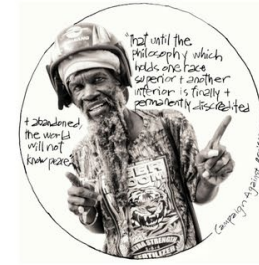




SOCIAL MEDICINE CONSORTIUM



June 9, 2020

Dear Members of the US House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee:

For far too long, our country has allowed commercial interests to exploit our workers while simultaneously failing to provide basic protections to strengthen our society and improve our standing in the world. Weaponized discrimination against communities of color has historically abetted the criminalization and marginalization of minority groups, while distracting from the exploitation of workers of all colors and creeds. The tragically outsized impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color demonstrates just how deep these inequities have cut into our national fabric, and how far we have to go in healing the wounds of racialized capitalism.

Minnesota continues to rank as one of the worst states for racial inequality in the nation, as a direct result of racialized capitalism. The median black family in the Twin Cities area earns half of the median white family income; this income gap is the second largest in the nation. Before the pandemic, black unemployment in Minnesota was still double the white unemployment rate. While about three-quarters of white families in the Twin Cities own homes, only about one-quarter of black families do. This area has a long history of "racial covenants", which were specifically designed to prevent black families from becoming homeowners and living in white neighborhoods. In 2019, the incarceration rate of black Americans in the Twin Cities area was 11 times that of whites.

The disparities in Minnesota are reflected in the actions of the Minneapolis Police Department. According to a 2015 report from the American Civil Liberties Union, in Minneapolis, Black people were "8.7 times more likely than whites were to be arrested for low-level offenses." Black people have accounted for more than 60% of the victims in Minneapolis police shootings in the last 10 years. The time for change is now. Community-led organizations such as the Black Visions Collective (a Black-led, queer- and trans-centering organization), MPD150, and Reclaim the Block are leading the fight towards police abolition. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department, the Minneapolis City Council committed to dismantling the city's Police Department. We must support abolition of the Minneapolis Police Department, for the safety and health of our black communities.

We would like to add that the disproportionate number of Covid-19 cases within communities of color in Minnesota has nothing to do with "genetics" and everything to do with the serious biological consequences of racism. One is not more prone to developing hypertension, diabetes, or obesity, the comorbidities that appear to increase the risk of poor outcomes from Covid-19, because of the color of

one's skin. The day-to-day exposure to racism creates unmitigated stress. The body responds to this by making changes in the function of the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal gland axis, autonomic nervous system, metabolic/endocrine system, and the immunological system. This leads to chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and compromised immune system function. We need to stop the moral narrative surrounding "lifestyle" as the driver of chronic disease and start addressing the real problem that is creating the disparities we are seeing in this pandemic: Racism.

Given the abysmal state of the social determinants of health among the black communities and communities of color in Minnesota, it is clear that the pandemic will continue to ravage and exacerbate these disparities, until families can rely on universal basic income, abolition of police, universal health care, reparations for all Black Americans and investment in children and families of color.

We thank the committee for addressing the issue of racial disparity as laid bare by the COVID pandemic. This conversation is the beginning, but real change must be backed by financial investment. The budgetary commitment of the Ways and Means Committee is urgently awaited. Together we can leave health disparities behind us, and emerge from this pandemic with renewed strength.

Our recommendations are as follows:

Universal Basic Income

Defund police and redirect funding towards community programs (<https://www.8toabolition.com/recommendations>)

Universal healthcare

Reparations for all Black Americans

Investment in children and families of color

People's Bailout (more info on the 5 demands here: <https://thepeoplesbailout.org/home/#newmode-embed-6879-17802>)

Sincerely,

Social Medicine Consortium, Minnesota Chapter, Campaign Against Racism