

Substitute Resolution

Item #: _____

Prepared by: Comm. Tami Sawyer

Moved by: _____

Reviewed by: Marcy Ingram

Seconded by: _____

RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING RACISM AS A PANDEMIC AND A COMMITMENT TO ENACTING POLICIES THAT UNEQUIVOCALLY DEFEND MINORITIES AND AIM TO ERADICATE THE EFFECTS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM AFFECTING BLACK PEOPLE, AND OTHER MINORITIES, THROUGHOUT SHELBY COUNTY, TENNESSEE. SPONSORED BY COMMISSIONER TAMI SAWYER, COMMISSIONER MICHAEL WHALEY, COMMISSIONER EDMUND FORD, JR., COMMISSIONER WILLIE F. BROOKS, JR., COMMISSIONER VAN D. TURNER, JR., COMMISSIONER EDDIE S. JONES, JR., COMMISSIONER REGINALD MILTON AND COMMISSIONER MICKELL LOWERY.

WHEREAS, violence against black people has been a longstanding practice in the United States by certain segments of the population; and

WHEREAS, the Thirteen, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were enacted to abolish slavery which had permitted state-sanctioned violence against blacks in the United States; and

WHEREAS, in response to the enactment of the Thirteen, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, many states adopted Jim Crow laws following the end of this nation's Civil War, which again perpetuated a systematic mistreatment of black Americans resulting in blacks being treated as second-class citizens in the areas of housing, education, employment and criminal justice

just to name a few inequities; and

WHEREAS, Shelby Countians are well-versed in the history of violence against black Americans following the Civil War by historic events such as the Memphis Massacre of 1866, where after a shooting incident involving white policemen and black soldiers, resulted in mobs of white residents and policemen attacking, raping, and killing black soldiers and civilians from May 1 to May 3, 1866¹; and

WHEREAS, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was adopted to curtail the violence and racist state-sanctioned antics of certain segments of the population against black Americans and even still today some 50 years later, black Americans, generally, are unfairly targeted and police throughout this country at inexplicable alarming rates; and

WHEREAS, in the previous decade, the deaths of unarmed black men and boys, e.g., Mike Brown (Ferguson, Missouri), Eric Garner (New York City, New York), Tamir Rice (Cleveland, Ohio), Philando Castile (St. Anthony, Minnesota), at the hands of police officers who did not look like them have further illustrated American citizens' (of all races) resolve and demands for police reform via civilly protest; and

WHEREAS, at the start of this new decade, the most recent killing of George Floyd (Minneapolis, Minnesota), on May 25, 2020, continues to show a surge in police violence against unarmed black Americans and renewed scrutiny on racism and the constant state of social inequities for black Americans throughout the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, in addition to higher levels of police violence against black Americans, several

¹ "Memories of a Massacre: Memphis in 1866." <https://www.memphis.edu/memphis-massacre/> (retrieved on June 5, 2020).

studies suggest that experiences of racism or discrimination raise the risk of emotional and physical health problems, including depression, hypertension -- more than 40% of black adults have high blood pressure -- and even death; and

WHEREAS, one's zip code (particularly in racially segregated communities) determines the quality of schools, the quality of neighborhood and the public services one has access to; and

WHEREAS, racial disparities in health are being found, but the causes are often misattributed to bad behavior rather than poor living conditions, low economic status and high levels of stress directly tied to the history of discriminatory policies adversely affecting black Americans in this County from its inception; and

WHEREAS, across the country, demonstrators are protesting the death of George Floyd and the ongoing systemic racism that is woven into the fabric of the United States. The protests come in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic that is disproportionately killing people of color — particularly black Americans and the close proximity of people protesting is likely to create a spike in Coronavirus infections.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF SHELBY COUNTY, TENNESSEE, that this body wishes to stand in support of the acknowledgement, by the CEOs of three (3) of the largest hospitals in Tennessee, that racism is a pandemic and “[r]acism is so insidious as it is intractable. No simple vaccine will save us from it.”²

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this body is not saying that *only Black Lives Matter* but it is an irrefutable fact that in communities of color, particularly for unarmed black male suspects, black Americans are dying at a disproportionate rate while in police custody and even by

² See again, “Health care leaders: Racism is another pandemic.”

those non-police officers attempting to affect a citizen arrest, e.g., Trayvon Martin and Ahmaud Arbery.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this body commits to working with its citizens to enact policies that eradicate the effects of systemic racism affecting black people, and other minorities, throughout Shelby County, Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall become effective in accordance with the Shelby County Charter, Article II, Section 2.06 (B).

Lee Harris
Shelby County Mayor

Date: _____

ATTEST:

Clerk of County Commission

ADOPTED: _____