

**ATTORNEY GENERAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
COMMISSION TASK FORCE**

**ON**

**ACT 54- RACIAL DISPARITIES IN STATE  
SYSTEMS**

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**December 15, 2017**



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## Executive Summary

Section 3 of Act 54<sup>1</sup> charges the Attorney General (AGO), together with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and interested stakeholders, with developing a strategy to address racial disparities within the state systems of education, labor and employment, access to housing and healthcare and economic development.

The AGO and HRC held three stakeholder meetings. There was a September meeting in Montpelier, a November meeting in Brattleboro, and a November meeting in Burlington. Attendance ranged from 17 to 33 people. In the Brattleboro and Burlington meetings the AGO and HRC facilitated input using a “turning the curve” results based accountability process for gathering ideas and prioritizing needs as perceived by those present. After these meetings, there was a surprising amount of coalescence around the most important issues that need to be addressed within state systems. The primary over-arching theme was that we will be able to reduce racial disparities by changing the underlying culture of our state with regard to race. The main suggestions for doing this were: 1) teach children from an integrated curriculum<sup>2</sup> that fairly represents both the contributions of People of Color (as well as indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, etc.) while fairly and accurately representing our history of oppression of these groups; 2) educate state employees about implicit bias, White Privilege, White Fragility and White Supremacy; and 3) increase the representation of People of Color in the state and school labor forces by focusing on recruitment, hiring and retention, as well as promotion of People of Color into positions of authority and responsibility on boards, commissions, etc.

Concurrent with these macro level efforts, we need to make changes at the micro level to ensure that the cultures of state agencies and schools do not undermine these efforts. For example, we need to ensure that People of Color feel welcome, supported, and mentored and that they are not subjected to discriminatory behavior by state workers, co-workers, members of the public, or in their communities. We need to market Vermont as a great place, not only to visit, but also to live.

Addressing these issues also furthers other state goals. To the extent that People of Color are the fastest growing demographic in the state, taking steps to be more inclusive in all aspects of our state systems will further economic growth in a time when our workforce is rapidly aging. In other words, equality of opportunity is good for everyone, White, Black and Brown.

To this end, this Report recommends that the State prioritize initiatives to reduce and eliminate racial disparities across state systems much as we have prioritized the opiate crisis. The adoption of indicators or benchmarks and performance measures by each state entity that can address existing disparities within that agency’s purview, and a coordinated approach to data collection, sharing and reporting will result in improved conditions over time.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2018/H.308>

<sup>2</sup> Curriculum in which concepts are embedded rather than teaching about the contributions of white men and addressing others during Black History Month, Women’s History Month, etc.

## Introduction

During the 2017 Legislative Session, with the backdrop of both national and Vermont specific statistics, from police stop, search and arrest data<sup>3</sup> to sentencing data that shows disproportionate numbers of People of Color in our jails and prisons<sup>4</sup>, the Legislature passed Act 54. Act 54 established an advisory panel to examine racial disparities in the criminal and juvenile justice systems and report back to the Legislature with recommendations.

Separately, Section 3 of Act 54 charges the Attorney General, together with the Human Rights Commission and interested stakeholders, with developing a strategy to address racial disparities<sup>5</sup> within the state systems of education, labor and employment, access to housing and healthcare and economic development. This task was the result of testimony that one cannot fully examine and understand the disparities in the criminal and juvenile justice systems without looking at the intersections of systemic racism in other state (and private) systems.

While slavery has been outlawed in this country for over 150 years, the vestiges of it and of Jim Crow remain today in the form of systemic racism. Despite amendments to the United States Constitution and the 1866 Civil Rights Act, which were intended to promote equality of opportunity, that equality remains elusive for many People of Color (POC)<sup>6</sup> both nationally and within Vermont.

The Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and sixties saw enormous progress on issues related to race. Additional laws were enacted to protect the rights of People of Color including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, national origin and religion. Four years later, housing discrimination based on these categories was outlawed by the Fair Housing Act of 1968. While these laws, in theory, provide remedies for intentional discrimination or discrimination that has an adverse impact on particular protected classes, they have not changed the underlying racial oppression. This is because White people continue to control virtually every power structure in the country, including federal, state and local governments and their agencies, corporations, businesses, schools, etc.

