap between White households and BIPOC households appears to be widening. Those efforts must be proactive, consider the market trends, exercise patience, be innovative, protect current residences, intentionally correct past harms, build BIPOC businesses, and include the opinions of the BIPOC community.

Housing Committee members also participated in the review of proposals for supportive housing and conduit financing guidelines.

County's current efforts

As one of several major agencies working to address affordable housing needs in the region, Hennepin County supports the creation and preservation of affordable housing through capital investment and meeting the housing needs of the county's most vulnerable residents through supportive housing services. The county invests at least \$134 million annually into areas such as supportive housing, emergency shelter, rental assistance, short-term housing, capital funding, and home repairs for low-income families.

Hennepin County is currently focused on minimizing people entering homelessness and maximizing people exiting homelessness, address the county's most vulnerable. Hennepin County's goals, which include creating more long-term supportive housing units, are commendable and serve as steps in the right direction.

¹⁰ <https://minnesotareformer.com/2021/07/21/minnesotas-housing-market-frenzy-in-five-charts/>.

REAC's recommendations

REAC's Housing Committee engaged in several panel discussions with nonprofit organizations, county staff, private organizations, and community organizations focused on creating solutions to create fair and equitable housing for all, including BIPOC communities. Hennepin County is positioned to have a significant impact on housing and as a result family stability, health outcomes, and wealth creation. Bold action is required. The REAC Housing Committee recommendations are grounded in two basic acknowledgments:

1. Local, state and federal policies and practices have been core drivers of racial inequities in housing, contributing to the racial wealth gap, racially concentrated areas of wealth and poverty, and the resulting disparities in health and education outcomes; and
2. Hennepin County takes responsibility for past actions and the present challenges by taking a proactive and intentional role in eliminating racial inequities and alleviating the resulting racial disparities in housing.

As a result of these panel discussions, research, and the above assumptions, REAC offers the following recommendations that are designed to make an impact in racial inequities surrounding housing, in addition to those identified in the memorandum to Hennepin County commissioners dated April 15, 2021 regarding proposed uses of American Rescue Plan funds:

1. Hennepin County must shift from a reactive to proactive leadership role in the housing marketplace.

Hennepin County cannot avoid the consequences of an inequitable housing market. Hennepin County currently mitigates the harmful effects of our housing market failures in the form of shelter beds, supportive housing, and other social and supportive services. The current housing marketplace contributes to the racial wealth gap in the region while benefiting from the significant and strategic investments made by Hennepin County in public infrastructure, public safety, workforce development and more.

Hennepin County should continue to mitigate and support households and individuals suffering from the failure of the housing market to provide the quantity and quality of housing for our community and it should reorient and expand its role upstream in the housing market to ensure sufficient supply and for households to access wealth building opportunities. Hennepin County is well positioned to advance racial and economic equity in the region by expanding and leveraging the following leadership capacities:

- Regional framing and leadership: Hennepin County staff develop and implement a strategy to build a shared understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and pathways toward

housing equity in partnership with local municipalities, nonprofit and private-sector stakeholders.

- **Power to convene:** County staff in the Housing and Economic Development Department begin applying the Racial Equity Impact Tool (REIT) to inform and shape convening and collaborative efforts with municipalities and other partners. County staff has a track record of convening stakeholders to problem-solve and build consensus. This should now include the REIT. The REAC requests a status report on staff trained on the tool, its application in the work of the department and a timeline on full implementation.
- **Funder:** County staff will incorporate racial equity criteria into funding and public infrastructure investments. Hennepin County, through very thoughtful strategic investments has improved quality of life and created private value for property owners while strengthening and expanding the tax base of local municipalities. Unfortunately, the private wealth and strengthened tax base has not resulted in a coherent strategy to address the decades-long housing crisis. County staff will report back to the REAC on efforts to incorporate equity criteria into environmental remediation grants, public infrastructure investments and other funding tools. For example, a grantee would need to demonstrate how they have evaluated the benefits and burdens of a project on BIPOC households and strategies the grantee will take to extend benefits and mitigate burdens on low-income and BIPOC households.
- **Mobilize resources:** Hennepin County is also positioned to mobilize resources to address structural inequities in the housing sector. The REAC Housing Committee strongly supports innovative ideas such as bonding for affordable housing. In addition, excess funds from TIF districts that have already paid off their debt should be redirected to affordable housing efforts. Lastly, Hennepin County staff should explore other creative measures to capture value from the energy in the market place through use of real estate transactions or other similar mechanisms.
- **Technical assistance to municipalities:** Municipalities within Hennepin County lack the scale to have multiple specialized staff to manage the development process. Hennepin County does an excellent job in providing planning support on infrastructure projects. However, municipalities struggle with implementing the necessary zoning, planning and development policy changes needed to guide equitable development. Housing and Economic Development should be directed to assemble technical resources and support for municipalities to support equitable development. Special consideration and support should be provided to municipalities within the transitway corridor that the county has invested in.

2. Institutional investors' impact on the rental housing market

The rise of institutional investors which can be classified as corporate landlords along with other investors not connected or accountable to the community can cause foreclosure-driven housing insecurities. In a tight housing market where sellers welcome cash purchases and receive multiple offers that are 25% to 50% higher than the appraised value, institutional and other investors can leverage their financial position to purchase distressed properties or NOAH¹¹ properties and further increase rents and exacerbate the racial disparities in home ownership. Investors target cities with low-price tiers for property value and a higher rental yield.¹² The impacts are already being seen in the Twin Cities.

The United States and our region are experiencing a growing wave of retirements which impacts workforce, business ownership and ownership of rental property. Many local business and rental property risk being purchased by investors with little connection or accountability to the local community, putting at risk what is defined as naturally occurring affordable housing. Additionally, property management firms can have a similar harmful impact on eviction rates and conditions of renters. The transfer of ownership to national or international investors puts at risk current affordable housing and may undermine measures to maintain the quality and underlying resilience of our marketplace.

To protect individual buyers, promote local ownership and promote a healthy housing market along with preserving existing affordable housing stock, REAC has the following suggestions:

- Monitor eviction patterns and conduct a study to see if displacement is driven by institutional investors.
- Proactively provide legal aid to tenants of newly sold apartments. Create policies for the preservation of affordable housing and support smaller/local landlords. Cities should also leverage Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI Fund) in generating economic growth and opportunities.
- Explore an eviction diversion program. The effects of evictions on households include health, education outcomes, employment, and household wealth. Hennepin County should explore models of eviction diversion programs to avoid the harms of eviction

¹¹ NOAH: Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing

¹² [Investor Activity and Rental Housing Crises: From the Foreclosure Crisis to COVID-19](http://www.hhh.umn.edu/event/investor-activity-and-rental-housing-crises-foreclosure-crisis-covid-19)
www.hhh.umn.edu/event/investor-activity-and-rental-housing-crises-foreclosure-crisis-covid-19

and promote household stability. An eviction diversion program is a holistic combination of services that diverts landlord (specifically institutional investors) disputes away from a court judgment. REAC suggests formalizing these services into a clear, coordinated process for which tenants can sign up to receive these arrays of social, legal, mediation and housing services.

- Transparency in the ownership of property and identifying institutional investors. Create a discussion in local communities around ownership.
- REAC requests that Hennepin County staff be directed to work with local municipalities and others to identify existing naturally occurring affordable housing at risk of turnover and develop a programmatic response. The goal would be to preserve existing affordable housing stock and maintain local ownership. Strategies could include incentive programs, tax abatement and financing to support the transition to a mission-driven housing group.

3. Consider the benefits of patient capital

Patient capital is a financing component that used to have a fundamental place in the funding mix for developing built assets that were planned to provide long-term utility. Rockefeller Center in New York City is an often-cited example (Leinberger, 2007)¹³. The past near-century, however, has seen a reliance on asset classes that are planned with a shorter life cycle. This short life constrains investors to expect larger near-term gains.

The recent planning trends of transit-oriented-development and other walkable, amenity-rich built environments (new or repurposed) should seek a longer-lived asset class. In the case of affordable housing as part of this mix, economic trends and government's emphasis on affordable housing in the long term raise the option of reviewing patient capital's role (Arrowsmith, 2020)¹⁴.

REAC recommends that the county investigate opportunities for patient capital in its funding mix as a means to alleviate short-term equity obligation by developer partners.

¹³ Leinberger, C. B. (2007). Back to the Future: the Need for Patient Equity in Real Estate. *Brookings*

¹⁴ Arrowsmith, J. (2020, July 8). *CBRE*. Retrieved from CBRE Hotels:

<https://www.cbrehotels.com/en/global/investor-hub/the-case-for-affordable-housing?article=63185a76-cc3e-4bb7-bcb2-caa921a8554b&feedid=bbc4df08-52a9-40f7-8c05-a316cc1cb8d7>

4. Combine programs to create innovative housing programs

REAC recommends that the Hennepin County commissioners request staff invest time and effort in researching and creating a pilot program geared toward creating long-term sustainable housing in BIPOC communities that is a hybrid of cooperative ownership and land trust. A co-op land trust hybrid program can address several obstacles to sustainable and permanent housing such as affordability, cost to create co-ops by combining program funds for different resources, and resistance to the responsibilities associated with single-family homes. More importantly, ownership creates pride within communities.

5. Ensure current tenants are protected

As the commissioners are aware, the rent moratorium will soon end, leaving many subject to eviction which will undoubtedly disparately impact the BIPOC community and individuals with lower incomes. As we think about creating methods to creating permanent housing, those efforts must be balanced with creating ways to maintain individuals and families in their current housing situations. We know efforts in Hennepin County are ongoing, and recommend some additional protections to consider:

- Mandate right-to-counsel (RTC) in all eviction filings.
- Create rental registries (Phillips, 2020). Require all licensed properties to register. Real-time data is vital to viewing the realities of the county's rental housing landscape. Current analyses are the result of market aggregators which do not take into account current rents, length of tenancy, and other data points necessary to complete a real-world picture. The minor burden of property owner registration should be outweighed by the benefits of real-time violations enforcement and identifying bad actors. Should jurisdictions allow rental stabilization, a registry will be crucial to measuring outcomes — results that will be necessary to inform the attendant rental rate governing body.
- Eviction filings should be required data on the registry. This would provide necessary transparency for tenants to confirm that eviction filings are valid or hollow.
- The registry could also serve as a dashboard for another recommendation — an expansion of the Hennepin County Housing Court Clinic's reach and diversion-focused efforts. Is the clinic generating content identifying trends such as frequent eviction filers, disparate outcomes faced by differing demographics, and similar predictive data?

- Increase direct rental assistance. Direct funding, either by HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Program or local programs, has proved to be key to the stabilization of formerly homeless persons (Phillips, p. 201)¹⁵.
- If new development removes current residents, provide an economically viable right of return. This can be achieved either on the planning and development side, in early, community-centered review, or on the outcome side, by intentional funding. Without this intentionality, the resulting increase in homelessness will cost the county a lot more in the forms of poorer mental and physical health, housing relocation and ongoing support, and increased police involvement.

