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SB 17 (Pan) Office of Racial Equity

Purpose

SB 17 declares racism a public health crisis and establishes the Office of Racial Equity (ORE) and the Racial Equity Advisory and Accountability Council, in order to address systemic and institutional racism that has resulted in poorer health outcomes and disparities in Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

Background

In the United States, BIPOC have experienced centuries of inequality and systemic, institutionalized racism, beginning when European colonizers stripped tens of millions of indigenous and native people of their identity, culture, language, lifestyle, families, work, history, and traditions. Even as it represents one of the most successful projects of modern democracy, the United States embedded racial inequality, violence, and trauma into its founding document. Numerous studies have identified racism as a root cause of many health disparities, including infant, maternal, and overall mortality. Studies show that chronic stress from individual and systemic acts of racism and discrimination trigger high blood pressure, heart disease, immunodeficiency, and result in accelerated aging. The lived experiences of racism and discrimination, both explicitly and implicitly expressed, contribute to alarmingly disparate health and qualities of life outcomes in BIPOC communities.

Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has made decades of inequities and structural racism even more evident and has disproportionately impacted BIPOC, women, and historically underserved communities. After adjusting for age, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander and Latinx Californians have the highest rates of COVID-19 infection, followed by Multi-Race, Black, and American Indian or Alaska Native Californians. These deep racial inequities are the product of decades of governmental and non-governmental policies and practices.

In recent years, the state has made efforts to acknowledge and confront racial disparities. However, equity has often been treated as an afterthought or as a siloed strategy. To deliver meaningful equitable outcomes, equity must be explicit and centered to address longstanding disparities. The state must play a more active role in dismantling racial inequities, particularly those exacerbated by the pandemic.

Solution

SB 17 establishes the ORE and the Racial Equity Advisory and Accountability Council, which will oversee the new office. The Office of Racial Equity will coordinate and lead the state's strategies for advancing racial equity across state agencies and departments. SB 17 will also require the ORE to develop a Racial Equity Framework for the state and directs state agencies to develop and adopt Racial Equity Action Plans, in order to implement the new statewide framework.

Sponsors: Advancement Project California, Greenlining Institute, Public Health Advocates, NextGen Policy

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