When coupled with racial bias, whether it is explicit or implicit, this power of the majority results in the oppression of those in the “minority.” We live in a White Supremacy culture.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Seguino and Brooks, *Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Traffic Stops: Analysis of Vermont State Police Data, 2010-15*; Seguino and Brooks, *Driving While Black and Brown in Vermont: Analysis of Police Data from 30 Agencies*, \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>4</sup> Vermont ranked number 1 in its incarceration rate (rate per 100,000) in 2016 with 1:14 Black men incarcerated. <http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>

<sup>5</sup> Based on feedback from stakeholders, this report also addresses issues related to Vermont’s indigenous population, the Abenaki.

<sup>6</sup> As used in this report, People of Color refers to all groups identified in census data as other than White (non-Hispanic).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dismantlingracism.org/white-supremacy-culture.html> “White supremacy culture is the idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. White supremacy culture is reproduced by all the institutions of our society. In particular the media,

Add to this, White Privilege<sup>8</sup> and White Fragility<sup>9</sup> and we begin to see how difficult it is to escape the current cycle despite a “belief” in equality of access and opportunity. For example, studies show that the difference in wealth accumulation of White households compared to Black households has actually increased since the 2009 recession. In 2010 White people had eight (8) times the wealth of Black people; by 2013 the rate was 13 times according to a Pew Research Center analysis of data from the Federal Reserve’s Survey of Consumer Finances.<sup>10</sup> Thus there is far more to be done to address disparities than simply passing some laws and letting nature take its course.

In Vermont, the second whitest state in the United States, it is fair to say that all of the power structures in the state are in the hands of White people. Many of the comments from stakeholders were focused on the need to have better representation of POC in prominent positions within systems of government, on boards and commissions, in businesses and in schools as well as the need for White people to understand implicit/unconscious bias, White Privilege, White Fragility and how these contribute to maintenance of the all-White systems we currently have.

If the State of Vermont is truly committed to addressing the racial disparities that exist in the criminal and juvenile justice systems and our other state systems, it must undertake a system-wide analysis of the ways in which state government actively or passively contributes to these disparities, collect data to determine our baseline, and set goals for reducing those disparities across all agencies and areas of service including recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention of employees of color; culturally and ethnically appropriate service provision, and education systems that provide culturally appropriate curriculum and address racial and socio-economic disparities in exclusionary discipline as well as harassment and bullying.

The status quo is unacceptable. Nothing short of a comprehensive and data-driven approach will alter the landscape for Vermonters of color and indigenous Vermonters. As a small state, Vermont has a unique ability to tackle and address issues in a comprehensive and coordinated way. We have done so with the opiate crisis. We can reduce racial disparities if we take the same approach. People of Color have waited far too long for the equality we promise in word but not deed. It is time to remedy that wrong.

## VERMONT STATISTICS

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the education system, western science (which played a major role in reinforcing the idea of race as a biological truth with the white race as the "ideal" top of the hierarchy...”

<sup>8</sup> White privilege is defined as “an invisible package of unearned assets which [a white person] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [the person] is ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, code books, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.” Peggy MacIntosh, Associate Director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1989. (Sample included in appendix).

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/white\\_fragility](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/white_fragility) Definition of white fragility - discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/>

In 1990, the U.S. Census estimated Vermont's racial and ethnic minority population to be 2 percent of the total population. By 2007, the figure had grown to 4% representing 24,500 Vermonters.<sup>11</sup> By 2016, the figure had grown to 5.4% or 33,728 people. Latinos and Asians were the fastest growing population during this period. The second fastest growing racial group in Vermont is Black or African American.<sup>12</sup> Contrary to popular belief more than half of the state's racial and ethnic minorities reside outside of Chittenden County.<sup>13</sup> So while the largest concentration of People of Color is in the greater Burlington area, the issues exist and persist statewide.

One of the major disparities, driven by the specific conditions identified below, is with regard to income. While 11% of White (non-Hispanic) households in Vermont were living below the federal poverty level (FPL) in 2016, 22% of American Indians, 23% of African-American/Black, 15% of Hispanics/Latinos, 15% of Asians and 21% of persons identifying as two or more races were living below the FPL.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, and likely related to the income disparities, racial disparities have been documented in each of the areas identified in Act 54 (education, labor and employment, housing, healthcare and economic development). A summary of some of the existing data points follows.