6. Conduct a racial equity audit of property taxes versus property values

As discussed in a recent report (An Evaluation of Property Tax Regressivity in Minneapolis and Hennepin County, 2020), research revealed that Hennepin County's residential property value and taxation rates have a "modestly regressive" (Belsky, Berry, Lankowski, & Schmidt, 2020)¹⁶ relationship. While modest compared to regressive taxation in other U.S. jurisdictions, the report's geocoding vis-à-vis the county's census tracts reveals clear inequities. To clarify, locales with a majority-BIPOC demographic typically experience property value underassessments and higher property taxes (relevant to assessed value), while minority-BIPOC locales experience the inverse.

While levy inequities are indefensible on their face, it is important to recognize two negative outcomes. Majority-BIPOC-locale homeowners are over-taxed and experience intentional depression of their home's value. At the same time, the county, as a result of the intentional under-taxing of its minority-BIPOC locales' properties to favor them as higher-valued homes, is losing "hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in property value untaxed every year" (p. 15). The REAC recommends the following actions be taken:

- Review the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago's report to test its conclusions.¹⁷
- Make the county's findings on assessment inequity public.

¹⁵ Phillips, S. (2020). *The Affordable City*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

¹⁶ Belsky, M., Berry, C., Lankowski, E., & Schmidt, M. (2020). *An Evaluation of Property Tax Regressivity in Minneapolis and Hennepin County*. Chicago: Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

¹⁷ <https://harris.uchicago.edu/news-events/news/property-tax-burdens-fall-nations-lowest-income-homeowners>

- Continue and improve upon valuable ongoing work in reducing assessment inequity.
- Make reparative efforts to rebalance historic inequities such as tax-disparity forgiveness and right of first refusal to property owners who lost their homes or equity as a result of tax-based forfeiture.

7. Increase BIPOC business participation

Small businesses owned by BIPOC communities are extremely underrepresented in Minnesota as revealed by disparities studies (the requirements for programs like the Minnesota’s Targeted Group/Economically Disadvantaged Small Business Procurement Program, and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Disadvantaged Business Enterprises Program).

BIPOC businesses lack the visibility and access to financial services that White-owned business find ease in accessing. "These disparities have minimized economic mobility among BIPOC Minnesotans who live and work in communities with economic challenges, creating a systemically unequal playing field."¹⁸

REAC recommends that Hennepin County make intentional efforts to include BIPOC business owners in housing development programs or projects financially supported by Hennepin County. REAC recommends Hennepin County do as follows:

- Improve its engagement with BIPOC small business at every stage of project. For example, in the design and planning stage, reach out to BIPOC business who can provide these services for input, consultation, and implementation for the needs of the county. These businesses can be easily located both on the Minnesota Department of Administration TGB website and the Minnesota Unified Certification Program website, which provide detailed directories of BIPOC businesses.
- Create demonstration projects committed to BIPOC businesses. Look at who is benefiting from projects. If there is a stated goal, ensure that the money is going towards that goal rather than to other efforts.
- Create mentorship programs to encourage more BIPOC architects and developers.

REAC’s engagement with the community revealed that tax rebates and small-business loans are insufficient to sustain BIPOC businesses. These businesses simply need more business to create economic stability within BIPOC communities. The need is even more critical as it has been indicated that BIPOC business have been heavily impacted by the pandemic. Keep in

¹⁸ <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2021/04/advance-racial-and-economic-justice-by-supporting-bipoc-owned-businesses/>

mind that disparities impact these businesses resulting in limited resources, so patience is key to ensuring BIPOC business can be present in Hennepin County projects.

8. Continue to be creative in reaching BIPOC communities regarding housing needs

As the commissioners are aware, community engagement is the key to understanding from those who receive housing services how to provide those services. However, many voices continue to go unheard for various reasons. Fostering a reciprocal partnership with community sets the stage. Any recommended commission actions by REAC must be vetted by the community Hennepin County serves. Accordingly, REAC recommends the following:

1. Seek informal ways to gain information through informal networks – for example, requiring Hennepin County staff to join community groups such Street Voices for Change and attend city council meetings when housing issues are being discussed.
2. Publicize innovative projects in various forums so anyone can access information about the project and have opportunity to provide input, such as community radio programs.
 - 1) Create a dashboard regarding efforts by partners, developers and cities that emphasizes performance and reveals how they are reducing disparities. This will create a focus on the importance to those seeking county funds and serve as an avenue to provide additional information to communities.
 - 2) Involve cities and companies that want to invest in reducing disparities and philanthropy.
 - 3) Pay community members to provide input regarding proposed county programming. There is a segment of the BIPOC community where financial resources are limited, yet their viewpoints matter.

During REAC engagement with community organizations, we learned (1) privilege is asking people to volunteer; and (2) too often the right people are not at the table when decisions are made. The county has made strides in the area of engaging the community in the housing domain and must continue to be creative. REAC believes the above recommendations represent just a few solutions that deepen community engagement.

Recommendations from the REAC ARP memo

Housing stability is one of the social determinants of health. Apart from facilitating wealth building for adults, it also contributes to children’s current well-being and future economic opportunity. Furthermore, stable housing promotes stable communities with people vested in the sustainability, safety and prosperity of the community.

1. Employ small businesses to rehab tax-forfeited homes that can then be sold to low-income households. Don't auction off homes, rehab them and sell them to households for whom this will be their primary homes.
2. Preserve Multi-Family Housing—designate sufficient funds to the HRA to use as a rolling resource to acquire multi-family properties that become available for sale or lose affordable housing designation. This will give the county time to find mission driven entities to buy and operate the properties, so they continue to be affordable.
3. Fund a program similar to NRP so people can access forgivable loans to rehab their existing homes to create and preserve affordable stable housing.
4. Create a rolling fund for people with barriers to accessing financing. Conventional loans require a waiting period after a bankruptcy which is a barrier to preserving ownership.
5. Give low-income families a tax holiday so they can retain their homes. There are models where low-income households who buy homes receive a tax holiday for 10 years to stabilize themselves. This pandemic has affected the income of many households.
6. Duplicate Great River Landing for people experiencing homelessness.
7. Hold taxes flat for a few years for low-income households who have lost income because of the pandemic. This time-limited provision will help families stabilize and speed financial, emotional and health recovery.
8. Give residents first refusal to buy back their home if they lost their home because of tax forfeiture.
9. Hire from the community. The County will have culturally competent people trusted by the community who can be liaisons for the County and advocates for the community. Furthermore, these employees will be role models for children in the community thus inspiring the next generation.
10. Build and provide operational funding for shelters for vulnerable women, LGBTQ households, families without children, and households with pets, and low barrier shelter for those with dependencies. Such shelters will increase the likelihood that they will be used by residents who do not feel safe or are not welcome in regular shelters.

Justice

The Justice Committee this year focused on learning about the work of the offices of the County Attorney, Sheriff, Public Defender and Community Corrections and Rehabilitation. The information in this report is based on peer-reviewed materials, publicly available information about these offices, written materials received from county staff, information from professionals in the field and lived experiences of community members, and council members.

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

Hennepin County "has a new diversity and inclusion director¹⁹ working together with Hennepin County administration and other external groups to coordinate all of our diversity and inclusion efforts."

Following up with the new diversity and inclusion director will be a critical next step for this committee in improving internal and external work on diversity and inclusion.

- The County Attorney's Office needs to be more transparent and provide complete and timely responses to the Justice Committee, allowing an opportunity to coordinate our efforts and commitment to ensure that residents are being served using good information.
- Requests to meet with staff about programs were not granted. Broad written responses were provided instead.

"The Hennepin County Attorney's Office has also incorporated initiatives that create a more diverse and inclusive workplace. We have developed a broader hiring pool by expanding our recruitment efforts to the broader community. We consciously promote those who show true leadership skills. Of our 10 most senior managers, seven are women and four are people of color."

1. REAC would like information on embedded practices that ensure that this will be ongoing and not just a reaction to the recent community uprising.
2. African Americans and American Indians are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and we would like to see the County Attorney's staff reflect the community it serves.

¹⁹ <https://www.mnbar.org/hennepin-county-bar-association/resources/hennepin-lawyer/articles/2021/04/30/hennepin-county-attorney-s-office-an-update-from-the-office>

3. Develop a robust recruitment pool by creating new paid pathways into employment for people of color and develop a non-traditional, creative, and inclusive recruitment strategy. People of diverse backgrounds and experience have to be part of the solution.
4. REAC would like more detailed information about the composition of the staff at different levels and salaries at different bands. The information received was incomplete.

“For the past three years, our rate of hiring diverse law clerks reflects our diversity hiring goal of 50 percent. Having a diverse group of law clerks provides us with a deep pool for future attorney hires.”

5. While this is a good statistic, information on the hiring rate from this pool would be beneficial.

Probation and practices for race equity

Incarceration seems to have little net effect on the likelihood of subsequent re-arrest and probation does not alter the probability of recidivism (Green & Winick, 2010)²⁰. Probation should be addressed through a race and equity lens.

- What information does the County Attorney's Office share with the public to determine when an offender is rehabilitated?
- What does the relationship between the County Attorney's Office and probation office look like?
- What is the policy and procedure when a law enforcement official, probation officer or County Attorney's Office worker is involved in crime? Is it handled differently than a regular citizen involved in a crime?

Hennepin County reported²¹ that “one barrier in our system is transportation, which caused no shows for important court or court-related appointments; the CJCC [Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee] launched a Court Ride Program. In 13 months (2019 and January 2020), 818 rides were offered to Public Defender clients; 54% of those individuals self-identified as a person of color.”

- This committee would like to see data that shows how effective this program has been in reducing the impact of criminal justice systems on the lives of BIPOC communities.

²⁰ Green, D. P., & Winick, D. (2010). Using random judge assignments to estimate the effects of incarceration and probation on recidivism among drug offenders. *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 48(2), 357–387.

²¹ [racism-as-public-health-crisis-response.pdf \(hennepin.us\)](#)

Expungements

In 1974, the Minnesota Legislature declared that it is the policy of the State of Minnesota to encourage and contribute to the rehabilitation of criminal offenders, and to assist them in the resumption of the responsibilities of citizenship. The opportunity to secure employment or to pursue, practice, or engage in a meaningful and profitable trade, occupation, vocation, profession or business is essential to the rehabilitation and the resumption of the responsibilities of citizenship.

“A new online expungement application program²² was launched by the County Attorney's Office in partnership with the Minnesota Attorney General's Office and the Ramsey County Attorney's Office. Residents with Hennepin County criminal convictions who have completed their sentences may be eligible to seal their criminal records. Once the data has been received, we hope to be able to measure the success of these partnerships in addressing expungements. A common reason people seek expungements is to make sure there is access to employment, housing, and licensing.”

- This committee would like data that confirms that the County Attorney's Office is working with agencies and are engaged in the process. The purpose for this is to ensure that the collateral sanctions of a criminal record are not hurting people who had their record expunged.
- We recommend that the County Attorney's Office form partnerships and make legal advice available as Minneapolis does using pro bono legal assistance.

“HCAO currently offers diversion for first time property/drug offenders and is presently expanding diversion criteria and developing a diversion option for certain criminal cases with concurrent child protection cases.” (Justice Equity Analysis 2021)

1. REAC recommends that the county actively support state legislation to expand diversion criteria.

Victim rights

The Hennepin County Attorney's Office mission statement says it is focused on justice, and that means protecting the victims of crime and witnesses to crime.

