



## INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

**DATE:** March 19, 2021

**TO:** Marcelia Nicholson, County Board Chair, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Jeff Roman, Executive Director, Office on African American Affairs

**SUBJECT:** From the Executive Director, Office on African American Affairs, providing an informational report on the work and forward direction of the Office on African American Affairs to achieve health and racial equity in Milwaukee County.

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### POLICY

This report is for informational purposes only.

### BACKGROUND

The Office on African American Affairs (OAAA) was created by resolution in 2015 by the County Board of Supervisors and established as a cabinet level department in 2016 by former County Executive Chris Abele to 'serve an integral role in recognizing and resolving the County's racial inequities for the benefit of all its citizens and for the region to achieve its full potential.'

The County Board's OAAA resolution (15-636) charged the department to:

- Examine and define issues central to the rights and needs of African Americans
- Advise policymakers and the public on recommendations for changes in programs and laws for the benefit of the African American community
- Develop and implement policies, plans and programs related to the special needs of the African American community; and
- Promote equitable access for all African Americans in Milwaukee County.

Abele appointed Nicole Brookshire OAAA's inaugural executive director in July 2017. Brookshire stood up the OAAA department and hired its first staff consisting of a development manager, community engagement coordinator, research and program manager, an executive assistant, and data analyst. Together they defined OAAA's vision, mission, pillars and priorities, and centered their work on 'getting Milwaukee County's house in order.'

During the first three years, OAAA:

- Trained more than 3,600 county employees in racial equity and implicit bias
- Launched a Racial Equity Ambassador program to elevate employees across county departments to advance health and racial equity
- Established the County's membership in the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)

- Initiated the County becoming the first jurisdiction in the United States to declare racism a public health crisis
- Supported focusing the County's first strategic plan in 20 years on racial equity and creation of Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity and Health in Milwaukee County government
- Implemented a countywide employee survey to provide perspectives on racial equity and inform future policy and strategy
- Supported development and implementation of the County's first Racial Equity Budget Tool to analyze the impact of cuts and investments on the 2020 and 2021 budgets
- Built critical community and institutional partnerships

Today, OAAA continues to work primarily with County departments, leadership, and staff to normalize, operationalize, and institutionalize racial equity principles and practices across the County. While this work was initiated under former County Executive Abele, it continues as a central focus of current County Executive David Crowley's administration.

## **CURRENT STATE AND FORWARD DIRECTION**

### **OAAA's role in addressing racism, COVID-19, other health disparities, and social unrest**

County Executive Crowley took office as the county and the nation contended with the early spread of COVID-19, polarizing partisanship, and widespread social unrest in protest of police brutality and racial injustice. Together, these factors have highlighted the intersections of race, policy, politics, and health disparities in Milwaukee County. With new leadership, OAAA is bringing a new level of energy to County Executive Crowley's commitment to create intentional inclusion, bridge the gaps, and invest in equity. Both the County Executive and the County Board Chairwoman have strategically positioned OAAA to support the County and empower the community to make Milwaukee County's vision, *'by achieving racial equity, Milwaukee is the healthiest county in Wisconsin'*, a reality.

Moving forward, OAAA is tasked to be a key driver of the county's vision and will play a larger role in advancing health and racial equity throughout the county, the Greater Milwaukee region, and the state. To accomplish this, OAAA is committed to empowering the community to achieve positive, long-term, sustainable outcomes through employing a bold and transformative collective impact model that will convene county and community partners to confront racism, mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and other public health crises, and systematically address the upstream factors that lead to health disparities. OAAA provides advice, guidance, education, research, and technical assistance to County leaders, departments, external/systems partners, and municipalities.

### **Focus on social determinants of health**

In April 2020, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors unanimously passed an ordinance creating Chapter 108 "Achieving Racial Equity and Health" of the Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances, which resolved that by achieving racial equity, the County will eliminate health and opportunity gaps along racial lines, and will increase the success of all groups by distributing resources justly across all communities. The adoption of the ordinance, commits Milwaukee County to support OAAA in informing and engaging community residents and collaborating with county departments and municipalities to assess and transform policies, procedures, practices, and power structures to help the County become a place where all citizens are healthy and thriving.