### **Education**

Students of color are disproportionately subject to school exclusion. First raised in the 2015 report, *Kicked Out! Unfair and Unequal Discipline in Vermont's Public Schools*,<sup>15</sup> the statistics have since been replicated by the Agency of Education in a subsequent report in 2015 that showed statistically significant over-representation of students of color in school exclusion.<sup>16</sup> School exclusion is strongly correlated with criminal and juvenile justice involvement, i.e. the school to prison pipeline. In addition, data from the 2010 *Report on Health Disparities of Vermonters*, shows higher rates of cigarette smoking, binge drinking (5+ drinks), marijuana and cocaine use among students of color, grade 8-12. African American students had the highest use of injected drugs.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the percentage of students of color who miss school due to safety concerns (last 30 days), who were threatened or injured by a weapon at school (last 12 months) and who were bullied (last 30 days) is significantly higher for students of color (Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, American Indian and Asian) than for White students. Finally, all students of color (grades 8-12) have higher rates of attempted suicide compared to White

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<sup>11</sup> Health Disparities of Vermonters, Vermont Department of Health, p. 50 (2010)

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census, 2016 data

<sup>13</sup> Health Disparities 2010, p. 52

<sup>14</sup> <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

<sup>15</sup> Jay Diaz, Vermont Legal Aid, *Kicked Out! Unfair and Unequal Discipline in Vermont's Public Schools*, (2015), [https://www.vtlegalaid.org/sites/default/files/Kicked%20Out\\_School%20Discipline%20Report.pdf](https://www.vtlegalaid.org/sites/default/files/Kicked%20Out_School%20Discipline%20Report.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Exclusionary Discipline- Report to the Legislature, Agency of Education (2016)

<sup>17</sup> Health Disparities of Vermonters, Vermont Department of Health, p. 60 (2010)

students: White (non-Hispanic)(5%): American Indian (12%), Asian (10%), Black (18%), Hispanic/Latino (16%) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (23%).<sup>18</sup>

## **Labor and Employment**

One of the key issues identified by stakeholders in this area was recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention of People of Color in state government jobs. In 2016 People of Color made up 3.3% of the state workforce and were 6.6% of the hires.<sup>19</sup> However, other statistics from the Vermont Department of Human Resources indicate areas of significant concern. The same report shows that Black/African American employees have a voluntary separation rate that is more than two times that of White employees (14.9% vs. 6.5%) and even more troubling, employees of color are three times more likely than White employees to be terminated (3.1% v. 1%).<sup>20</sup> Employees of color also have lower than average salaries compared to their White counterparts (\$51,538 vs. \$57,367).<sup>21</sup>

## **Housing**

The lack of affordable housing is at a crisis point in Vermont. A majority of employers (76%) view the cost and availability of affordable housing as an obstacle to community development and with good reason.<sup>22</sup> Seventy-two (72%) percent of low-income Vermonters lack affordable housing and 2/3 of those eligible renter households do not receive rental assistance.<sup>23</sup> Data from the January 2017 annual homeless count showed an overall increase of 9.7% and homelessness among families with children rose by 14.2%. Forty-five percent (45%) of those surveyed were homeless for the first time.<sup>24</sup> The Legislature and Administration appropriated more funding for affordable housing during the 2017 Legislative Session but this issue requires continued focus. Fifteen percent of Vermont households spend half or more of their income on rent. While the lack of affordable housing is an issue for all Vermonters, because a higher percentage of POC are low-income, affordability is of particular concern to POC.

Another issue that was identified is low vacancy rates. Vacancy rates have historically been very low due to supply and demand problems, particularly in Chittenden County. These low vacancy rates allow private landlords more prospects to choose from when filling apartments which can lead to discrimination against vulnerable populations including People of Color, families with children, and people with disabilities. Audit testing by Vermont Legal Aid's Housing

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<sup>18</sup> Health Disparities of Vermonters, Vermont Department of Health, p. 62 (2010).

<sup>19</sup>

[http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/humanresources/files/documents/Workforce\\_Data/DHR-Workforce\\_Report.pdf](http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/humanresources/files/documents/Workforce_Data/DHR-Workforce_Report.pdf), p.14

<sup>20</sup>

[http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/humanresources/files/documents/Workforce\\_Data/DHR-Workforce\\_Report.pdf](http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/humanresources/files/documents/Workforce_Data/DHR-Workforce_Report.pdf), p. 42.