All victim rights need to be addressed. This can include offering mental health services, medical assistance, and protection – making sure that regardless of race and income status, everyone has access to quality services.

²² <https://www.hennepinattorney.org/get-help/sealing-criminal-records/seal-criminal-records-info>

Marsy's Law seeks to give crime victims meaningful and enforceable constitutional rights equal to the rights of the accused. Some examples of the types of rights to which we believe all victims are entitled are:

2. To be treated with dignity and respect throughout criminal justice proceedings.
3. To be notified of his, her or their rights as a victim of crime.
4. To be notified of specific public proceedings throughout the criminal justice process, and to be present and heard during those proceedings.

Marsy's Law has already been successfully passed in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.²³

- We recommend that passing of Marsy's Law be included in Hennepin County's legislative agenda.

Victims of police violence

Families who lose loved ones to police violence are left with no services or resources to cope or process the tragic event or take care of final expenses. If a loved one is killed by any other person or means they are provided access to services and resources to both help process and help with final expenses.

As part of a collaboration with the Hennepin County Attorney's Office we would like to explore avenues for services and resources families could access to address these needs.

Victim services recommendations

1. Provide direct financial assistance for victims from the county (not redirecting victims and families to the crime victim fund which often is limited/has barriers).
2. Follow up after the conclusion of a criminal case.
3. Implement restorative justice practices, including notifying victims of sentencing.
4. Track and provide data on victims serviced by Hennepin County.
5. End punishment of victims who are unable to make a court appearance under subpoena who are fearful for their life.
6. Support sentencing that restores and repairs families in cases of domestic violence and does not cause further harm to the family unit.

Overall recommendations for the County Attorney's Office:

²³ <https://www.marsyslaw.us/what-is-marsys-law>

The County Attorney's Office needs to be transparent and timely with the Justice Committee, allowing an opportunity to coordinate our efforts and a commitment to ensure the county as a whole is being served with good information.

- Provide access to the data and information requested to the Justice Committee.
- Arrange a meeting with the new Hennepin County Diversity and Inclusion director and discuss ways we can implement best practices together.
- Have interactions between the County Attorney's Office and the REAC Justice Committee to further understanding about what REAC does and how we can collaborate together.
- Provide access to resources for families who lose loved ones to police violence.

Hennepin County Sheriff's Office (HCSO)

Hennepin County has recently hired a race and equity coordinator. We plan to work closely with this individual to discuss concerns about public engagement and how it relates to Hennepin County.

Our committee has made an inquiry about the policies and procedures of the day-to-day operations with the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, as well as how this office interacts with the public, and no response has been received.

There is value in having access to the data of who is being arrested by the Sheriff's Office and areas where this is happening to prevent recidivism in the community. We would do this by working closely with the race and equity coordinator. If we are unable to get this information, we would work to create a database. Finally, it would be helpful to spend time seeing the best practices of other county sheriff's offices and how we can improve the HCSO.

In the past year, the Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR), the courts, the HCSO and many others worked on disparity reduction goals, particularly probation reform²⁴. It would be helpful to see how this has been working, especially in Black and Indigenous communities where they are disproportionately represented on probation and in our correctional system.

5. REAC needs data to assess the impact and success of these efforts.

Our committee had a special guest speaker named Del Shea Perry whose son, Hardel Sherrell, died while in custody and was not given proper care in a county jail²⁵. As a result of what

²⁴ (<https://www.hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/your-government/overview/docs/racism-as-public-health-crisis-response.pdf>)

²⁵ <https://spokesman-recorder.com/2020/07/02/beltrami-county-sued-for-black-mans-death-while-in-custody/>

happened to Hardel Sherrell, the Hardel Sherrell Act²⁶ was passed into law this session which will reform how services will be provided for people in custody.

6. This committee would like information on changes being made to implement the Hardel Sherrell Act in Hennepin County.
7. The focus needs to be on transparency and accountability for the people taking care of someone in custody. We would like information on how this is being done.

We have a responsibility to ensure that people incarcerated are given an appropriate level of care²⁷.

Opioid services

A program will soon be launched to place a social worker in booking at the jail. There is a new partnership with the Downtown Improvement District to get a social worker on the streets downtown, with the goal of helping people to access the supports they need even before contact with law enforcement (Justice Equity Analysis Report 2020).

8. REAC would like to be able to speak with this social worker and collaborate on best practices.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, opioid misuse greatly impacts the criminal justice system. A person's odds of incarceration rise sharply when they begin to use opioids, from an average of 16% to as much as 77%. Between 24% and 36% of people with heroin use disorder enter American correctional facilities every year. Once a prisoner leaves jail, they have a 10 to 40 times higher risk of opioid overdose than the general population²⁸.

The New England Journal of Medicine reported that a former inmate's risk of death within the first two weeks of release is more than 12 times that of other individuals, with the leading cause of death being a fatal overdose (Binswanger, Stern, & Deyo, 2007)²⁹. Overdoses are more common when a person relapses to drug use after a period of abstinence due to loss of

²⁶https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF1267&session=ls92&version=list&session_number=0&session_year=2021&keyword_type=all&keyword=hardel

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xikLuk5T2NI&t=433s>

²⁸ (<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018/NSDUHNNationalFindingsReport2018.pdf>)

²⁹ Binswanger IA, Stern MF, Deyo RA, et al. Release from prison—a high risk of death for former inmates. *N Engl J Med.* 2007;356(2):157-165. doi:10.1056/NEJMsa064115.

tolerance to the drug. One study found a reduction in post-incarceration deaths from overdose among individuals who had received medication for opioid use disorder in correctional facilities.

The Sheriff's Office has a contract with Hennepin Healthcare to provide medical services. Hennepin Healthcare staffs the on-site jail clinic and patients are transferred to HCMC if their needs can't be met at the jail. Although the Adult Detention Center (ADC) is doing better than facilities with health care provided by private companies, the sheriff sets the standards. There's room for improvement; more could be done to bring health care at the ADC closer to a community standard.

It is unclear what coordination of care is in place when people leave jail. We understand that discharge planners are supposed to ensure that people get connected to follow-up care after release, but we don't know how realistic that is given how quickly some people cycle in and out of jail, sometimes in a manner of just days, and how unpredictable release days can be. We are especially concerned about patients with opioid use disorder; if they start medication for opioid use disorder treatment in the jail, we HAVE to make sure they get linked to a community provider to continue that medication when they're released because the risk of death from overdose after incarceration is absurdly high: Approximately a third of Hennepin County overdoses have occurred within a year after a jail release.

Minnesota has an ethical and legal obligation to safeguard the health of incarcerated and detained individuals. Evaluate and measure access to health care and overall wellbeing in the Hennepin county workhouse and jails.

Recommendations

- Allow meetings between REAC and the HCSO race and equity contacts.
- Allow this committee opportunities to interact with people in the HCSO to exchange information on what the REAC's Justice Committee does and how we can collaborate.
- Transparency and timely response to requests for data and information from the Justice Committee will allow us to collaborate and move towards equity in systems.
- The treatment for an individual struggling with an opioid addiction should be individualized, strength-based, and trauma-informed, and allow the client to decide if medication or treatment is the best option for them to choose. Basic medical services must be provided to all individuals in custody. This should include access to a doctor or nurse practitioner, the ability to get a physical, and meet with an eye doctor, dentist, and mental health professional(s) for evaluation.
- Expand access to opiate disorder medication for those waiting in jail for treatment spots to open. Community solutions that allow people to be close to their families and social support

system can be more effective and have better outcomes. Further, the risk of overdose for individuals leaving jail is incredibly high. To ensure these individuals receive proper care transitions and linkage to community providers who prescribe medications for opioid use disorder, the number of jail discharge coordinators to facilitate these care transitions from should be increased.

- It is important we explore the current list of contractors that the jail and/or workhouse is using for medical needs. We would benefit from talking and learning ways to improve the process for the individuals who are in the custody of the HCSO.

Hennepin County Public Defender's Office (HCPDO)

According to the RFK Children's Action Corps National Resource Center review from January 2020, it was recommended that the juvenile court judiciary, in collaboration with HCAO, Office of the Public Defender, and the Juvenile Probation Division conduct an exhaustive review of the current calendar, docketing/scheduling, notice, and post-court information process and identify specific recommendations for remedies to the current processing of court cases³⁰. We would like to look into time management that was addressed in the RFK Children's Action Corps National Resource Center review from January 2020.

- Although this came out a couple months before COVID-19, the Justice Committee would like to know what changes were made after the information was received.

The Justice Committee would like to ensure that BIPOC communities are equitably served and we would like to do everything to make sure that people are given access to quality representation. It would be helpful to see how the Hennepin County public defenders are compensated and make sure that wages are aligned with other public defender offices and the Hennepin County Attorney's Office.

Since African American and American Indian communities are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and receive disproportionately punitive sentences resulting in barriers to housing, employment, child custody, etc., it stands to reason that quality and timely legal representation is crucial. We commend the county for allocating CARES/ARP funding to clear the backlog in suburban courts.

We would like more done to ensure that public defenders are treated fairly and have the resources to represent their clients well. We encourage the county to be proactive in leading and convening innovation and change in the Public Defender's Office.

³⁰ (<https://www.hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/residents/public-safety/documents/juv-justice-system-report.pdf>)

Recommendations

- Hennepin County should collaborate with other metro counties to review public defender caseloads and wages to ensure parity with other public legal employees. This is a race equity issue since low-income people in the justice system who depend on the Public Defender's Office are predominantly Black and Indigenous.
- Pay equity between the Public Defender's Office and other public legal entities should be pursued so poverty is not a deterrent to justice.

Requests

- The Hennepin County Public Defender Office needs to be responsive, transparent, and timely with requests from the Justice Committee.
- Provide access to the data and information requested to the Justice Committee.
- Allow this committee to interact with HCPDO staff so we can understand our roles and collaborate.

Cash bail³¹

The cash bail system needs to be withdrawn from the State of Minnesota. Until such time, Hennepin County must do its part in limiting cash bail for its residents. Every day that cash bail is enforced, Hennepin County is openly supporting a biased and racist monetary penalty that criminalizes its low-income residents, supporting a process that is detrimental to the health of those incarcerated without choice and openly participating in perpetuating poverty amongst its poorest residents.

The cash bail system is biased and reinforces systemic racism in our courts system. The flexibility in the amount of bail assigned to each defendant was meant to allow judges the opportunity to assign high monetary values to high-risk defendants. Unfortunately, bias and racism has allowed for this flexibility to disadvantage communities of color. In Minnesota specifically according to Minnesota Freedom Fund, Black people comprise 7% of the state population, but 31% of the prison and jail population. Indigenous people account for 1% of Minnesota's population, but 8% of the prison and jail population. This section is focused on bail; however, it is not a secret that

³¹ <https://www.mic.com/p/what-is-cash-bail-why-is-it-so-problematic-64100036>
<https://mnfreedomfund.org/bail-explained>
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/how-cash-bail-works>
<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2020/how-cash-bail-system-endangers-health-black-americans>
<https://martinwagnerlaw.com/news-events/47-criminal-defense/220-bail-reform>

communities of color and low-income neighborhoods are overpoliced, leading to higher rates of arrest. Nationwide “Black and Latino men are assessed higher bail amounts than white men for similar crimes by 35 and 19 percent on average, respectively.” Not only are people of color being sent to jail more often than their White counterparts, they are being more harshly critiqued in mere minutes by judges in a bail hearing. Low-income communities and communities of color do not always have the same resources to defend themselves and explain why they are equally less of a risk than their White counterparts.

