



Remarks of Susan West Levine, CEO of Lowell Community Health Center Before the Lowell City Council Reaffirming Racism Is A Public Health Crisis

Thank you. I am Sue Levine, CEO of Lowell Community Health Center.

I stand here with Sheila Fernandez Och, Chief Engagement and Equity Officer, Bruce Robinson, Lowell CHC Board of Directors Chair, Dr. Robert Marlin, Chief of Family Medicine & Metta Health Center, and members of our team.

We appreciate your effort to work together on addressing racism – an issue that is so important for our community. Reopening this discussion is a step forward.

We are here to ask that you amend and modify this motion to state that racism IS a “Public Health Crisis.”

We understand that the language in this motion attempts to unify the Council to address racism while also diffusing and avoiding labeling the city as racist. It is important to understand that declaring racism a public health crisis is **NOT** a label for our city. It is the **opposite**. It is an acknowledgment of centuries of laws, regulations and policies that have historically oppressed our nation’s people of color. Structural racism manifests in every city, town, and community. Lowell is not immune.

On June 17th, 2020, our Lowell CHC Board of Directors, took a stance and declared Racism as a Public Health Crisis and implemented a Board Resolution on Racial Equity that



guides our work to this day. By making this declaration, it empowered us to look at our own structures, make changes, and hold ourselves accountable to our patients and community. The same will be true for the City if you modify this motion.

As publicly stated, the existing motion looks to make investments in four key areas: public health, education & training, socioeconomic equity, and generational wealth-building opportunities... These are all vitally important. Of equal importance, we also ask that an area be explicitly added directing the city to work **more closely** with community organizations to better understand the current situation and work **together** to enact changes. **We stand ready to help.**

I'd like to take a minute to explain why we are continuing to declare that racism **IS** a public health crisis.

The social determinants of health, including racism, economic security, food security, educational attainment, community safety, housing and more have a clear and direct impact on health. Those facts are well known and clear.

Racism, as a social determinant of health, has a very direct and lasting influence on the health of individuals and families throughout Lowell. As a result of the trauma inflicted by racism and the purposeful disinvestment in their social and economic well-being, **many people of color live with disproportionately higher rates of chronic stress, chronic disease, maternal & infant mortality, and so many other conditions not trending in the right direction.**

Our most recent example of how racism is linked to health as a public health crisis ---- is the impact of COVID 19. We all witnessed it firsthand, right here in Lowell. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the **rate of positive cases was 3x higher for Black and LatinX** residents than the rate for White non-LatinX. They also experienced higher rates of death **in every age group** compared to their white counterparts.

This **is** an issue in Lowell – **today**. It's because of this that we are asking you to modify your motion, and add clear language that **racism IS a public health crisis** and to more directly and clearly involve community organizations in the City's process.

Racism **IS** a Public Health Crisis, and we will work tirelessly until one day it is not.

Again, thank you for your consideration.