<sup>21</sup>

[http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/humanresources/files/documents/Workforce\\_Data/DHR-Workforce\\_Report.pdf](http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/humanresources/files/documents/Workforce_Data/DHR-Workforce_Report.pdf), p. 64

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.vhfa.org/documents/Vermont%20Housing%20Need%20Overview.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> HUD's 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment to Congress

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.vhfa.org/documents/Vermont%20Rental%20Housing%20Needs.pdf>

Discrimination Law Project in 2014 documented high rates of differential treatment of individuals of color and people with disabilities as well as families with children during housing searches. The combined results reflect preferential treatment toward White American renters in 46 percent of the national origin tests and 36 percent of the race-based tests; renters without children in 45 percent of the familial status tests; and renters without apparent disabilities in 22 percent of disability tests.<sup>25</sup>

## **Healthcare**

While there was evidence in 2010 indicating that People of Color have lower rates of access to healthcare, including insurance, a personal doctor, or lack of money to pay for healthcare<sup>26</sup>, the issue of health disparities goes well beyond issues of access. People of Color also experience higher rates of diabetes, asthma, and obesity.<sup>27</sup> Health risk factors (smoking, lack of exercise and poor nutrition) are all much higher among people of color as are sexually transmitted diseases (in 2010, the rate of chlamydia was 6x higher among Black people than White people).<sup>28</sup> Equally troubling, stress reactions to racism including headache, upset stomach, tensing of muscles or pounding of heart were experienced by 1.5% of Vermonters of Color (translating into 6,800 adults). These Vermonters were four times more likely to report poor or fair health compared to Vermonters who did not experience physical symptoms related to their race (40% vs. 6%). Higher rates of poor birth outcomes (low birthweight, pre-term births) for Black women may also be attributable to the stress of racism.<sup>29</sup> Stress manifests in other ways as well. Black people are more likely to smoke (46 vs. 16%), be depressed (59 vs. 22%) and to have low incomes (78 vs. 40%). Among the stakeholders present at the meetings the impact of racism on the health of individuals was identified as a top concern.

## **Economic Development**

In 2012, there were 75,827 employer owned firms in Vermont. Of those 2,354 (or 3%) are owned by minorities.<sup>30</sup> A recent report commissioned by the Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD),<sup>31</sup> identified making growth a number one priority in the state by encouraging more people to move to the state, supporting start-ups and entrepreneurial businesses and growing the number of out-of-state companies that relocate to Vermont. Along with other recommendations, retention and expansion of existing Vermont businesses was also deemed crucial to growing our economy. Since statistics show that POC are the fastest increasing demographic in the state, a focus on attracting and supporting businesses of POC dovetails nicely with these existing initiatives.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://hrc.vermont.gov/sites/hrc/files/publications/Rental-Discrimination-Report-2014.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Health Disparities of Vermonters, Vermont Department of Health, p. 55 (2010).

<sup>27</sup> Health Disparities of Vermonters, Vermont Department of Health, p. 56 (2010).

<sup>28</sup> Health Disparities of Vermonters, Vermont Department of Health, p. 57 (2010).

<sup>29</sup> Health Disparities of Vermonters, Vermont Department of Health, p. 58-59 (2010).

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Census Data, Quick Facts: Vermont, 2016

<sup>31</sup> <http://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/Vermont-Economic-Development-Marketing-PLAN-with-APPXs.pdf>

## THE PROCESS

As described above, the AGO and HRC organized three public meetings to gather input from stakeholders. Stakeholders included representatives of state agencies, organizations that work with state agencies, organizations that work on racial and social justice issues and community members interested in making change. At the first forum, it was suggested that we conduct additional evening forums that could be attended by members of the community, one in the south and one in Burlington. Due to the time constraints associated with the November 1, 2017 due date for the report, a request was made to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee for an extension on the deadline until December 15, 2017. This extension was granted.

The first meeting was held at the Statehouse in Montpelier on September 28, 2017. It was attended by 33 people. The participants broke into small groups based on the topic areas (education, labor & employment, housing, healthcare, and economic development) and explored issues related to racial disparities, what data existed or did not exist that might provide a baseline to analyze, who else needed to be included in discussions and suggestions for addressing the issues.

A second meeting was held in Brattleboro on the evening of November 20<sup>th</sup>. This meeting was also attended by approximately 30 people, most of whom were community members. The participants again broke into groups around topic areas and completed exercises designed to narrow in on one or two issues in each of the larger topic areas. These topics were then subjected to a more comprehensive analysis that included identifying the root causes of the alleged disparity, potential partners, and some concrete steps that could be taken to address it.