The cash bail system perpetuates poverty among low-income Hennepin county residents. The justice system affords every citizen the right to be innocent until proven guilty; however, cash-strapped citizens are automatically criminalized by being forced to pay their way out of jail. In Minnesota cash bail bondsmen are allowed to charge 10% fees on any bail bonds. This is a non-refundable fee that only the poorest of Hennepin county residents must pay in order to return to their lives, retain their jobs, provide for their families and fight for their day in court. No person should be required to pay to prove their innocence. Those who cannot are left languishing for months in jail, unable to be economic contributors to our county, their communities, or their families as they lose wages and spend money on jail costs such as phone calls to loved ones, stamps for letters and basic goods. To those low-income citizens who are able to pay a bail bondsman, they have lost valuable cash to be used for legal and other fees associated with legal proceedings. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics data reviewed by the PPI, people in jail had a median income of \$15,109. It is not appropriate to expect all Hennepin county residents to be able to afford hundreds or thousands of dollars (plus a potential 10% fee), even before any of them have been found to be guilty.

The cash bail system is detrimental to the health of those incarcerated. Forcing our fellow Hennepin county residents into imprisonment creates a public health crisis in Hennepin County. The research is clear that there are numerous negative health outcomes to prolonged detention. This includes higher rates of HIV, hepatitis C, tuberculosis, hypertension, asthma, arthritis and more. The damage done to mental health is also widespread and includes increases in anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia. Hennepin County has declared racism a public health crisis; forcing individuals who have been discriminated against to remain in prison due to lack of funds is a large component of this health crisis.

Across the nation cash bail is being phased out. However, some states were ahead of their time in removing this blight on the legal system. For example, Washington, D.C., was an early pioneer³² in pretrial reform, taking steps to eliminate the use of cash bail as early as the 1960s.

³² <https://hls.harvard.edu/content/uploads/2020/11/Massachusetts-Racial-Disparity-Report-FINAL.pdf>

The results have been extraordinary: 94 percent of defendants³³ are released pretrial, and 91 percent of them appear in court for their trial.

New Jersey passed a suite of criminal justice reforms in 2016 that essentially eliminated cash bail and created a new pretrial services program. Since implementing these reforms in 2017, New Jersey saw a 20 percent reduction³⁴ in its jail population. In 2017, 95 percent of defendants were released pretrial and 89 percent of them appeared at their trial date.

Harris County, Texas, home to the third largest jail system³⁵ in the country, reformed its pretrial system as part of a consent decree to virtually eliminate the use of money bail for misdemeanor charges. Prior to these reforms, 40 % of people arrested on a misdemeanor charge were detained until their case was adjudicated. Experts estimate that reforms will result in pretrial release for 90 to 95 percent of misdemeanor defendants³⁶.

Recommendations

- Bail should be set at the lowest level possible for all offenders.
- Create a fund that is administered by a community provider to pay the bail for the poorest offenders so the system doesn't discriminate against those who can least afford to be away from their jobs or face other barriers that incarceration brings.
- We recommend that Hennepin County commissioners voice support for bills to end cash bail.

Juvenile justice system

This council had the opportunity to meet with Gerald Moore and Judge Mark Kappelhoff. We commend them for their work in creating a more person-centered and responsive system for county-involved youth. The Youth Justice Council and the Eliminating Racial Disparities Subcommittee are excellent efforts to advance systemic equity.

³³ [Massachusetts-Racial-Disparity-Report-FINAL.pdf \(harvard.edu\)](#)

³⁴ [www.njcourts.gov/courts/assets/criminal/2017cjrannual.pdf](#)

³⁵ [cdn.buttercms.com/4DqpQrPZT6ynmRKDxa5b](#)

³⁶ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/reports/2020/03/16/481543/ending-cash-bail/>

Health equity

Building resilience in BIPOC communities is critical not only for people of color to thrive in the present but also to withstand distress or calamities in the future. According to the [US Department of Health and Human Services](#), community resilience is the sustained ability of communities to withstand, adapt to and recover from adversity. Resilient communities promote individual and community physical, behavioral, and social health to strengthen their communities for every day and extreme challenges.

Health

Investing in community health helps reduce health gaps caused by racial, ethnic, location, and other inequities. Good health allows residents to engage fully in economic and social activities and create thriving communities.

The recommendations below are from REAC's ARP memo

1. Fund community clinics that provide services on a sliding scale fee directly without a grant process. Set up unit rates that these clinics can access so people can access trusted providers.
2. Support start-up clinics that reach deep into BIPOC communities and ensure their long-term financial and strategic vitality.
3. Increase access to fresh food in low-income areas and food deserts. Create direct farm to home delivery of fresh which would benefit MN farmers and BIPOC communities.
4. Create a community paramedics program where EMTs can provide preventive care as well as chronic disease management, medicine administration and monitoring, follow up after medical appointments etc. This is a cost-effective way to maintain good community health, promote better health outcomes, and reduce the cost of health care.

Chemical and Mental Health Services

Chemical and Mental health services both prevent and address health crises that create unsafe situations. Timely and readily accessible addiction services also create safe communities. However, current models are not culturally relevant and are ineffective for non-white adults and children. Children and adults need therapy from BIPOC professionals and culturally competent professionals.

1. Contract with providers who use alternate models. There are many community providers that the county has not connected with because they follow models that are different from what the county considers mainstream. However, these are providers whom community members trust and from whom they could have better outcomes. The county must identify and contract and or fund these providers.
2. Expand access to opiate disorder medication for those waiting in jail for treatment spots to open. Community solutions that allow people to be close to their families and social support system can be more effective and have better outcomes. It must also provide capacity-building support
3. Increase rates for chemical and mental health contracted providers so residents have access to comprehensive care in a timely manner rather than care that is limited by inadequate funding. Waiting or not receiving adequate care worsens the health of people who are already in precarious situations and may be experiencing other chronic health conditions; and increases costs in the long run.
4. Compensate cultural knowledge fairly like any other professional skill. Doing so will not only improve access to culturally specific health options, but also build community wealth, stability, sustainability, and resilience in culturally diverse communities. Furthermore, this is a valuable skill that the County must factor into compensation for new employees.
5. Increase contract rates so community providers can have a livable wage too, similar to the \$20/hr minimum wage for County employees, and staff can access training, education and skills that will benefit residents. Often people working in these agencies are closest and most trusted by communities.
6. Fund research and educational institutions to work with communities of color and develop models that would align with their cultural values. Then, BIPOC communities are more likely to trust and use these treatments.
7. Create grants and scholarships so students of color can consider these professions as viable options and have the means to pursue them.

Advance systems change to health inequities and shift our viewpoint from a majority group's perspective to that of the marginalized group or groups. Historical and contemporary views of economics, politics, and culture, informed by centuries of explicit and implicit racial bias, normalize the White experience. Minnesota's minority populations have higher poverty rates, which leads to higher odds of having chronic diseases, yet have less access to health care. Social determinants of health are factors in the environment where we are born, live, learn, work, play,

worship, and age. When these things add stress or pressure to our schools, jobs, or neighborhoods, they can affect our well-being and overall quality of life.

Reproductive equity

Minnesota has seen unprecedented growth in the number of incarcerated women, most of whom are mothers with minor children. Major public health concerns relate to the reproductive health of women in prisons and jails and the well-being of their infants and young children. Use a reproductive justice framework to examine the intersection of incarceration and maternal and child health.

Reproductive justice is a framework borne by BIPOC women which uplifts the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. Reproductive justice demands that we dismantle systems of oppression and replace them with systems that ensure that BIPOC birthing communities are free to live their lives without fear and with the resources necessary to live with dignity. One of the core values of reproductive justice is to raise one's children in a safe and sustainable community – that would be a community free of the trauma of police violence. Police violence is a social determinant of health that can directly impact reproductive health equity. Community-level trauma such as racialized police violence in communities can vicariously influence the health of Black people unrelated to those directly targeted. Studies show higher rates of adverse health conditions such as high blood pressure among Black people living in highly and inequitably policed areas.

Infant mortality

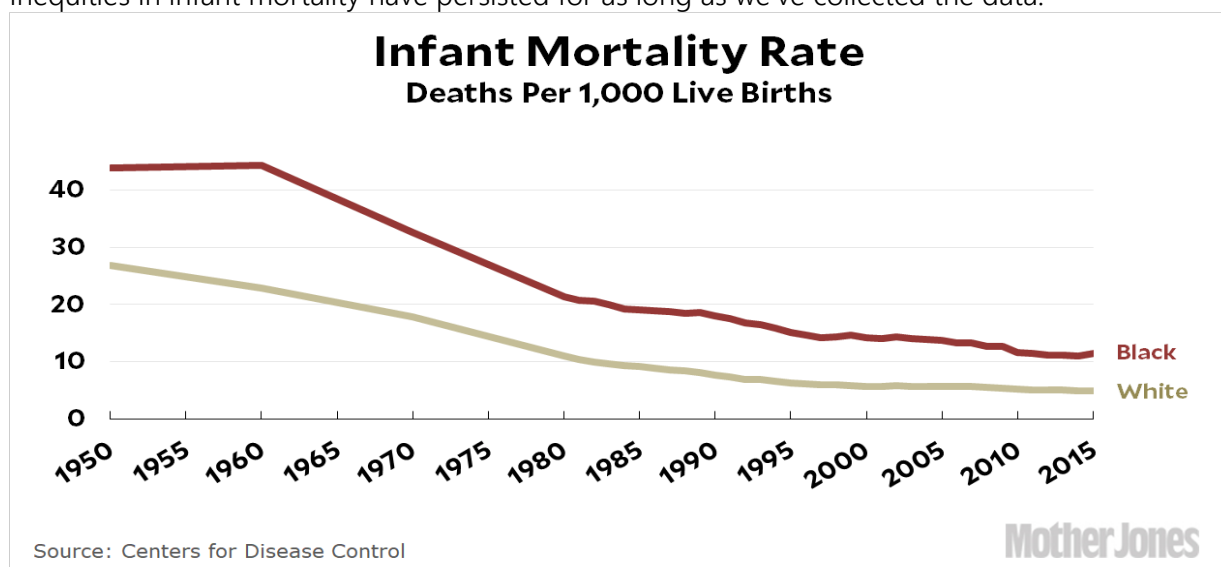
Infant mortality, a global indicator of population health and well-being, is defined as the death of an infant during the first year after the birth. While over the last decades infant mortality in the U.S has declined, prominent disparities remain across racial/ethnic groups and geographical areas – particularly in Hennepin County.

