

**Subject:** COVID-19 and Legislating Using a Racial Equity Lens

**Date:** Monday, March 23, 2020 at 2:11:35 PM Eastern Daylight Time

**From:** McDuffie, Kenyan (Council)

**To:** Members Only (COUNCIL)

Dear Colleagues:

I would like to take a moment to thank you and your staffs for your tremendous efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic which is taking a serious toll on our city. I was especially proud of how quickly we all came together to draft and pass the emergency relief bill last Tuesday. As we monitor implementation of the programs created by the emergency measure that we recently passed as well as move forward to consider additional ways to mitigate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on our local economy, I want to reinforce the importance, now more than ever, of legislating using a racial equity lens.

As the saying goes, when white America catches a cold, Black America catches the flu. While many experts are conveying coronavirus warnings as though they will impact Americans equally, it is more likely that this pandemic will hit the poor, communities of color, and minority-owned businesses the hardest.

We know that people of color are more likely to be uninsured or underinsured, may not have a primary care physician or access to transportation, childcare, or to technology required to stay connected. Recent reports estimate that unemployment may reach 20 to 30 percent nationally, so we should assume that those numbers will be even higher for communities of color.

We also know that it is harder for communities of color to socially distance. Just the other day, I drove through a neighborhood in my ward and saw lots of young people congregating. Many people of color live in cities, dense neighborhoods, or public housing, while others experience persistent housing insecurity or homelessness. Our families tend to be larger and more than one generation may live under one roof, exposing vulnerable adults to frequent interactions with others inside of their home.

History demonstrates that inequitable government responses to disasters have led to recoveries that exacerbate existing disparities and contribute to displacement of individuals and businesses in communities of color. As the coronavirus spreads and the public health emergency persists, I hope that we will continue to work collaboratively, paying special attention to the impact that this disease and the response to its spread may have on communities of color as well as on minority- and women-owned businesses. We should follow the guidance of GARE/Race Forward to “dispel myths and racist misinformation, to collectively work to create a system-wide response needed to end the spread of this communicable disease, and to address the needs of marginalized populations while stamping out stigma and blame.”

Again, thank you for your tireless efforts and let us ensure that any further emergency measures that we consider during this public health emergency utilize a racial equity lens.

Regards,

krm