A final meeting was held in Burlington on the evening of November 28<sup>th</sup>. The meeting was attended by 17 people. The participants completed the same exercises as the Brattleboro group, building on the work of the previous two forums.

This report and its recommendations are built on the stakeholder input received at these meetings.

## STAKEHOLDER INPUT

### Education

The following were identified by stakeholders as contributors to racial disparities for Black and Brown children (and families):

- Cultural barriers for students
- Need for increased supports for parents of color
- Lack of diversity in the overall education system- recruitment, hiring, and retention of educators of color/disparity between minority enrollment (20%) and minority educators (>1%).
- Exclusionary discipline/school to prison pipeline/teacher discretion in referrals for discipline/ restorative justice as solution?
- Achievement gaps/ % of students of color ready for school in all 5 domains of development/ lack of affordable quality early childhood education/early literacy education for parents
- Curriculum that is not representative, culturally responsive, social justice oriented, inclusive of accurate indigenous history
- Over-emphasis on “color blind”/noncultural curriculum of math and reading to the exclusion of social studies
- Over-identification for special education, 504 and EST
- Lack of adequate mental health support and lack of understanding of issues facing children of color in our schools
- White privilege/implicit bias- teachers need to understand the extent of White privilege and be trained on best practices in dealing with race issues in the classroom (especially in elementary school)
- Lack of community awareness of history as it relates to classism, racism, whiteness and privilege
- Lack of funding to support children of color to receive additional supports (tutoring, mentoring, cultural affirmation) that can help overcome barriers faced in a White majority culture
- Link between nutrition and readiness to learn—food programs are essential
- Lack of equity in personal learning plans, AP enrollment, tracking, technical education vs college

After identifying these factors, the groups voted on one item to examine further. In Brattleboro, the votes were tied for:

- 1) ***Recruitment, hiring and retention of educators of color; and***
- 2) ***Curriculum that is not representative, culturally responsive, social justice oriented or inclusive of accurate indigenous history. The top choice of the Burlington group was also the issue of non-representative curriculum.***

The groups were then asked to identify the story behind the factor (i.e. the root causes):

- 1) ***For recruitment, hiring and retention of educators of color,*** the story behind the factor included:
  - White supremacy

- Unconscious bias in hiring and school practices- bias implicit within the structure and culture of a school
- Whiteness of the school staff and community
- Explicit bias in the school and community
- Unwillingness to recognize issues of racism
- White people making all decisions from AOE to Superintendents to school boards to principals

The group then identified Partners who could help to change it:

- AOE
- Superintendents
- School boards
- Administrators
- Spark program
- Teacher training programs & institutions
- N.A.M.E.
- Educators of color in each district
- Community members of color in each district

The group then provided ideas for addressing the issues:

- Provide loan forgiveness for People of Color who get trained as teachers and work in a Vermont public school for X years
- Partner with teacher training programs to promote the loan forgiveness program
- Train all staff about whiteness and White Supremacy with regard to curriculum, pedagogy and workplace culture
- Recruit educators of color

2) ***For the curriculum issue***, the groups identified the story behind (root causes) as:

- Failure to train teachers to provide racially sensitive class culture and curriculum
- Lack of staff diversity
- Assumption that a diverse curriculum is only important to Students of Color
- Limiting teaching to struggles of race (slavery, civil rights)
- Teacher fear of leading discussions that include issues of racism
- Pre-packaged curricula that is only from one White perspective and doesn't include or allow space for culturally responsive/social justice topics/lens

The groups identified partners who could help as:

- AOE, Superintendents, school boards, administrators
- Peoples, Places and History of Words- looking at how local history/culture connects to schools
- Homeschoolers/ Oak Meadow
- People of Color including indigenous people
- Brattleboro Community Justice
- Spark Program
- Library
- Teaching Tolerance

- Zinn Education Project
- Rethinking schools

Ideas for addressing the issue:

- Mandate that AOE provide culturally responsive/social justice curriculum
- Ethnic studies advisory committee (legislation being developed)
- On-going community forums-community voices in curriculum
- Ensure curriculum reform is addressed at all levels and in all subjects and that it is totally integrated, not an add on
- Integrate with co-curriculars (sports, arts, student groups)

### **Labor and Employment**

The following were identified by stakeholders as contributors to racial disparities:

- Recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention of People of Color in state government
  - Job requirements that may not be necessary to the job (e.g. bachelor's + 2 years experience) have an adverse impact on People of Color
  - Aspects of White culture/privilege create an unwelcome work environment for POC
  - Need for mentorship/internship opportunities for POC
  - Lack of role models and connections
  - Lack of POC on boards, commissions and in leadership positions reducing access to decision-making power
  - Job interview processes and job descriptions that are not inclusive
  - Need to strengthen recruitment efforts for POC
- New Americans stuck in low-wage jobs despite their skills
- Degrees from overseas not treated as equivalent
- Communities are not welcoming to POC
- Low wage jobs make childcare unaffordable and the cost of childcare makes it difficult to work
- Lack of paid family leave policies
- Need for on-going diversity/implicit bias training

After identifying these factors, the groups voted on one item to examine further. In Brattleboro the top vote getter was **1) recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention of People of Color in state government. In Burlington it was 2) the need to address specific aspects of white culture/privilege that create environments that are unwelcome for POC.** Given the statistical information indicating that POC voluntarily leave state employment at 2 times the rate of white employees and are terminated at 3 times the rate, this second issue appears to be a subset of the first issue (specifically retention).

The story or root causes of these factors included:

- Vermont is primarily a White state
- Lack of incentives, mentors, support and/or pathways to success for POC to come to Vermont or to stay in Vermont

- Location- rural seat of government
- Systemic “circling of the wagons” to keep POC out or set them up for failure
- Lack of accountability
- Discerning what is skill and what is culture
- Awareness of employers and applicants
- People perpetrating micro-aggressions within the work environment
- Lack of effective training for White people on how to handle challenges of race when they arise in the workplace

Partners who can help to change:

- Media
- Schools (guidance counselors)
- Vermont Tourism- marketing the brand
- Community organizers and their organizations
- Existing community organizations that conduct implicit bias training
- Employers, human resources, leadership
- Service agencies
- Department of Labor
- Community/state colleges

Ideas for addressing:

- Accountability
- Creating a culture of inclusivity
- Promoting awareness/self-reflection of White privilege, White fragility and unconscious bias in White gatekeepers
- Hire more POC and track retention, promotion, etc.
- Change the school environments- start early to address these issues
- Encourage government leaders to model/lead by taking anti-racism training and then promoting it
- Look to more skill-based vs. credential-based job descriptions
- Discipline officials/employees who target people based on race, background, etc.

## **Housing**

The following were identified by stakeholders as contributors to racial disparities:

- Blanket policies that exclude people with criminal records
- Language barriers for new Americans
- Segregated neighborhoods (Burlington, Winooski)
- Steering to segregated neighborhoods
- Gentrification that makes housing unaffordable to low-income people
- Discriminatory loan practices/ redlining
- Discrimination by private landlords and low vacancy rates that contribute to discrimination
- Insufficient affordable housing/housing vouchers
- Lack of transportation limits housing options
- Over-representation of POC in subsidized housing (due to income disparities)

- Question whether there is any disparity in eviction rates of POC
- Need for fair and impartial strategies to address these issues

After identifying the factors, the groups voted on the top choice which while slightly different in statement, was essentially the same two issues: ***1) lack of sufficient affordable housing and 2) discrimination by private landlords (with low vacancy rates as contributing factors).***

***1) Lack of sufficient affordable housing***

The story or root causes identified included:

- The income cap on subsidized housing is too low
- Gentrification is a significant problem
- Housing prices are artificially inflated
- Subsidies for utilities are too low
- More POC are incarcerated which limits access to public housing
- Racial disparities in homelessness and rent burdened households
- Whether low income people are under-represented in subsidized or other affordable housing relative to their income level

Partners who can help:

- State- data collection
- Town health officers- improve safety and quality of housing (they need more training)
- All levels of government
- Media to get the word out

Ideas for addressing:

- Spread information about affordable housing opportunities (VFHA website, etc.)
- 
- Encourage towns to form affordable housing committees to promote development of low-income housing
- More money to develop and renovate affordable housing
- Incentives to lower housing costs

***2) Discrimination by private landlords (with low vacancy rates as contributing factors)***

The story or root causes identified included:

- Racism limits economic opportunity, access to housing
- When there is an abundance of potential tenants vs. housing a landlord pays no price for refusing POC

Partners who can help:

- Vermont Legal Aid- for enforcement and testing
- CVOEO-education about fair housing

- Human Rights Commission (HRC)- enforcement and training (participants identified the Attorney General’s Office (AGO) but it is actually HRC and HUD that have this enforcement responsibility)
- Housing advocates/activist organizations working to dismantle racism and poverty
- Landlord network activists