Structural racism, defined as the myriad ways in which society fosters differential access to resources and opportunities by race as well as policies, laws and practices that reinforce racial inequity, has been recognized as a fundamental cause of racial health inequities, including infant mortality. Achieving racial equity in childbirth care is critical to the health and well-being of our community. Black infants are more than twice as likely as White infants to die before reaching their first birthday, and Black and Indigenous individuals who experience reproduction are 3-4 times more likely to experience a complication or death related to childbirth. While evidence

shows considerable geographic variations in county-level racial inequities in infant mortality, the role of structural and institutional racism across urban communities remains unexplored.

Preserving the lives of newborns has been a long-standing issue in public health, social policy, and humanitarian endeavors. High infant mortality rates are generally indicative of unmet human health needs in sanitation, medical care, nutrition and education.

Historical demographers estimate that in 1850, enslaved infants died at a rate of 1.6 times that of White infants, whereas 2016 CDC data show that Black infants have a mortality rate 2.3 times higher than non-Hispanic White babies; the mortality rate for Indigenous communities is higher. Inequities in infant mortality have persisted for as long as we've collected the data.



Recent research has emphasized the benefits of patient–physician concordance on clinical care outcomes for underrepresented minorities, arguing it can ameliorate outgroup biases, boost communication, and increase trust. When Black newborns are cared for by Black physicians as opposed to White physicians, their in-hospital death rate is a third lower; these effects manifest more strongly in more complicated cases and when hospitals deliver more Black newborns. The size of this mortality rate reduction would correspond to preventing the in-hospital deaths of about 1,400 Black newborns nationally each year.

Results indicated four key findings:

- Black infants experience inferior health outcomes regardless of who is treating them. However, clinical penalties for Black newborns treated by Black physicians are halved

compared with the penalties Black newborns experience when cared for by White physicians.³⁷

- These benefits accrue more sharply in more medically complicated cases, insofar as the performance disparity across White and Black physicians increases as the number of newborn comorbidities rises. These effects are more pronounced at hospitals that deliver more Black newborns.
- No effect of concordance on mortality for birthing mothers was observed, suggesting communication is not the exclusive mechanism by which concordance benefits will manifest.

Recommended action

- Educating health professionals about the social determinants of health generates awareness of the potential root causes of ill health and the importance of addressing them in and with communities.³⁸
- Leverage county relationships such as the Hennepin University Partnership (HUP) to advance an equity frame of education and practice.
- Invest in racial justice research so that all BIPOC birthing people and infants can live their full greatness and glory.
 - Data collection and effective evaluation to improve outcomes and quality
 - How deaths are identified and flagged as pregnancy-associated or pregnancy-related including how to define and capture data on near misses³⁹.
 - The extent to which both clinical and nonclinical data about the death are available and accessible (including information on broader social determinants of mortality and morbidity)
 - How best to report information for population subgroups at greatest risk but for whom small numbers may pose a challenge (including racial and ethnic groups, sexual minority groups, and indigenous populations)How systematically data are collected, how flexible data collection and management can be, and how data can be harmonized across committees to determine whether trends are localized or generalized
- Support and call for perinatal and postpartum policy change.

³⁷ <https://jech.bmj.com/content/75/8/788.long>

³⁸ <https://www.sph.umn.edu/news/black-newborns-die-less-when-cared-for-by-black-doctors/>

³⁹ https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/maternal_perinatal/nmconcept/en/

Impact of less lethal weapons

Less lethal weapons and repeated use of chemical irritants for crowd control by local and federal law enforcement during sustained racial justice protests in the U.S. has raised concerns about potential adverse health effects. Current research is showing potential causation between high rates of persons with early onset of menses, heavier menses, and an apparent dose-response association between tear gas exposure and spontaneous bleeding and breast/chest tenderness which has not been previously reported in the peer-reviewed literature. Hennepin County should work with local researchers and support funding research to further measure these outcomes and shift policy around use of these less lethal weapons⁴⁰.

Community engagement recommendations:

1. Meet the community where they are. Hold events around the county to get input and educate the public on what REAC does.
2. If the county is serious about addressing race and equity issues within Hennepin County, appropriate funds and provide this committee with a budget to be able to carry out some of our initiatives. Lack of a stipend has precluded participation from those unable to volunteer their time for REAC.

The committee thanks the following members for providing information to help gain understanding and knowledge. The following were in-person meetings:

- Honorable Mark Kappelhoff, assistant presiding judge, Juvenile Court, and Juvenile Probation Division Manager Jerald Moore to hear about their work on juvenile racial justice and commend them for their leadership and commitment ⁴¹.
- Del Shea Perry (community activist) to understand health care in the justice system.
- Commissioner Anderson to understand why the board action to eliminate less lethal weapons did not receive majority support.

The committee received written information about victims' rights from Vernona Boswell, the newly appointed director of equity in the County Attorney's Office.

⁴⁰ (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8074355/>)

⁴¹ <https://www.startribune.com/hennepin-county-launches-initiative-to-eliminate-disparities-in-juvenile-system/600014947/>

Hennepin County staff

Overview

Hennepin County employs over 9,000 people and accounts for 20% of Minnesota's population. Racially diverse staff and inclusive work environment are vital to reducing disparities, and Hennepin County's success in building an equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace will have a direct impact on racial income disparities, employment rate, experience and trust by community members who interact with the institution. This will be especially true for BIPOC community members. Therefore, the issues of workforce diversity, inclusion and workplace culture along with pay equity need to be approached with urgency and transparency.

Available information

Hennepin County's chief human resources officer provided an overview of human resources and available data regarding employee demographics. The presentation was appreciated by REAC members. It also surfaced gaps in data gathering, analysis and transparency. Staff indicated that existing reporting requirements do not necessarily align with the emphasis of REAC. For instance, pay equity reporting is tied to gender versus race. Also, there is the challenge of comparing similar types of work and staff experience. The existing policies and practices are not designed to provide data to inform a proper baseline and potential interventions or document progress towards racial equity.

Other jurisdictions have found ways to be more transparent in providing department level racial/ethnic demographic detail along with pay levels. For example, Ramsey County's report titled "Ramsey County Workforce Statistics Report Year-End 2018" provides more detailed and department-level data. This level of data would enable the county commissioners, County Administration and REAC to prioritize specific departments and develop unique strategies to recruit, retain and develop leadership pathways to address workplace disparities. Hennepin County's current approach obscures department baselines and existence of pay inequities.

Example of **staffing concern**

The following is a concern and experience brought forward by a Hennepin County staff person who identifies as a BIPOC individual. The experience is generalized to maintain anonymity. The experience described is consistent with other anecdotes REAC members have heard and/or observed regarding Hennepin County and other workplaces. Although the experience is not unique, it highlights the additional layer of work that needs to be acknowledged and implemented to ensure that Hennepin County is providing an inclusive environment for staff and

delivering quality services to all Hennepin County residents regardless of race, gender, class, sexual orientation and/or geographic location.

Staff member experience: The staff person shared that they work in a department that regularly engages with the public who are seeking assistance or in crisis. The department is over 90% White and struggles with retaining BIPOC staff. It is common for White staff to make negative or disparaging comments regarding interaction with BIPOC community members. This concern has been raised with supervisors. However, the supervisors lack the experience and skills to address the individuals causing harm or create a healthier department culture to get a different outcome.

Recommendations

- Hennepin County commissioners direct Human Resources to develop a report similar to that of Ramsey County providing a department-by-department baseline. REAC members are available to work with HR leadership to help identify the needed data.
- Hiring managers are gatekeepers to jobs within Hennepin County. The county needs to evaluate hiring by individual managers to ensure that hiring is equitable and promotes diversity.
- Diversify leadership within Hennepin County staff: The county also needs to ensure that the “management” as well as upper-level management demographics are diverse and reflect the county; this includes different ethnic and cultural groups within a racial class of people. The county has significant homeless and unstably housed populations, foster care youth, children in the child protection system, county-involved youth and adults in the justice system who identify as BIPOC. These areas have had many hires in the past five years, yet directors, managers and planners have been almost entirely White. If the county intends to find permanent solutions or engage the public in meaningful ways, it has to intentionally develop staff who reflect the populations served. The usual practice of hiring from area nonprofits will not work since their staff are also predominantly White. Invest and be patient until the right staff are hired to reduce racial disparities. Place the right value on lived experience and community knowledge.
- Additionally, the lack of racial diversity within departments has resulted in the county relying on consultants and contractors to offset the lack of cultural knowledge and community ties. Community ties and context should be more heavily valued. Analyze offers and willingness to negotiate with BIPOC candidates: There’s anecdotal information of White employees being able to negotiate higher salaries on hire and when promoted, and BIPOC employees being denied such opportunities. Lived experience and multicultural experiences that will help reduce disparities or bring a different perspective that can inform solutions should be recognized as desirable skills and compensated appropriately highly. We request a report of

exceptions and higher-than-recommended rates for hiring and promotional pay for White and non-White, and male and female employees.

- Provide disaggregated pay data: There is a perception among employees that White employees, especially males, are compensated at a higher rate than others at the county. HR did not provide data REAC requested about the average salary of a White employee vs. a non-White employee, average male vs. female pay rate, and average White vs non-White salaries at different pay bands. This is aggregate data, not individual data, and should be a metric that is looked at to identify and address pay inequities. Hennepin county is a large employer and needs to lead in pay equity.
- On-the- job training should be embraced. The county has a select few programs for persons to get training through an internship; however, there are no guarantees after the internship. We need to accept the value of lived experience so there is equity for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- A past conviction should not be a barrier to employment. The county needs to have a metric for evaluating persons who have been rehabilitated. The county should not require individuals who have had a record expunged to disclose that record.
- Leaders in their professional development need to enumerate what they've learned from the community. They need to meet with the BIPOC, LGBTQ and disability communities, and have conversations with the community to get feedback on hiring practices, information and policies. Since staff composition can't be changed quickly, management needs to be better informed about the community. There has to be a metric that evaluates their effectiveness to respond to the community and implement reforms.
- Use REAC as representatives of community to vet policies and programs. Coordinate with REAC quarterly to increase guidance and representation from different communities. REAC has information about providers that county doesn't have.

REAC recognizes that it is not charged with addressing staff grievances; however, it is impossible to ignore the impact of not having diverse voices at the table when the largest disparities in the country exist and persist in Hennepin county.

Appendix 1: Race Equity Advisory Council members 2020-2021

Members and terms

Appointed by a commissioner:			
Appointed by Hennepin County Board of Commissioners			
			Term end
District 1	Vacant		
District 2	Amani	Stumme-Berry	3/31/2023
District 3	Vacant		
District 4	Vacant		
District 5	Johnathon	McClellan	3/31/2023
District 6	Vacant		
District 7	Miamon	Queeglay (Secretary)	3/31/2023
At large:			
Appointed by Hennepin County Board of Commissioners			
			Term End
Biiftuu	Adam		3/31/2022
Debjyoti	Dwivedy		3/31/2023
Deran	Cadotte		3/31/2022
Larry	Hiscock (Vice-Chair)		3/31/2023
Mahogany	Ellis-Crutchfield (Chair)		3/31/2022
Mukul	Nautiyal		3/31/2022
Sheila	Webb		3/31/2023
Tekia	Jefferson		3/31/2022

Former Members

	Term ended		Term ended
Farhia Mohammed	May 2021	Lissa Jones-Lofgren	December 2021
Isaak Rooble	December 2021	Marisol Rosado-Carrisalez	December 2021
Latasha Jennings	April 2021	Paul Beshah	April 2021
Alexis Murillo	September 2021		

Memo

To: Rosemary Levin, Director, Energy and Environment (Public Works)

From: Latasha Jennings, Chair
Debjoythi Dwivedy, Deran Cadotte, and Johnathon McClellan
Climate Action Committee members
Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC)

Date: December 14, 2020

Re: REAC response to Hennepin County's Climate Action Plan.

