

April 29, 2020

Governor Ned Lamont
Office of the Governor
State of Connecticut
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106
Via email

Dear Governor Lamont,

We are grateful that Connecticut has worked hard to contain and manage the current crisis and to acknowledge disparities in access to services such as COVID-19 testing. As the state begins to plan for reopening and recovery, it is imperative that the needs of underserved communities are intentionally contemplated and incorporated in response and recovery efforts. To this end, we ask you to create a COVID-19 Equity Task Force.

People of color in Connecticut face disproportionate social and economic strain, illness, and death. It follows that the recovery period will be particularly challenging for these communities. **Intentionally designating a task force to consider how policies and programs could impact underserved communities is an important step towards mitigating disparities.**

While members of existing advisory groups surely have knowledge of health and economic disparities, at present no individual or group has been tasked with applying an equity lens to these efforts. Michigan and Massachusetts offer examples of how inclusion is being operationalized in other states. The Michigan Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities was [created by executive order](#) and is comprised of 3 government officials and 24 members of underserved communities. This group engages in outreach and advises the governor on policy solutions to inequities related to the pandemic. Massachusetts has a statewide [Emergency Task Force on Coronavirus and Equity](#) supported by a nonprofit organization and the Mayor of Boston has convened a COVID-19 Health Inequities Task Force to advise the city on data analysis, testing, and health services for residents who are Black, Latino, Asian or immigrants. We urge you to follow these examples and adopt a similar model to inform Connecticut's recovery and preparedness planning to safeguard against unintentional harm and failure to reach disadvantaged groups.

Specifically, we recommend that a COVID-19 Equity Task Force:

- include representation from diverse communities;
- be structured to support meaningful influence; and
- be linked to or embedded in other advisory bodies, such as the Reopen CT Advisory Group.

We further recommend that the task force make recommendations regarding:

- data collection and transparency to monitor and evaluate disparities;
- reducing barriers to COVID-19 testing and medical and behavioral health care during the crisis and recovery period; and
- promoting equity by modifying existing supports and adopting long-term recovery efforts.

When we operate within our current structures, our default is to assume the needs of all communities are represented by the average experience and, as a result, to create programs and structures that unintentionally exacerbate existing inequities. For example, [current discussions](#) about contact tracing have included technology that is unlikely to be used by low-income communities due to limited data plans, limited devices per household, and distrust of state and health systems; and implicit bias may result

in limited tests for COVID-19 being less likely to be given to people of color. Unless we ensure that contact tracing and other initiatives are linguistically and culturally appropriate, the health disparities faced by low-income communities of color are likely to grow.

We urge you to ensure that recovery efforts are inclusive and, again, we are grateful for all you and your team have done to mitigate the impact of this pandemic. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

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