



State Representatives Thomas E. West and Tavia Galonski

State Senator Cecil Thomas

April 15, 2020

Dear Governor DeWine, Lt. Governor Husted, and Dr. Acton,

Thank you for your continued leadership during this unprecedented pandemic and for what you have done to keep all Ohioans safe and healthy. We write to you today with recommendations for a strategic plan on how to combat the racial and ethnic disparities that exist in the COVID-19 pandemic's widespread effects.

Past research on pandemics shows myriad inequities by race, ethnicity and income groups including the level of exposure to the pathogen, access to quality healthcare, post-pandemic effects, shortened life expectancy, and lower quality of life.

This is largely due to the persistence of unacceptable racial and ethnic health disparities, which strongly correlate to social determinants of health. Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. They include factors like socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood and physical environment, employment, social support networks as well as access to high quality culturally appropriate health care.

COVID-19 exacerbates these pre-existing SDOH problems. That is why available data reflect a disproportionate burden of COVID-19 for minorities. The OLBC considers these circumstances unacceptable. It will take broad-based short and long-term intentional strategies to ensure that vulnerable communities, including low-income racial and ethnic minority communities, survive the disproportionate burden of this pandemic.

Addressing COVID-19 in the short term requires an intensive and rapid strategic plan on the local, state and national levels by taking several key steps. These steps are broken down into the health, housing, education, employment, criminal justice, and economic and business development policy areas.

Health

1. Identify vulnerable populations who cannot easily comply with current social distancing recommendations;
2. Implement targeted COVID-19 testing for minorities, especially those with preexisting conditions for COVID-19;
3. Update hospital protocols to mitigate healthcare disparities due to COVID-19;



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4. Assure that the expanded hospital capacity for COVID-19 addresses the unique healthcare circumstances of minorities;
5. Allow for African American Medical Doctors and Treatment Clinics to provide testing for location as an alternative to Health Departments and Hospitals;
6. Collect and report accurate demographic data (including race) on rates of infection and outcomes;
7. Deployment of a team of minority healthcare providers and researchers with demonstrated expertise in health disparities and providing clinical care to disparate populations. This team should develop statewide clinical protocols to guide clinical decisions relative to COVID-19. This is necessary to minimize healthcare disparities, especially those related to COVID-19;
8. Identification of a team of state and non-state individuals to include the Ohio Commission on Minority Health and health equity experts to coordinate a response for African-Americans regarding COVID-19 with daily reports to OLBC

Housing

9. Allocate adequate financial, housing and other necessary survival supplies to resolve the tremendous impact on housing, food, education, and unemployment;
10. Provide equitable relief for renters. Less than half of all Black people own their own home compared to 73 percent of white households. Many governors have suspended mortgage payments. To ensure fairness and support for all communities, this must be coupled with a rent suspension;
11. Provide rent assistance and rapid rehousing funding for potentially displaced individuals and families;
12. Identify safe living places with food and other supplies so that minorities at high risk for COVID-19 can self-isolate;
13. Development of a plan to ensure that COVID-19 testing is prioritized in neighborhoods with significant numbers of low-wage essential workers who cannot easily practice social distancing recommendations due to housing density and other factors;

Education

14. Ensure that the disruption of the school year does not disproportionately impact minority students' academic achievement



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15. Divert wrap-around service funding to provide online tutoring and daily checks/calls to check on kids that need supports. Ensure wrap-around funding is targeted for those children for whom it was intended;

16. Enact student loan debt forgiveness programs aimed at minorities who work in occupations that pay less than \$75,000 a year;

Employment

17. Provide navigator programs across Urban Leagues and Community Action Agencies to help black and brown families Recover from COVID-19 utilizing TANF to help with employment and navigation through the maze of service delivery;

18. Re-deploy Ohio Means Jobs employees to help families complete and resolve unemployment claims;

19. Provide summer employment opportunities for teenagers home from college and out of school youth;

20. Support workers organizing for better conditions and demand that any additional federal and state pandemic relief put people, not corporations, first. At a minimum, essential workers must receive hazard pay, free health care, paid family and medical leave. Safety standards must also be put in place to protect them from COVID-19;

Criminal Justice

21. Release from jails and prisons vulnerable people.;

22. Remove re-entry barriers by ending punitive criminal background screens for housing, employment, and public benefits. Those returning home from prison and jail need food, safe, stable housing, employment, and health care;

23. Impose a moratorium on court fines and fees and related penalties, including driver's license suspensions;

* Please note that Representative Erica Crawley continues to work on a more comprehensive list of criminal justice policy recommendations.

Economic and Business Development

24. Provide safeguards and supports for minority-owned businesses to transition back into normal operations after COVID 19 fullness;



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25. Provide tax breaks/exemptions and supports to minority business start-ups for three years to ensure companies' stability and enhance our economic recovery;

26. Direct the Ohio Attorney General to offer settlements to minority-owned businesses for delinquent debt obligations;

27. Identify African-American economists and businesses professionals who can help in the development, implementation and evaluation of an economic recovery plan that is targeted and equitable;

28. Implement culturally appropriate media messages using avenues to target the African American community, including TV, radio, newspaper and social media.

We must begin to implement these strategies to stem the growth of COVID-19's spread, to take bold steps toward being a more racially inclusive state, and to fulfill Ohio's promise of safety and security for residents of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations, and thank you for your continued service to the State of Ohio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas E. West".

Representative Thomas E. West

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tavia Galonski".

Representative Tavia Galonski

Senator Cecil Thomas