



Unity Group of Chattanooga

For Immediate Release:

May 17th, 2020

Cc: Resolution on COVID-19 Remedies

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a grave and imminent public health risk, with more than 1.4 million documented cases and 90,000 recorded fatalities in the United States alone; and

WHEREAS, early data released by the CDC have reported that African- Americans have accounted for nearly 30 percent of all COVID-19 related cases, and fully 1/3 of all COVID-19 deaths; and

WHEREAS, racial ethnic groups are experiencing a disproportionately higher level of COVID-19 transmissions, infections and deaths including widespread outbreaks in LATINX communities and in the Sioux and Navajo indigenous nations; and

WHEREAS, pre- COVID-19, African- Americans and communities of color had already suffered significant health disparities at disproportionate levels due to numerous preexisting and underlying conditions which include: hypertension, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, sickle cell, cancer, chronic lung syndromes (asthma), stroke (cerebrovascular disease), HIV and other severe medical ailments, many because of the lack of environmental justice; and

WHEREAS, in the research study, "COVID-19 Racial Disparities in U.S. Counties," amFar, the PATH's Center for Vaccine Innovation and Access and researchers at Emory, John Hopkins, Georgetown and the University of Mississippi found that majority black U. S. counties, "accounted for nearly half of COVID-19 cases and 58% of COVID-19 deaths. " They further surmised, "Structural factors including health care access, density of households, unemployment, pervasive discrimination and others drive these disparities, not intrinsic characteristics of black communities or individual-level factors."; and

WHEREAS, the CDC notes that "living conditions" is a primary factor that contributes to the spread of COVID-19 in underserved communities because for many these locations are dense,

racially segregated , multi-generational, in food deserts, and have populations that are overly represented in prisons, jails and juvenile detention centers; and

WHEREAS, the CDC and Bureau of Labor Statistics in the Current Population Survey list working conditions as a primary factor in contracting the virus as workers of color are disproportionately represented in health care, transportation, manufacturing, service industry, agricultural, and other face to face jobs that have not only been deemed as essential but often times fail to provide adequate health insurance and paid sick leave; and

WHEREAS, according to the APM Research Lab, the latest available COVID-19 mortality rate for Black Americans is, "2.2 times higher than the rate for Latinos, 2.3 times higher than the rate for Asians and 2.6 times higher than the rate for Whites." The APM also asserts, "If all Americans had died of COVID-19 at the same rate as White Americans, at least 10,500 Black Americans, 1,400 Latino Americans and 300 Asian Americans would still be alive."; and

WHEREAS, groups such as the National Employment Law Project have stressed the need for "Protecting Worker Safety & Health." These recommendations state that all industries should comply with workplace standards that includes: (1) Social Distancing; (2) Free availability of face masks; (3) Hand Sanitizing, Hand Washing, and Gloves; (4) Regular Disinfection; (5) Increase ventilation rates; (6) Notification of Workers on confirmed COVID cases; and (7) Deep Cleaning after Confirmed Cases. This also includes whistleblower protections and the right to refuse to work under dangerous conditions; and

WHEREAS, in the critical analysis ROADMAP TO PANDEMIC RESILIENCE, Harvard University stated that the country needs to deliver 5 million tests per day by early June to deliver a safe social reopening, and that number will need to increase over time (ideally by late July) to 20 million a day to fully remobilize the economy; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Unity Group calls upon the Hamilton County Government and Hamilton County Department of Health to work in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration in order to find meaningful solutions that would help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in communities of color, and those that are disadvantaged, vulnerable and underserved; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, we agree and call for the recommendations that the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law has submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services and call for these to be subsequently enacted by the Hamilton County Department of Health:

- "Prompt release of all existing data related to COVID-19 tests for all by race and ethnicity because in the absence of this data, officials and lawmakers are not properly equipped to develop targeted and tailored public health responses and strategies to address barriers to testing and the unique needs and concerns of communities of color. "
- "Prioritize ongoing release of comprehensive, complete and robust race and ethnicity data collection for all tests, cases and outcomes."
- "Develop concrete action plans to address racial disparities in Black communities and other communities of color by targeting these communities to provide free access to widespread testing and healthcare."

FURTHER, we agree with numerous aspects of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition and National Medical Association on the Joint Statement of the Response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 Pandemic: A Public Health Manifesto, and call for these to be speedily implemented:

- "State and local health departments and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) must be required to collect and publicly report COVID-19 testing, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and outcomes data, stratified by demographics (including race, ethnicity, gender, and 9-digit ZIP codes)."
- "To date, less than one-percent (1%) of the population has been tested for COVID-19, and the numbers are skewed based on race and socioeconomic status (SES). Access to testing must be expanded, to ensure timely access to COVID-19 testing stations, and prioritize testing in medically underserved areas, and with populations and neighborhoods impacted by limited/restricted access to public transportation. The expanded use of mobile testing units and providing for "walk-up" testing at drive-up testing stations must be immediately employed to help ensure equitable access to testing for underserved populations. The walk-up capabilities must meet the following requirements: A.) Testing stations should be no more than one quarter mile (5-minute walk) from the nearest operating bus stop, train, or subway station."
- "Information concerning walk-up and drive-up testing stations must be widely disseminated, and must include multilingual, culturally sensitive, public service announcements within African American, Latinx, and American Indian/Alaskan Native communities."

Further, we call for the meat and poultry processing plants in this county, in lieu of the fact that more than 14,000 workers nationally have contracted the virus, to immediately comply with standards as outlined by OSHA, and to implement best practices that have been given by groups

such as the CDC and NELP, which includes: (1) social distancing; (2) Free availability of face masks; (3) Hand Sanitizing, Hand Washing, and Gloves; (4) Regular Disinfection; (5) Increase ventilation rates; (6) Notification of Workers on confirmed COVID cases; and (7) Deep Cleaning after Confirmed Cases; and

Finally, the lack of proactive remedies that would help mitigate the spread of COVID- 19 has been deeply "disconcerting and discombobulating", and is on the path of becoming a botched Reopening if the science, data and evidence provided by medical experts continues to be blatantly disregarded, and if the needs of essential workers and vulnerable populations is left unattended and unaddressed.

Yours in abundance,
Unity Group of Chattanooga
Sherman E. Matthews Jr., Chairman
Eric Atkins, Corresponding Secretary

Suggested Readings:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>
1

https://ehe.amfar.org/inequity?_ga=2.39481315.1921270018.1589750837-736025164.1588724514

<https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race>

<https://www.nelp.org/publication/protecting-worker-safety-health-covid-crisis-state-local-model-policy-response/>

<https://www.ohiochc.org/news/503331/Rainbow-PUSH-Coalition-National-Medical-Association-Response-to-COVID-19-A-Public-Health-Manifesto.htm>