Ideas for addressing:

- Outreach- information about rights- use volunteer networks/students
- Promote channels for reporting discrimination
- Hire or appoint a housing ombudsman (similar to the Healthcare Ombudsman)
- System for advocates to accompany people searching for housing
- System of rating landlords (YELP for landlords) with federal funding tied to the YELP reviews related to racism, racist practices

## Healthcare

The following were identified by stakeholders as contributors to racial disparities:

- Lack of providers who are POC (clinicians, mental health)
- Child/maternal health discrepancies for POC
- ACES scores (adverse childhood experiences)
- Referral rates
- Wait times
- Treatment follow-through (to completion)
- Access to health insurance
- Clinicians lack knowledge of special issues for POC
- Providers lack knowledge and understanding of relationship between racism and health (stress, etc.)- seen as pathology (e.g. depression)
- Racism as a social health determinant/diseases of despair (cumulative stress of racism)
- Doctors, social workers, nurses etc. need education about myths, stereotypes, so doctors “hear” concerns- cultural competency training
- Child protection removal rates are higher for children of color
- Historical trauma (including Eugenics)
- Opportunities for integrated care (mental, physical, substance abuse)
- New American health providers unable to practice in Vermont due to licensing issues

The groups voted on the top choice which while slightly different in statement, was essentially the same issue: ***relationship between racism (historical trauma) and health-related issues; racism as a social health determinant.***

The story or root causes included:

- Investments are in healthcare on the back end rather than social supports on the front end (in other countries less is spent on healthcare due to more robust social supports)
- Need for investments in community health and well-being
- Inability of health providers to identify issue-specific health needs
- Stress-related health outcomes- obesity, asthma, infant mortality, depression, chronic stress

- Racism affects entire community
- Treatment varies among different races (e.g. pain management vs. “med-seeking”)
- Trust of providers- patients of color less willing to follow through
- Behaviors seen as intentional rather than as a product of society

Partners who can help:

- Dr. Camara Jones
- Equity Solutions
- Medical schools, research universities, social work/psychology departments

Ideas for addressing:

- Update 2010 Health Disparities of Vermonters report
- Create and support Community Health Workers (from community, culturally appropriate services, paid a livable wage, reasonable caseloads, peer to peer, reimbursed through healthcare system savings)- See Elizabeth Bradley study on mismatch in funding medical care vs. community supports
- Invest in a generational approach to support families (children, parents and grandparents)
- Invest in building resiliency at the individual and community level
- Train on impact of racism and health as well as trauma informed treatment (on-going medical CEUs)
- Provide grants for research on racism and how it is addressed by providers
- Work to recruit and retain POC in physical and mental health positions
- Improve language access
- Call out specific impacts, needs, resources based on race/discrimination

### **Economic Development**

The following were identified by stakeholders as contributors to racial disparities:

- Lack of businesses owned by POC later clarified as the need to expand POC owned businesses
- Businesses owned by POC are not supported (e.g. by Chambers, Rotary, etc.)
- Vermont is not welcoming to POC so people come but do not stay
- Prosecutorial gate keeping is used to drive POC from the state
- Boards, CEOs, etc. do not have diversity
- Insufficient emphasis on business opportunities in POC markets for POC-owned businesses and entrepreneurs
- Need to attract venture capitalists of color to the state
- Need more emphasis on government contracting with minority owned businesses
- Need grants and economic incentives to recruit business developers who are POC
- Insufficient data regarding POC businesses and homeownership
- Training for small business owners
- Need for more promotion of Vermont as a tourist destination for POC

The groups identified two areas for additional exploration: *1) need for expansion of marketing and business development efforts and 2) need to expand the number of POC owned businesses.*

**1) *Need for expansion of marketing and business development:***

The story or root causes behind the two:

- Employers only use traditional forms of outreach
- Nepotism-markets are too narrowly defined
- Lack of diversity in job training
- Lack of emphasis on markets of communities of color
- Unwillingness to enter into new territory
- Not enough college and career awareness early on
- Silos in state government (Labor and Education)

Ideas for addressing:

- Paid internships
- Better collaboration among departments (Education, Commerce and Community Development, Agriculture, Labor- joint efforts)
- Introducing businesses to the market (e.g. ski resorts reach out to the National Brotherhood of Skiers & Snowboarders)
- Market Vermont products to Black and Hispanic manufacturers who need raw materials- capitalize on the Vermont brand
- Promote People of Color in the state- iamavermonter.org