Here's the Race Equity Advisory Council's (Council) response to the County's Climate Action Plan that you presented to the Council and requested feedback on. As discussed, the Council would like to continue to engage with you around this plan. We invite you to attend Council meetings when there are developments that the Council can provide input on.

Energy

Concern: Carbon based energy is one of the contributors to climate change that we can control. The County Plan doesn't consider carbon neutrality by 2050. If this is not possible, the goal should at least be zero net carbon.

Suggestions:

- 1) More education about the impact of carbon fuels and alternatives.
- 2) More incentives for green energy.
- 3) Disseminate information about county programs for green energy.
- 4) Provide need-based subsidies for energy efficient appliances and publicize the programs.
- 5) Collaboration with the University and other research institutions to find solutions.
- 6) Collaborate with corporations to develop solutions that are affordable.
- 7) Partner with the state Department of Energy and Economic Development to create an entity that addresses green energy development funding gaps. Charter a "Green Bank" (see below) that can "motivate faster and more extensive deployment of clean energy assets" (NY Green Bank, 2020). <https://greenbank.ny.gov/About/Approach>

Housing

Concern: Housing is foundational for people to thrive. BIPOC homeownership is very low, rental housing is unaffordable, and housing instability is very high.

Questions:

- 1) What is being done to preserve and develop housing that is affordable, safe, and healthy?
- 2) What is being done to address the impact of greater incidence of flooding in low-income areas?

Suggestions:

- 1) Incentivize urban development that promotes affordability and safety.
- 2) Launch a competition to award new-build and existing housing rehabilitation developers to make units energy-plus (i.e. they add to the energy grid) (Ex. [Helsinki's Re-Think Urban Housing Program](#)).
- 3) Create a fund to address the impact of wetter seasons, such as flooding and mold
 - a. landscape to prevent basement flooding
 - b. create a test kit, akin to the radon test kit, for mold
 - c. provide means tested mitigation for flooding, mold, and other effects of flooding

Transportation

Concern: Transportation is one of the contributing factors we can control. For mass transit to become the transportation of choice in both urban and suburban areas we need smarter development.

Suggestions:

- 1) Connect bus and light rail systems to increase the reach and frequency of mass transit.
- 2) Develop retail and amenities at rail stations by constructing on and over the platforms. This will reduce dependence on single occupancy vehicles.
- 3) Make electric charging stations as ubiquitous as gas stations. The county has to take the lead on this until the private sector catches up.

Infrastructure

Concern: Infrastructure needs to be updated to deal with climate change. Parks, storm water pipes, domestic water supply will all be affected by climate change. People least equipped for these changes will be most impacted.

Questions:

- 1) What studies have been undertaken to understand the impact of climate change on parks and preserve water quality in economically disadvantaged areas?
- 2) What steps will be taken to address the impact of climate change (e.g., water pollution, change in wildlife, etc.) in depressed neighborhoods?
- 3) What steps are being taken to update infrastructure in poor neighborhoods?

Suggestions:

- 1) Make commercial and residential infrastructure green. Green buildings don't cost more, they cost differently.
- 2) Provide tax rebates for greener infrastructure and to remodel buildings.
- 3) Use building code reform to force updates.
- 4) Promote solar panels in rental and low-income housing. People are unaware of incentive programs and the process to install panels. Develop programs like "Open for Business" to provide consultants and process navigators for green energy.
- 5) Build rainwater gardens to harness water before it reaches storm water pipes.
- 6) Update storm water systems, especially in densely populated areas, so they can handle the change in precipitation.
- 7) Regularly inspect water conditions and pipes in underserved communities with BIPOC concentrations to identify contaminants—we don't want a situation like 3M dumping waste that affects the water table and causes health issues.
- 8) Plant vegetation and promote other mitigation actions to reduce urban heat islands.
- 9) Implement zoning requirements that require a net-zero effect on existing open space: if you develop an existing space (parking lot), you have to create equal public green space in a location designated by local government.

Community Engagement

Concern: People experiencing daily survival hardships cannot be expected to be concerned about the future although they would be the ones most impacted. We must be creative in how we engage the community and use strategies like public health campaigns so the whole community is engaged. One of the ways could be by focusing on children and youth.

Suggestions:

- 1) Schools
 - a. The MN Department of Education is already changing curriculum to include race. Climate change is a race equity issue. Collaborate with the Department of Education to include climate change in the curriculum revision. These could be short modules 2-3 times a year so students can take the information home to adults.
 - b. Support schools that want to be engaged in climate change. Create action plans and campaigns to increase awareness similar to active living campaigns like "walk and bike to school."
 - c. Provide funding for schools to create competitions, websites, and student committees to promote climate resilience activities.
 - d. Incorporate this information into ECFE, ESL and other adult education programs.
- 2) Colleges
 - a. Students are already engaged in green activities in colleges. Create incentives for them to take information into neighborhoods.
 - b. Universities have public interest associations. Engage them in county-university partnerships.
 - c. Use law student associations to review industry practices and make changes.
 - d. Collaborate to develop programs to prepare people for a future green economy.

3) Religious Leaders

BIPOC have strong connections to their religious leaders and practices. Engage religious leaders as partners. Fund activities where they can make a difference.

4) Social Media

- a. Create information campaigns for every social media platform—Facebook, Instagram, etc.
- b. Develop partnerships so interesting programs that incorporate climate change information can be developed for children and adults.

County Finance and Contracting Practices

Concern: The County makes large investments with property tax, state, federal and philanthropy dollars, which can have a huge impact on how the county develops climate resilience.

Suggestions:

Review all investments—infrastructure (transportation, building, parks, etc.), employment, education, training—and find ways to promote practices that will support strategies to address the impact of climate change on BIPOC communities

- Review and rewrite RFPs so strategies to impact and address climate change are given weight.

Upstream divestment

The Council recommends continuous review of county investments so no opportunity to divest is missed.

Council's question regarding upstream investment philosophy. The 2020 budget indicates \$14.9 million in investments. Is this portfolio centered in climate change-informed entities?

(County response to Council's question)

Response from the Office of Budget and Finance:

The \$14.9m in the budget represents the income the county receives from its investment portfolio. Under state law, the county is limited to investing in fixed income securities, or bonds. As a matter of investment policy, the county does not invest in private credits, such as bonds issued by companies. We have this practice to eliminate any exposure to private company credit risk. As such we invest only in investments that have backing from the federal government. These include U.S treasury securities and federal agencies that are partially or wholly guaranteed by the federal government. These agencies include the Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA), Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB), and Small Business Administration (SBA) and many other agencies.

Bottomline: Hennepin County investments are in some form of other government security, and therefore not tied to public companies' investments with anti-climate positions.

Based on OBF's response, Public Works asked their energy policy analyst to help us understand if the county's investment in US treasury securities and federal agencies have a connection to fossil fuels/anti-climate investments. Here is the response.

One could argue that because the US has pulled out of the Paris Climate Accords, investing in US treasuries and securities is an anti-climate investment, or if some of the "other [federal] agencies" that our budget office refers to includes US EPA – which watered down Obama-era climate initiatives or US Forest Service – now engaged in logging the Tongass National Forest, or US BLM – which is leasing public lands for oil and gas exploration...the list goes on... One could argue that these are anti-climate investments, but it very indirect.

He also shared this article about how the firms that follow environmental, social and governance guidelines are also trying to understand this.

<https://www.ftserussell.com/research/why-climate-change-also-matters-government-bond-investing>

To: Commissioner Marion Greene, Chair, Hennepin County Board of Commissioners
David Hough, Hennepin County Administrator

From: Latasha Jennings, Chair,
Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council

Date: April 15, 2021

Re: Proposals for American Rescue Plan Funds

The Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC) would like to make the following proposals for the \$245 million American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds that Hennepin County is expected to receive.

Communities of color were distressed and facing incredible disparities even before the pandemic and these disparities have amplified exponentially during the pandemic. While definitive data on the full extent of the pandemic's effect are not yet available, anecdotal and media reports point to extensive and disproportionate negative impacts on Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities compared to other communities. Negative impacts run the gamut from children disengaging from education to loss of homes and livelihood.

Building resilience in BIPOC communities is critical not only for people of color to thrive in the present but also to withstand distress or calamities in the future. According to the [US Department of Health and Human Services](#), community resilience is the sustained ability of communities to withstand, adapt to and recover from adversity. Resilient communities promote individual and community physical, behavioral, and social health to strengthen their communities for every day and extreme challenges. ARP is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for federal investment in long-term solutions for Hennepin County.

The Council examined the issues facing BIPOC communities using the *racism as a public health crisis* framework and makes the following recommendations.

Health

Investing in community health helps reduce health gaps caused by racial, ethnic, location, and other inequities. Good health allows residents to engage fully in economic and social activities and create thriving communities.

1. Fund community clinics that provide services on a sliding scale fee directly without a grant process. Set up unit rates that these clinics can access so people can access trusted providers.
2. Support start-up clinics that reach deep into BIPOC communities and ensure their long-term financial and strategic vitality.
3. Increase access to fresh food in low-income areas and food deserts. Create direct farm to home delivery of fresh food which would benefit MN farmers and BIPOC communities.
4. Create a community paramedics program where EMTs can provide preventive care as well as chronic disease management, medicine administration and monitoring, follow up after medical appointments etc. This is a cost-effective way to maintain good community health, promote better health outcomes, and reduce the cost of health care.

Chemical and Mental Health Services

Chemical and Mental health services both prevent and address health crises that create unsafe situations. Timely and readily accessible addiction services also create safe communities. However, current models are not culturally relevant and are ineffective for non-white adults and children. Children and adults need therapy from BIPOC professionals and culturally competent professionals.

1. Contract with providers who use alternate models. There are many community providers that the county has not connected with because they follow models that are different from what the county considers mainstream. However, these are providers whom community members trust and from whom they could have better outcomes. The county must identify and contract and/or fund these providers.
2. Expand access to opiate disorder medication for those waiting in jail for treatment spots to open. Community solutions that allow people to be close to their families and social support systems can be more effective and have better outcomes. Solutions must also provide capacity-building support.
3. Increase rates for chemical and mental health contracted providers so residents have access to comprehensive care in a timely manner rather than care that is limited by inadequate funding. Waiting or not receiving adequate care worsens the health of people who are already in precarious situations and may be experiencing other chronic health conditions; and increases costs in the long run.
4. Compensate cultural knowledge fairly like any other professional skill. Doing so will not only improve access to culturally specific health options, but also build community wealth, stability, sustainability, and resilience in culturally diverse communities. Furthermore, this is a valuable

skill that the County must factor into compensation for new employees who could become trusted messengers.