OAAA is reaffirming its commitment to putting Black and Brown people at the center of shaping our health and racial equity work across the county. OAAA will focus on key social determinants of health

(SDH) that impact the lifespan of our most vulnerable residents: racism, education, economic mobility, safety, and the built environment. OAAA will work with countywide leadership to align and maximize efforts across the county and region that impact these five SDH, as they have been identified a primary levers that can either hinder or provide residents access to power and opportunities. We will close racial gaps and sustain progress by elevating the voices and building capacity of historically marginalized communities to define what health means to them, and will work with all county residents, systems, and community partners to generate new norms and solutions to address the root cause of racial inequities. By intentionally investing in impacted community leaders and organizations and challenging systems and power structures that perpetuate inequity, we will address the upstream factors of these SHD to improve educational attainment, increase access to employment opportunities, improve community safety, and achieve equitable financial investments in our built environment (housing, infrastructure, green space, etc.). We will measure our success by tracking four primary racial equity indicators: access, awareness, participation, and investment, so that Black and Brown Milwaukee County residents are partners in decision making.

### **Racial equity training, support, and capacity building**

Through OAAA, the County has prioritized building the racial equity and public health capacity of Milwaukee County by intentionally engaging employees and residents most impacted by health and racial disparities. This work moving forward includes building bridges between levels of government, engaging our cross-sector systems and community partners, and increasing the skills of our workforce and municipal leaders to combat biases that lead to racial disparities and inequities. Specifically, OAAA is resuming racial equity training offerings and customizing capacity building supports for our departments and municipalities that will help them critically examine and challenge power structures, eliminate barriers to inclusion, elevate the voices and lived experiences of impacted residents, and be transparent and accountable in our leadership to gain the support and trust of our Black and Brown communities.

Starting in May, OAAA is rolling out our new training calendar which includes mandatory virtual racial equity training for county leadership, managers, and front line employees. Training vendors include the YWCA of Southeastern Wisconsin, Nurturing Diversity Partners, Ubuntu Research and Evaluation, Cream City Conservation, The Effective Communications Coach, Mindfulness for the People, and Uplifting Impact.

Additionally, OAAA continues to build the capacity of Racial Equity Ambassadors (REA) across county departments through regular learning community sessions and their inclusion in developing and supporting execution of divisional and cross-department racial equity projects and initiatives. The first REA cohort is ending, and a 2.0 cohort experience is in development. Recruitment for the next REA cohort will begin in May, as part of this year's Vision Week.

Overall, our new approach to training will focus on building internal (county departments) and external (county municipalities) capacity, toolbox development, and supports to address racism, the root cause of racial disparities and inequities.

### **County strategic plan and strategy teams**

Milwaukee County has been committed to understanding the link between race, government and health and our contributions to inequities. We recognize our power to change at a systemic level. This work began in 2019 when Milwaukee County declared racism a public health crisis. The declaration set us on the explicit path to achieve racial equity and health. A year later, Milwaukee County passed an ordinance committing to identify and address policies, practices and power structures that work in favor of white people and create barriers for Black and Brown residents. The following threat of COVID on our

Black and Brown communities coupled with the Black Lives Matter movement cemented our focus and brought urgency to lifting Black and Brown residents in decision-making. Our theory of change is that by achieving racial equity, Milwaukee will become the healthiest county in Wisconsin. OAAA is actively engaged in supporting goal setting work across the County's seven strategic planning strategy teams so that health and racial equity and the voices of Black and Brown residents is front and center.

Milwaukee County is still growing in our journey to achieve racial equity and health. As his first priority, Director Roman conducted a gap analysis of the County's racial equity work to inform forward strategic planning. His analysis of our current situational state concludes:

- We have identified frameworks to lift racial equity and health but do not yet have clear definition of the terms or equity language we are using;
- We are in the very beginning stages of coming to a shared understanding of foundational concepts (racism, whiteness, equity v. equality) necessary to ground our racial equity work;
- We excitedly jumped into racial equity training without an assessment of our climate/culture or our readiness to address the root causes of inequities, and without a system for employee navigation and support to confront personal and institutional biases; and
- Racial equity is leading the framing and focus of our strategic planning work, but we don't yet have the needed tools, guidance, and clear indicators and metrics to measure our progress on achieving racial equity internally and across the county.