**2) *Need to expand the number of businesses owned by POC***

The story or root causes behind the issue:

- 2015 POC spent \$83m on travel and tourism
- Vermont gains estimated at \$10m at present- how to increase marketing to POC to increase exposure
- Tourism as a gateway to moving to Vermont

Ideas for addressing:

- Mining data from economic census
- Link marketing to locavore-agriculture-related products (e.g. every household of POC replaces Aunt Jemima syrup with real maple; maple syrup breweries)
- Link better food with better health
- Host Vermont conferences of associations of POC
- Expand outreach to pools of POC professional organizations

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING RACIAL DISPARITIES

Act 54 asks for “a strategy” to address racial disparities across these systems. That is simply not possible though the single strategy could be: *Vermont state government will devote sufficient resources to reducing identified racial disparities across all systems of state government.*

Addressing such a long-standing and complicated problem is incredibly challenging but doing nothing is not an option. We have done that for far too long with predictable results. The new approach needs to be at both a micro and macro level.

Stakeholders identified very specific issues across the identified state systems for the State to target and offered a variety of concrete suggestions for how to do so. These suggestions come primarily from the people most affected by the consequences of state systems that are not responsive to the needs of POC. Many of the suggestions are “low hanging fruit”--ideas that could be pursued without the need for significant resource allocation. For example, moving to a health model that puts resources currently being spent on healthcare into front-end social services that reduce the need for costly healthcare interventions could make a huge difference and provide decent employment opportunities for POC.

These stakeholder recommendations should be reviewed and considered by the agencies and departments of jurisdiction: Agency of Education, the Department of Labor, Human Rights Commission, Department of Health, Agency of Commerce & Community Development, and Department of Agriculture. Addressing these issues in a coordinated manner can be tied to existing initiatives, like economic development, health equity and the Governor’s Equity and Diversity in the Workplace Council.

We must also address the elephant in the room: White Supremacy. Vermonters have a tendency to believe that because the state is generally forward thinking and progressive, issues of race discrimination, harassment, etc. do not exist here. On an individual level, they believe that they treat people equally and therefore the problem, to the extent it might exist, lies with “other people”--- those who are explicitly racist.

This ignores the fact that anyone and everyone who has grown up in this country is a beneficiary of a White Supremacy culture that influences individual implicit biases which play out in interpersonal interactions and in the way that our systems and institutions treat People of Color. Every employee of state government needs to understand this.

On the micro level, every agency, department, commission, board, etc. (not just those mentioned above) must commit to addressing racial bias within its organization for the individual employee, the workplace as a whole, and in its service delivery systems. There are several state agencies already engaged in work on these issues, some more effectively than others.

The state uses Results Based Accountability (RBA) to improve services by identifying desired outcomes, indicators or benchmarks for those outcomes, and performance measures to see how we are doing with regard to the identified outcome. This system can be used by agencies, departments and other state entities to address stakeholder identified racial disparities.

To accomplish this the State should:

- ❖ Identify Vermont agencies/departments/commissions/councils, etc. that are currently engaged in affirmative efforts to address racial disparities;
- ❖ Examine what these entities are doing and what is and is not working well;
- ❖ Work to replicate what is working throughout state government;
- ❖ Task existing entities with more global tasks (e.g. task the Governor's Equity and Diversity Council with working on recruitment, hiring, retention and promotion and the health equity council/committee with health outcomes, require that all state contracts contain language related to reduction of identified racial disparities; diversify boards, commissions, etc.);
- ❖ Support efforts to create curricula that is representative, culturally responsive, social justice oriented and inclusive of accurate indigenous history.
- ❖ Ask that the Governor issue an executive order requiring each agency, department, etc. to:
  - ✓ Review, and where appropriate, utilize stakeholder suggestions for addressing racial disparities in each system identified in this Report
  - ✓ Identify indicators and performance measures that are related to racial disparities in the agency's workforce and services that the entity provides to track as part of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) initiative;
  - ✓ Have each agency/department identify an EEO officer who will oversee the work related to the performance measures;
  - ✓ Require EEO officers to gather public input, particularly input from affected groups on an annual basis;
  - ✓ Have the EEO officers convene on at least an annual basis to review and revise the work, examine trends, etc. and report to the Chief Performance Officer and Joint Justice Legislative Oversight Committee on progress.