5. Increase contract rates so community providers can have a livable wage too, similar to the \$20/hr minimum wage for County employees, and staff can access training, education and skills that will benefit residents. Often people working in these agencies are closest and most trusted by communities.
6. Fund research and educational institutions to work with communities of color and develop models that would align with their cultural values. Then, BIPOC communities are more likely to trust and use these treatments.
7. Create grants and scholarships so students of color can consider these professions as viable options and have the means to pursue them.

Child Wellbeing

Investments in our County's children will set them up for success now and into adulthood. Investments in our BIPOC children and their families is vital to reducing educational, health, and developmental inequities that exist.

1. Install fiber optic internet in zip codes with the greatest number of people with incomes below the area median income. As more jobs require people to work from home and children need access to information and materials online, this is an urgent and permanent need. Use this opportunity to make internet a public utility so health care can be delivered online. Provide financial support to households in which the ability to pay/pay consistently is a barrier to access.
2. Provide tutoring grants to families below 50% of the area median income so students can receive the supplemental support they need to catch up for missed educational and developmental opportunities.
3. Create safe outdoor spaces for children in their neighborhoods or improve access to transportation so they can access safe and healthy places. Outdoor activities are essential to the physical and emotional wellbeing of children.
4. Invest in quality childcare and early childhood facilities in low-income areas and make it available to all children regardless of parental employment status. Include extended hours so parents and caretakers have more employment options. Invest in culturally specific providers including home and center-based care.

Diversify County Contracted Providers

BIPOC small business owners have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Investment and support of these small businesses is necessary to support recovery and sustainability efforts.

1. Hire navigators to provide technical assistance to smaller organizations so they can access government assistance.
2. Develop a grant fund that businesses in diverse neighborhoods can access to rebuild. Entrepreneurship is one of the best ways to escape poverty but BIPOC business owners face challenges in accessing capital for business improvements or as is happening now, to stay open. Available [data](#) indicates that 50% of black enterprises have failed in this pandemic. Furthermore, [data](#) shows that while banks approve 60% of loans sought by white small business owners, they approve less than 29% of loans applied for by black small business owners
3. Create an innovation fund so small businesses can work with the county and the county can assume the risk while businesses adapt and develop their administrative and service capacity. Small businesses and service providers can be nimbler and more creative and innovative in serving residents than larger established organizations.

Housing and Wealth Building

Housing stability is one of the social determinants of health. Apart from facilitating wealth building for adults, it also contributes to children’s current [well-being and future economic opportunity](#). Furthermore, stable housing promotes stable communities with people vested in the sustainability, safety and prosperity of the community.

1. Employ small businesses to rehab tax-forfeited homes that can then be sold to low-income households. Don’t auction off homes, rehab them and sell them to households for whom this will be their primary homes.
2. Preserve Multi-Family Housing—designate sufficient funds to the HRA to use as a rolling resource to acquire multi-family properties that become available for sale or lose affordable housing designation/supports. This will give the county time to find mission driven entities to buy and operate the properties, so affordable housing is preserved.
3. Fund a program similar to NRP so people can access forgivable loans to rehab their existing homes to create and preserve affordable stable housing.
4. Create a rolling fund for people with barriers to accessing financing. Conventional loans require a waiting period after a bankruptcy which is a barrier to preserving ownership.
5. Give low-income families a tax holiday so they can retain their homes. There are models where low-income households who buy homes receive a tax holiday for 10 years to stabilize themselves. This pandemic has affected the income of many households and a tax holiday could assist households to retain their homes which provides the stability needed to obtain employment and for better educational outcomes for children.
6. Duplicate Great River Landing for people experiencing homelessness. Create a space where residents can live and receive the full range of social services and health services they need; with opportunities to thrive.

7. Hold taxes flat for a few years for low-income households who have lost income because of the pandemic. This time-limited provision will help families stabilize and speed financial, emotional and health recovery.
8. Give residents first refusal to buy back their home if they lost their home because of tax forfeiture.
9. Hire from the community. The County will have culturally competent people trusted by the community who can be liaisons for the County and advocates for the community (trusted messengers). Furthermore, these employees will be role models for children in the community thus inspiring the next generation.
10. Build and provide operational funding for shelters for vulnerable women, LGBTQ households, families without children, and households with pets, and low barrier shelter for those with dependencies. Such shelters will increase the likelihood that they will be used by residents who do not feel safe or are not welcome in regular shelters.

Civic Engagement

People are concerned and communities are feeling oppressed and helpless. When people feel disconnected and helpless, it poses a community health risk. Engaging the community and providing them with the knowledge and resources to participate in activities that determine their future will go a long way to build trust and give people a sense of control over their destiny.

1. Contract with community DEI specialists to assess where outreach is lacking and create communications; they are nimbler and not constrained by government policies.
2. Fund and expand the capacity of community organizations that are already reaching diverse communities who are hesitant to participate in civic activities.
3. Identify new organizations to partner with. This will increase choices for residents who distrust established organizations.
4. Contract with community organizations for voter outreach. Develop transparency in the County's interaction with residents.

Public Safety

Criminal justice involvement is associated with poorer health and wellbeing outcomes. Investments in the health of those involved in our justice system along with a reduction of the number of individuals involved is needed to support long-term vitality of our community. Further, diversifying the public safety workforce to include those directly impacted is needed to make innovative change possible.

1. Expand access to opiate disorder medication for those waiting in jail for treatment spots to open. Community solutions that allow people to be close to their families and social support

system can be more effective and have better outcomes. Further, the risk of overdose for individuals leaving jail is incredibly high. To ensure these individuals receive proper care transitions and linkage to community providers who prescribe medications for opioid use disorder, the number of jail discharge coordinators to facilitate these care transitions from should be increased.

2. Maintain decarceration efforts. Individuals in congregate living situations are more susceptible to COVID-19. Protect the health of our community by continuing decarceration efforts at the Adult Detention Center and Adult Correctional Facility.
3. Increase funding for the Public Defender's office. Everyone deserves adequate representation and speedy justice.
4. Prioritize employment experience from defense side of the justice system. The prospect of retirements and transitions in key leadership positions present a unique opportunity to hire leaders, especially leaders of color, whose professional experience connects directly with communities often targeted by the justice system. Avoid privileging staff from current systems such as County Attorneys' Offices or the bench. Public Defenders, defense attorneys, and the formerly incarcerated should be among targeted recruitment groups.
5. Develop a robust recruitment pool by creating new paid pathways into employment for people of color and develop a non-traditional, creative, and inclusive recruitment strategy. People of diverse backgrounds and experience have to be part of the solution, including people who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system (e.g., individuals with histories of incarceration and/or community supervision).

Memo

To: Commissioner Greene, Chair, Hennepin County Board of Commissioners
David Hough, County Administrator

From: Latasha Jennings, Chair.
Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council

Date: April 19, 2021

Re: REAC recommendations for County action regarding the death of Daunte Wright

The Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC) condemns the killing of Daunte Wright by a, now former, Brooklyn Center police officer and the aggressive and unnecessary policing methods that led to the traffic stop and set in motion his death. Those aggressive policing methods have resulted in increased hurt and trauma in our communities, especially BIPOC communities, and continues to cause stress in these communities especially the residents of Brooklyn Center.

The Hennepin County Board of Commissioners has declared racism a public health crisis. Police violence is one of the leading causes of death for black men in the United States (Edwards, Lee & Esposito, 2019). We call on the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners and County Administration to strongly condemn the death of Daunte Wright, provide immediate support to the traumatized community and conduct a Race Equity analysis of policing in Hennepin County. Acknowledge that the problem is actions against BIPOC by police, BIPOC communities and people are not the problem.

The Race Equity Advisory Council also calls on the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners and County Administrator to take the following actions:

1. Handling of protests and free speech: Race Equity Advisory Council Members have witnessed the indiscriminate use of projectiles and teargas on nonviolent protesters. This has heightened tensions, added trauma, and further undermines our community's ability to grieve. It also entrenches divisions and undermines trust between elected leaders, police, and community.

In addition, it is our understanding, that protestors are being held without being charged or given bail -- a right the white officer accused of taking a life was given immediately. If we are going to move forward

as a community of racial equality and equity, transparency, and trust, we must actively rectify these wrongs.

Recommended action:

- Any protestor currently in custody should be released.
- Immediately end the use of tear gas, chemical irritants and projectiles and permanently ban violence of any sort against peaceful protestors exercising their first amendment rights. A [study](#) on the use of non-lethal weapons during the protests after the murder of George Floyd found that they cause serious injuries: “Although less-lethal weapons are designed as an alternative to lethal weapons, we found a substantial number of patients with serious injuries, including many injuries to the head, neck, and face” NEJM.

2. Immediate support for individuals and families living near the Brooklyn Center Police Department: Tear gas used by the police adversely affected and traumatized residents living in [apartment buildings](#) adjacent to the police department. Several days of exposure to these chemicals can have delayed and long-term effects on people in these apartments, especially children and pregnant women. Many people have had to use their limited resources to pay to live elsewhere because their homes and furnishings have been saturated by the toxic gases. The toxic stress of these events along with lifetime of worry for the safety of black and brown children has created a community in distress.

Last week was black maternal health week. According to the [CDC](#), Black, American Indian, and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women – and this disparity increases with age. It is ironic that during the same week many black women have been exposed to chemicals that could have adverse effects on their pregnancy.

Recommended actions: The County and City must create a one-year plan to support those affected that includes the following:

- Pay rent for affected households and offer alternate living locations until they are safe to return to their homes;
 - Provide wrap around mental health services to affected households;
 - Provide emergency supports such as food, health care and cash assistance.
3. Racism in MN, especially in the police departments: The dehumanizing of BIPOC communities and hyper and aggressive policing of nonwhites has created a situation where people do not feel safe, are afraid and stressed. There is disproportionate killing, incarceration, and police action against BIPOC people. The negative reaction of the general public and the focus of police on the looting of a store far surpasses the reaction to the killing of a BIPOC person.

Structural racism creates the conditions for BIPOC to encounter police more than white people.

The intent of officers does not matter. Racism is the reason these encounters happen. Racism operates in two ways: by structuring opportunity and by assigning value (Dr. Camara Jones).

Deadly encounters between BIPOC communities and police are minimized, and inaction in the face of need is how structural racism is created and sustained. [Blacks](#) and [American Indians](#) are three times more likely than white people to be killed during a police encounter; other people of color also have disproportionate [negative](#) outcomes in police encounters.

It is imperative that the extreme, harsh and fatal tactics used against BIPOC people end. When crime is committed, we demand the integrity of due process to be used from beginning to end. The care of HUMANITY should be the priority. We want all members of BIPOC community to go through the judicial process and have the legal system determine their consequence instead of being judged in the middle of the street.