OAAA is working with County leadership and strategy teams to fill these gaps to strengthen our work to achieve the county's vision. We are working to develop toolboxes, shared language, and provide guidance to County leaders, departments, partners, and staff so there is aligned understating and capacity to embed racial equity principles and best practices in advancement of our vision and mission. As part, OAAA staff currently comprise membership of five of the seven strategy teams and is leading the work of applying a racial equity lens to all county functions and supporting strategies to eliminate barriers to diverse and inclusive communities across the County's footprint. This includes ongoing engagement with the County's Intergovernmental Cooperation Council and Community Justice Council.

### **Strategic communications and outreach**

To bring greater awareness to Milwaukee County's vision and mission, OAAA has created a strategic marketing and communications plan. In December 2020, File No. 20-937 placed \$100,000 for marketing and communications in an allocated contingency account within OAAA. The file further directed OAAA to provide a report to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to review and approve the details of our marketing and communication plan to access contingency funds.

In the December 2020 board cycle, OAAA also reclassified an existing position to create a Communications Manager position. As a result, OAAA has increased our social media audience by 45 percent on Facebook, added nearly 300 followers on Twitter, received over 150,000 impressions, and has seen a large growth on Instagram to increase in outreach and engagement. Under Director Roman, OAAA has taken strategic steps to build and strengthen relationships with advertisers for print, television, and radio ad buys, generating more public trust and reach into our impacted communities and key constituent groups. OAAA continues to work collaboratively with the Office of the County Executive and County Board staff and leadership to share the county's vision both locally and nationally with reporters. Our website has become a single source of truth for matters pertaining to the county's work to drive the vision forward.

To ensure the buy-in of key constituent groups and impacted communities, OAAA has secured a professional communication services vendor to design and produce a year-long strategic communications roll-out in tandem with the Offices of the County Executive and County Board

Chairwoman. The communications roll-out will elevate the County's three strategic priorities and racial equity and health messaging to both internal and external audiences, using a three-tiered approach:

- Educate on the county's vision (why now, why racial equity, why Milwaukee County, etc.)
- Engage impacted communities (examples: our Black History Month events calendar, we solicited feedback from community on events to include, Milwaukee County engages the public in more participatory budgeting from impacted communities)
- Build Awareness (example: OAAA establishing a social media presence to be seen as a connector and trusted single-source of truth both internally and externally, remain top of mind for internal and external partners to advise on topics around equity, inclusion and belonging, alignment with regional, anchor institutions and others to ensure Milwaukee County is a region of choice for Black and Brown communities)

Through this coordinated marketing and communications plan we will collaborate with county departments on programs and messaging so that everything we do is aligned to the County's vision and strategic plan. We will celebrate the diversity of all impacted communities along the way, highlighting:

- MLK Day (January)
- Black History Month (February)
- Women's History Month, Cesar Chavez Day (March)
- Asian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May)
- Pride, Juneteenth, Men's Health Month (June)
- Black August – *Liberation, Business, Philanthropy*
- Hispanic Heritage Month, Indigenous People's Day (Sep/Oct)
- First Nations/Native American Heritage Month (Nov)
- Kwanzaa (Dec)

### **Forward path workplan**

OAAA is tasked with being a key driver of the County's vision but we are limited in our reach and scope to fulfill this function. Our name alone suggests that the burden of addressing structural racism and systemic inequities in Milwaukee County lays on the backs of our African American employees, residents, and communities. This is an unfair, unrealistic, and unsustainable proposition that does not set OAAA up for success. Director Roman is working with the Office of the County Executive, cabinet members, and strategy teams to execute a workplan that reflects the broad scope of work and capacity needed to support and empower all of Milwaukee County's leaders, departments, employees, 19 municipalities, community partners, residents, and diverse communities in making our vision of achieving racial equity and becoming the healthiest county in Wisconsin a reality. This workplan will support the forward direction of the county's strategic plan, with increased capacity to elevate the voices of our residents most impacted by racism, social inequities, and disparities in health, including those with varying abilities.

