

March 18, 2021

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

SB 17 (Pan) Racism as a Public Health Crisis
AAP-CA Position: SUPPORT

Dear Senator Pan,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA) representing the over 3,000 pediatrician members of California AAP Chapters 1, 3 and 4 strongly support SB 17, as amended on February 25, 2021, which would establish an Office of Racial Equity to coordinate, analyze, develop, evaluate, and recommend strategies for advancing racial equity.

The root causes of racial health inequities lie in 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. National AAP's 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." ("The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health," *Pediatrics*, August 2019.) 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 start 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 African-American and Latinx children to live in neighborhoods with more air pollution, higher levels of pesticide and lead contamination, and limited access to safe play spaces and healthy foods. Inequitable access to 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. 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. More recently we have seen the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on BiPOC communities. COVID-19 death rates are 3 to 6 times higher for African-Americans than the general population. Financial strain, unemployment, and workplace exposures have disproportionately impacted these groups.

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

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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 of California AAP Chapters 1, 3 and 4 across the state strongly support SB 17. Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and wellbeing of children, youth, and families in California.

Sincerely,



Nancy Graff, MD FAAP
Member, State Government Affairs Committee
American Academy of Pediatrics, California

cc: AAP Leadership