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July 27, 2020

The Honorable Senator Richard Pan  
State Capitol, Room 5114  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SCR 92 (Pan) Racism as a public health crisis**  
**AAP-CA Position: Support**

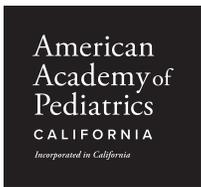
Dear Senator Pan:

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA), representing over 5,000 California pediatricians, strongly supports your proposed legislation SCR 92 as introduced on June 25, 2020. This bill would declare racism a public health crisis, and would direct the legislature to examine whether policies play a role in upholding racist systems, and secure resources to address the problem.

Racism is a core determinant of health. The root causes of racial health inequities are the extensive array of structures, policies, and norms that lead to inequitable access to opportunities and resources, and systematic disadvantage of individuals and communities due to their outward appearance. The AAP statement on the Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health describes racism as “a socially transmitted disease passed down through generations, leading to the inequities observed in our population today.” As pediatricians, we see the impact of this system every day manifested as inequitable burdens of stress, chronic disease, and overall well-being.

The everyday stress inflicted by racism results in lifelong physiologic changes that starts in childhood, eventually leading to increased rates of heart disease, stroke, obesity, and other chronic diseases. These stresses in mothers lead to increased risk of infant mortality and infants being born with low birth weight, passing on disadvantages to subsequent generations. Government supported housing discrimination and racist lending policies have constrained Black American and Latinx children to live in neighborhoods with worse air pollution, higher levels of pesticide and lead contamination, and limited access to safe play spaces and healthy foods. Inequitable access to high quality educational opportunities creates further barriers to academic success, and education level is strongly associated with future income potential and overall health status.

Racist policing policies have led to disproportionate arrests and deaths at the hands of law enforcement. Furthermore, bail and sentencing guidelines result in an inequitable burden of incarceration on youth and adults of color. Incarceration itself leads to further trauma as well as loss of voice in voting. These policies and others result in children of color being raised without one or more parents, with lower income potential, and with the additional trauma associated with being justice-involved. I have seen our Black and Latinx patients being taken out of school and placed into the criminal justice system for minor offenses,



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leading to trauma, loss of food and social supports from school, and further widening the education gap.

More recently we have seen the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander communities. COVID-19 death rates are 3 to 6 times higher for Black Americans than the general population. Financial strain, unemployment, and workplace exposures have disproportionately impacted these groups. In my practice I have seen families in crisis. Many are essential worker parents struggling to balance the risk of COVID-19 exposure to their families, and making an income. Some of the families do not have access to COVID-19 cash assistance because one parent does not have a valid social security number, and others are domestic workers. Even those who are eligible for assistance are fearful of accessing services due to concerns it may affect their immigration status.

In our health care systems, we see the policies and practices interwoven into the structures supporting racism. Practice guidelines, medical education resources, and race-based lab references continue to uphold erroneous beliefs that differences in health are attributable to biologic reasons or patient behaviors. We must start reversing this course and begin the process of repairing the damage done by racism so all children and future generations can thrive. Similarly, the legislature should formally recognize the responsibility that policymakers have in analyzing laws, regulations, and enforcement guidance for potential contributions to structural racism. This furthermore highlights the obligation of our state's leaders to dismantle and counteract the racist effects of such policies.

Pediatricians across the state strongly support SCR 92. We thank you for your leadership on behalf of the health and well-being of children, youth, and families in California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Wu".

Susan Wu, MD FAAP  
Member, State Government Affairs Committee  
American Academy of Pediatrics, California

CC: AAP-CA Leadership; Lydia Bourne