OAAA's workplan focuses on the intersections of health and racial equity to strengthen the County's ability to intentionally center impacted communities by increasing accessibility, transparency, and accountability in County government. Our driving mission is increasing citizen access and inclusion, addressing the root cause and upstream factors of racial inequities, and fostering authentic community engagement and resilience with and within our Black and Brown communities. This work is supported by our ongoing collaborative work with County leaders, departments, and partners to strengthen the County's public health infrastructure and our public information sharing capacity. Our workplan is categorized into six sections, (1) operations, budget, and planning, (2) internal and external capacity building, (3) strategic communications and outreach, (4) special projects, (5) research and policy advocacy, and (6) African American culture and community building. We have actively begun implementing our workplan activities, which will be enhanced with the filling of vacant OAAA staff

positions currently in the hiring process.

### **Ongoing commitment to African American residents, culture, and community building**

OAAA's central focus of centering African Americans in our work will not be lost in the execution of our workplan. As a priority, Director Roman and OAAA staff continue to work very closely with African American leaders, community partners, and residents, and our counterpart OAAA at the City to ensure a seamless and uninterrupted commitment to African American residents and communities in Milwaukee County. This commitment has included the following work and forward priorities of OAAA:

- Regular communication, ongoing meetings, and development of a partnership and coordination MOU with the City's Office of African American Affairs and Office on Equity and Inclusion in the Department of Administration to collectively address factors contributing to Black-white disparities in health, education, safety, criminal justice, etc. Joint priorities are focused in four areas: service delivery, policy advocacy, capacity support, and African American culture and community building.
- Facilitation support for the Milwaukee County and Wisconsin Legislative Black Caucuses to align policy, budget, and program priorities to eliminate barriers and racial inequities to ultimately impact all of Milwaukee County.
- Strategic program partnership planning with the African American Roundtable, Black Historical Society Museum, Black Health Coalition, and Diverse & Resilient to support OAAA's provision of department service functions, outreach, awareness building, and advocacy activities.
- Participation in the 2021 Milwaukee Juneteenth Celebration planning and promotion committee led by Northcott Neighborhood House. This year marks Milwaukee's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the annual Juneteenth celebration. Following this year's celebration, OAAA will collaborate with organizers and resource partners to strengthen community infrastructure support and capacity to ensure the Milwaukee celebration can be sustained for the next 50 years.
- Participation in and inclusion of Milwaukee County employees and partners in the Facing Race (November 2020, Race Forward) and State of Black Health (March 2020, Center for Black Health and Equity) national virtual conferences to spur networking and learning from national health and racial equity leaders working to improve Black health and quality of life outcomes.
- Sponsorship of cultural awareness events and educational programming (Kwanzaa, MLK Day)
- Intentional inclusion and equitable engagement of African American thought leaders in the work of the County's ongoing COVID-19 response work (Community Resilience Response Team, Vaccine Coordination Committee) and Public Health Research Steering Committee.

In summary, OAAA is committed to be a key driver of the County's vision to achieve racial equity and health so all our residents, regardless of their race/ethnicity, orientation, status, or ability have access to every opportunity to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. We are working in tandem with the Office of the County Executive and cabinet departments, other elected offices, and with the new Grants and Special Projects Office to support resource development and advance health and racial equity strategies (i.e. County We Care Crew, Community Resilience Initiative, and Racial Equity Budget Tool/REBT) across county government. We anticipate sharing our progress along the way by sharing regular informational reports and updates to the Milwaukee County Board and related committees.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Informational report only.

Thank you,

*Jeffery K. Roman*

Jeff Roman

Executive Director, Office on African American Affairs

Cc: David Crowley, County Executive  
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive