

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

Board calls racism public health crisis

New panel to ID policies, address effects on health care, law and justice, and economics

By **Sandra Emerson**

semerson@scng.com

@ReporterSandraE on Twitter

Racism has been declared a public health crisis in San Bernardino County.

The Board of Supervisors made the declaration Tuesday after two meetings of discussions and comments from faith

leaders, activists and members of the Black community.

"I urge everyone involved in this monumental opportunity for change to think big," Supervisor Josie Gonzales said. "I want to enable you all to bring the 24 cities, bring the mayors on board. Find new leaders within your community who will run for office

in the future. Let's get everything we've got on the table, and let's make this new opportunity work."

On June 10, supervisors voted to add "equity" as the 11th element of its Countywide Vision, a blueprint for the county's future. They also voted to form a group of community members and experts to identify policies and programs to address the effects of racism in health care, law and justice, and economic op-

portunity in the county.

The move was sparked by nationwide civil unrest and protests over police brutality and systemic racism after the death of George Floyd, 46, on May 25. Floyd, a Black man, died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for 8 minutes, 46 seconds.

San Bernardino County's declaration acknowledges that racism results in disparities in family stability, health

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and mental wellness, education, employment, economic development, public safety, criminal justice and housing among the Black community and communities of color.

Racism causes physical and behavioral health conditions as well as geographic segregation disproportionately exposing people of color to lead poisoning, poor air quality, inadequate nutrition and under-resourced recreational health care facilities, according to the resolution.

While the county's Black population is about 9%, members of that community account for a disproportionate number of jail bookings and of the homeless population. Black students also face lower math and English proficiency rates as well as career and college readiness compared to all students, according to the resolution.

In a statement after the meeting, board Chairman Curt Hagman called the declaration an important first step.

"Thanks to the partnership and support of several community members and organizations, my colleagues and I became the first county in California to declare racism as a public health crisis, and I sincerely hope we are not the last," he said. "Through today's action, we built a foundation for positive change throughout the county and encourage our 24 cities to join us."

Speakers returned to the board chambers Tuesday to urge supervisors to make the declaration.

"It's a beautiful thing to feel change happening in full effect, meaning there is hope for humanity and the future, where my peers and I won't fear bringing out children into such a dangerous world that will just dehumanize them," said Mabel Morris-Dugbartey, a Fontana resident and college advisor with the Blue Educational Foundation in

San Bernardino. "Where as the beautiful Black woman I am, I won't fear running errands by myself because a racist terrorist group runs the streets freely, where my family and I won't fear my brother and his friends going out to the mall without being racially profiled."

Social injustice is all around us, Morris-Dugbartey said.

"If you say it's not, you must not have eyes," Morris-Dugbartey said. "It's time for change. In fact, it's been time for change, but now we're fed up. Steps are being made. Progress is in full effect and we'll continue to fight until we're treated as the amazing human beings we are."

Gonzales asked the community to have an open mind and to support law enforcement.

"This is not a time to put each other down," Gonzales said. "This is a time to look and see where can we improve, where can we change, where can we re-mold, where can we re-direct."