



Staff Report

File #: 21-9

Version: 1

Date: 1/11/2021

Item #: 5.b.

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Jackie Leung, Ward 4

SUBJECT:

Motion from Councilor Jackie Leung regarding declaring racism as a public health crisis.

Ward(s): Ward 4

Councilor(s): All Councilors

Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods

MOTION:

I move that City Council direct staff to prepare a resolution for Council's consideration to declare racism as a public health crisis, and further that Council suspend Council Rule 5(j) to vote on this motion at tonight's meeting.

DISCUSSION:

From Councilor Leung.

As a City Council, we are elected by Salem residents to develop and decide policies that affect City Government and our city. Across the nation, and even here in Salem, there has been an ongoing and systematic spike of racist violence against black people and other people of color. Not only are we going through a national crisis as COVID-19 continues to impact us, we are going through a local crisis happening right here in Salem.

Across the country, there are local and state leaders who are declaring that racism is a public health crisis. According to the American Public Health Association (APHA), these declarations are an important, "first step in the movement to advance racial equity and justice and must be followed by allocation of resources and strategic action." During the last several city council meetings, several councilors, including myself, denounced racism. Racism permeates in both institutional and systemic settings and continues to harm our residents. I mentioned this previously in council. I, too, have experienced racism in Salem. From someone who spit from their truck at my daughter and I while we were walking on the sidewalk, to someone at Costco telling my family to "f*** off", to hearing or

receiving comments such as, "Go back to your country!", "Do you speak English?", and even "Wow, you speak English so good!" Let me tell you something - I was born here in the U.S. I also come from a family of immigrants. Does this make me less American? No, it does not. Least people have forgotten history...the U.S. was founded by immigrants.

I recognize that the Mayor has proposed an agenda item under 5a Special Orders of Business: 21-4 requesting that the Human Rights Commission work on a report on how the city should take action to promote diversity as a core strength. I plan to support that motion and possibly amend it to strengthen it. As a former Commissioner with the Human Rights Commission, I value the expertise and experience of those on the commission. However, as a council, we need to do more than request a report. We need a resolution to denounce white supremacy as our neighbors in Keizer have done. To do less, is to be complicit bystanders. The report is one step that Salem's leadership could do. Yet, we need to do more. In addition to denouncing hateful, racist acts that we experienced, have heard from others, and seen video proof of, we as a council need to take a stance towards addressing racism at its core.

This is why I am requesting that the council pass a resolution declaring racism is a public health crisis and that we direct staff to return to us if possible by our work session on January 19, when we discuss the policy agenda, with a draft declaration that we will approve of at our next council meeting on January 25th.

This also includes recognizing that white supremacy exists not only in Salem, but throughout the nation. As elected leaders, we must call out racism and white supremacy in all its forms and to ensure our community knows we stand against racist practices that permeate from structural and institutional racism to the lived experiences that our communities of color deal with EVERYDAY.

There are multiple counties and states that have approved such statements so it is not unheard of and is not a "new" unknown practice. If Keizer can pass a resolution, so can Salem. The APHA webpage (<https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-equity/racism-and-health/racism-declarations>) has multiple declarations to review. This is why I urge the council to please suspend council rule 5(j) and vote on and pass this motion tonight Racism is not tolerated in the city of Salem (the city of peace) and that we as councilors take this into consideration as we set our policy agenda for the upcoming year.

Attachments: None