Recommended actions: There are several ways the County can be impactful:

- Name the problem—pervasive and insidious racism;
- Conduct an in-depth review of laws, systems, policies, and procedures and take swift and concrete action to make changes to protect BIPOC individually and structurally;
- Recognize that different standards exist for officers and residents based on their race and create a fair system;
- Support moving this case to Keith Ellison and the State Attorney General's office so the officer is charged fairly and justice is served;
- Support meaningful and substantive legislation including the package regarding police reforms in the Omnibus bill. Put the weight of the entire County behind passing these reforms;
- Support efforts by community and civic organizations that are working on police reform in MN;
- Armed police should not be used for low level traffic stops and arrests for low level infractions that disproportionately target people of color, are dangerous, racist and promote unnecessary practices that don't aid public safety, but instead result in predictable violence and death for Black men like Daunte Wright. (MN ACLU);
- Decriminalize minor offenses and change the laws so police cannot stop people for minor offenses such as objects hanging from mirrors;
- According to the Department of Vehicle Service, 1000s of drivers in MN have expired tabs due to the pandemic; yet the laws allow police to stop people for these offenses which disparately impact low income and diverse neighborhoods.

4. Support communities in need of healing: A highly traumatized community that is attempting to heal by expressing their sorrow among people like them is attacked instead of being supported. Pointing guns, hurling projectiles and tear gassing will not help communities or individuals heal.

For example, the community was forced to cancel a planned a peaceful vigil because the Governor declared a 7 p.m. curfew without much notice. People peacefully engaging in their first amendment right to protest about another senseless killing of a young person should be supported, not met with opposition.

Recommendation action: Support and protect the community that is grieving and attempting to heal by processing their grief among affected people who look like them and have similar experiences. Provide as much support to a grieving community as is being provided to the former police officer whose home is protected by police and barriers. This can be accomplished in several ways:

- Establish professional restorative services to help the community deal with their grief and anger such as healing circles;
- Recognize the inaction by government to support businesses. Many businesses had to use their limited resources to board up their buildings. The County and its partners must be proactive and support the community to prepare for crises;
- The aggression and errors of police have hurt communities badly and created immense loss of property. Create a way to compensate those who have suffered loss;
- Communities cannot distinguish between the different law enforcement entities. They see a militarized environment that triggers fear. Create and support community-based solutions rooted in prevention, de-escalation, and mediation, not aggression.

The REAC represents a variety of voices from around Hennepin County who are experiencing different aspects of trauma facing this community. The above recommendations are a combination of those voices -- voices you have requested to hear. Accordingly, we request the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners and County Administration to listen intently and act.

Appendix 5: 2020-2021 Committees and members

Child Protection	Civic Engagement	Climate Action	Housing	Justice
Biiftuu Adam	Amani Berry	Debjyoti Dwivedi	Deran Cadotte	Amani Berry
Mahogany Ellis-Crutchfield (Chair)	Sheila Webb (Chair)	Deran Cadotte (Chair)	Larry Hiscock (Chair)	Biiftuu Adam
		Johnathon McClellan	Mukul Nautiyal	Johnathon McClellan (Chair)
			Tekia Jefferson	Mahogany Ellis-Crutchfield
				Miamon Queeglay
				Latasha Jennings (Former member and chair)

Appendix 6: Resource people who presented at REAC meetings or in committees

Committee presenters/participants

Name	Organization	Committee
Joan Granger- Kopesky	Hennepin County staff	Child Protection
Kelis Houston	Village Arms	Child Protection
Michelle Lefebvre	Hennepin County staff	Child Protection
Nathan Graham	Hennepin County staff	Civic Engagement
Barbara Jeanetta	Alliance Housing	Housing Committee
Cindy Mohs	US Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	Housing Committee
Ed Goetz	Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)	Housing Committee
Henry Rucker	Project for Pride in Living (PPL)	Housing Committee
Jeff Washburne	City of Lakes Community Land Trust	Housing Committee
Julia Well Ayres	Hennepin County staff	Housing Committee
Kat Vann	Beacon Interfaith	Housing Committee
Kevin Dockry	Hennepin County staff	Housing Committee
Lee Blons	Beacon Interfaith	Housing Committee
Markus Klimenko	Hennepin County staff	Housing Committee
Nathan Johnson	4RM+ULA	Housing Committee
Patrick Troska	Phillips Family Foundation/consultant	Housing Committee
Peter McLaughlin	Local Initiatives Support Corporation	Housing Committee
Paola Sánchez-Garrett	4RM+ULA	Housing Committee
Del Shea Perry	Community member	Justice Committee
Rep Mohamud Noor	Elected Official	Justice Committee
Jerald Moore	Hennepin County staff	Justice Committee
Judge Kappelhoff	Hennepin County District Court	Justice Committee

Race Equity Advisory Council Monthly Meeting: Presenters/resource people

Aug 20	Commissioner Conley	Welcome
Aug 21	David Hough	Welcome
Aug 21	Chet Cooper	Welcome
Aug 21	Amy Schrempp	Welcome
Sep 20	Commissioner Greene	Welcome
Sep 20	Ge Lee	Introduction to Disparity Reduction and Racial Equity Impact Tool (REIT)
Sep 20	De'Vonna Pittman	Introduction to Disparity Reduction and Racial Equity Impact Tool (REIT)
Sep 21	Chet Cooper	Pathways programs
Oct 20	Dave Lawless	County budget and finance process
Oct 20	Amy Schrempp	Domain priorities
Oct 20	Mercy Das	REIT and domains
Nov 20	Julia Welle Ayres	Housing domain
Nov 20	David Hewitt	Housing domain
Nov 20	Rosemary Levin	Climate Action Plan
Dec 20	Christa Mims	Education domain
Dec 20	Michael Rossman	Human Resources
Dec 20	Chela Guzman-Wiegert	Education domain
Jan 21	Kareem Murphy	Legislative platform and process
Feb 21	Commissioner Anderson	Meet and greet
Feb 21	Commissioner Goettel	Meet and greet
Feb 21	Nimisha Nagalia	Voter engagement and outreach
Feb 21	Kathy Pederson	President, League of Women Voters Crystal, New Hope, East Plymouth, Robbinsdale
Feb 21	Joann Brown	Voter Services, League of Women Voters, Crystal, New Hope, East Plymouth, Robbinsdale
Feb 21	Michelle Jayne	Membership chair, League of Women Voters, Crystal, New Hope, East Plymouth, Robbinsdale
Feb 21	Ginny Gelms	Voter engagement and outreach
Mar 21	Commissioner Lunde	Meet and greet

Appendix 6: Resource people who presented at REAC meetings or in committees

Apr 21	Kelsey Dawson Walton	Community engagement
Apr 21	Alisa Salewski	Community engagement
Apr 21	Vinodh Kutty	Community engagement
Apr 21	Jean Heyer	Community engagement
Apr 21	Maggie Heurung	Community engagement
Apr 21	Pa-Shie Vang	Community engagement
Apr 21	Hue Lee	Community engagement
Apr 21	Joan Vanhala	Community engagement
May 21	Commissioner LaTondresse	Meet and greet
May 21	Chela Guzman-Wiegert	Use of REIT in the budget process
Jun 21	Commissioner Conley	Meet and greet
Jun 21	Commissioner Greene	Meet and greet
Jul 21	Commissioner Fernando	Meet and greet

Appendix 7: REAC questions for county departments

Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council
Safety/Justice Committee
Questions for the Sheriff's Office and County Attorney's Office

Sheriff's Office

Complaint process

- If a community member has a complaint what is the process for filing a complaint?
- What mechanism does the Sheriff's Office use to address complaints against deputies?
 - Does the public have any role in that mechanism?
 - Are complaints about deputies made easily available to the public (such as putting them on your webpage) pursuant to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Ch. 13?
- What is the treatment of a complaint once it is filed?
- What are your policies and procedures for prosecuting law enforcement who are involved in critical incidents?

Community engagement

- How does the Sheriff's Office work with the community to address concerns of the community?
- What kind of community outreach does your office do, and what communities does it do them in?

Hiring and racial composition

- What is the racial makeup of the Sheriff's Office and how do you recruit?
- What is the hiring process for Hennepin County officers? Provide the hiring records for every stage of the hiring process. We'd also like the data to include demographic information such as race as filled by the applicant.
 - Application
 - Interview stage
 - Psych exam
 - Hiring

Health care for those in the justice system

- What are the protocols and/or policies when a person is under the care of a physician in a hospital for procuring an arrest?
- Who does the HCSO use to provide medical services?
- When a medical person working in the HCSO indicates that an inmate needs medical services, are there any roadblocks for the inmate to get the help requested?
- What services around mental health do you provide?
- Who does the HCSO use to provide mental health services? Who do you contract with for those services?
- What is the level of training of any mental health professionals?
- How many mental health professionals work with HCAO?
- What kind of assessment is used, if any, for screening for mental health?
- Are there any cross-over of records from overdose incidents that turn into arrests? Does that information end up on the police report?
- When a jail inmate dies in Minnesota, counties typically investigate themselves and find they did nothing wrong, despite evidence to the contrary. Will Hennepin County commit to having independent investigations of jail deaths?

- What are your policies on use of force during crowd control?
 - The use of chemical agents
 - The use of flash bangs

County Attorney's Office

- Why is it that your office rarely prosecutes law enforcement excessive force incidents even though some would easily have met the violent gross misdemeanor/felony threshold? It is our belief that doing so would reduce the incidents of excessive force, including incidents of deadly force.
- Why did your office promote the narrative in your charging document that George Floyd's medical conditions contributed to his death?
- When you receive reports from the BCA on law enforcement critical incidents, how many reviews of these reports does your office do? Was your office aware, for example, that even though your report of the shooting of Thurman Blevins stated that he fired on officers, this was disproven by the video and lack of a casing from his gun on the scene and, further, that neither the medical examiner nor the BCA tested his hands or clothing for gunshot residue? Why was that disproven statement included in your report?
- What are your policies and procedures for prosecuting law enforcement who are involved in critical incidents?
- What is the racial makeup of the County Attorney's Office?
- Does the County Attorney's Office do any community service work?

- Does the county work in the schools and communities, to mentor students within Hennepin County to work within the HCAO?
- Does the HCAO receive any training on restorative justice?
- Does the HCAO have a process for determining rehabilitation of ex-offenders?
- What are your policies and procedures for prosecuting law enforcement who are involved in critical incidents?
- What is the level of work the HCAO does with the police?
 - What do these relationships look like?

Human Resources

- The Race Equity Advisory Council's Justice Committee would like a BIPOC breakdown of staff in the County Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office, Public Defender's Office and DOCCR separately.
- What is the comparison of Hennepin County employee salaries: Females and males, people of color and White? Average salary of male, female, person of color and White? Representation in salary range. (e.g.: \$40,000 - \$50,000 – how many females, males, White, people of color)?
- Summary of Local Equity Pay Act
- What is the disparity of satisfaction for BIPOC employees from satisfaction surveys? Could you share employee satisfaction data by gender and race?
- Request for number of BIPOC women who are managers.
- Retention for Pathways is 89%; what is the retention rate for BIPOC staff?
- Data on men of color and leadership positions.
- For BIPOC in leadership positions, what are their salaries compared to their White colleagues?
- Do pay disparities exist between county employees by race and gender -- for leadership positions and for other levels of work?
- I often question the fidelity and authenticity of pay equity when it comes to diverse groups of women and their experience with very profound gaps in pay, specifically when it pertains to ageism and disabilities. Could you provide data for Hennepin County?

Contact information

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