

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SB 17 Would Create The California Office of Racial Equity

New Office Would Tackle Systemic Inequities

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SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA – In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic bringing racial inequities in California and throughout the U.S. into sharp relief, the California Legislature is considering a systematic approach to curbing racial inequity via [SB 17](#), introduced in the California Senate by Dr. Richard Pan (D-Sacramento). SB 17, which has now been referred to the Governmental Organization Committee and the Judiciary Committee, builds on the commitment Gov. Gavin Newsom made Tuesday night in his State of the State speech: “When this pandemic ends – and it will end soon – we’re not going back to normal. Normal was never good enough. Normal accepts inequity.”

SB 17 would declare racism a public health crisis and create a state Office of Racial Equity and a Racial Equity Advisory and Accountability Council. These new bodies would be tasked with developing a statewide racial equity framework and concrete strategies for addressing racial inequity across state government.

Data from Advancement Project California’s [RACE COUNTS](#) initiative shows that low-income and people of color are less likely to have access to early childhood education programs, have health insurance, own a home, vote, and feel safe in their neighborhood. According to state data, Latino, African American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Californians have suffered disproportionately high rates of [COVID-19 deaths](#). SB 17’s supporters believe the state can and must play a more

active role in dismantling racial inequities, particularly those exacerbated by the coronavirus.

If SB 17 is enacted, the Office of Racial Equity and the Racial Equity Advisory and Accountability Council will:

- Identify existing policies and practices in the state that contribute to, uphold, or exacerbate racial disparities and develop proposals to address these disparities, to be recommended to the Governor's Office and Legislature.
- Analyze, develop, evaluate, report on and recommend strategies for advancing racial equity across state agencies, departments and the Office of the Governor.
- Create and provide a Racial Equity Framework for the state and direct agency Secretaries to develop, adopt and implement Racial Equity Action Plans.
- Create a budget equity assessment tool to determine whether budget requests and annual allocations benefit or burden communities of color.

SB'17s principal co-authors are Assemblymembers Joaquin Arambula (D-Fresno) and David Chiu (D-San Francisco). Additional co-authors are Senators Dave Cortese (D-San Jose), María Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles) and Lena Gonzalez (D-Long Beach) and Assemblymember Robert Rivas (D-Hollister).

"Extensive research has identified racism as a public health crisis leading to significant health disparities, including infant and maternal mortality, chronic diseases prevalence, life expectancy and now COVID mortality," said Dr. Richard Pan. "The state needs an independent body to hold us accountable by examining California's policies and budget with the goal of achieving racial equity and ending systemic racism."

"These inequities didn't just happen by chance, they resulted from policy choices – some deliberate, some inadvertent – and they won't fix themselves automatically," said Alvaro Sanchez, Vice President of Policy at The Greenlining Institute. "To address structural racism, it has to be someone's job to identify it and develop concrete strategies to change it."

"All of the racial inequities we've seen in this pandemic have been decades in the making. We can no longer react to the symptoms of systematic racism or nibble around the policy edges," said John Kim, Executive Director of Advancement Project California. "Passing SB 17 and establishing a State level Office of Racial Equity is crucial to excavating the intersectional nature of structural racism baked into this state's public systems and policies. A fully resourced and appropriately authorized office is a powerful mechanism not only to stem the tide of bad, racist policies but

also to generate new pathways to close the opportunity gap for communities of color throughout the state."

"State government has a responsibility to address the systemic impacts of institutional racism on the people who call California home," said Arnold Sowell Jr., Executive Director of NextGen California. "The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people of color at alarmingly high rates and brought to light decades of structural racism embedded in various policies and programs within the systems of government. SB 17 proposes an important and meaningful solution to address these inequities and will put California farther down the path towards an equitable California for all."

DeAngelo Mack, Director of State Policy for Public Health Advocates said, "The disproportionate harms caused by racism are undeniable. Its negative effects permeate throughout all California systems. Intentional focus at every level of government is necessary to undo centuries of inequitable policies, practices, and treatment towards communities of color. We strongly support SB 17 and this historic opportunity to greatly improve the health and well-being of all Californians."

SB 17 is co-sponsored by a combination of racial equity, public health, environmental, and power building organizations:

- [NextGen Policy](#) fights for progressive policies to address environmental, social, racial, and economic inequities in California through justice-centered legislative advocacy, grassroots partnerships, and democratic civic engagement.
- [Public Health Advocates](#) brings a public health lens to today's most pressing problems, helping communities to pass laws, reform systems, and establish norms that foster justice, equity, and health.
- [Advancement Project California](#) is a multi-racial, multi-generational racial justice organization with expertise in research, advocacy, and policy. We work with partners and communities to expand educational opportunities for California's children; create healthy and safe neighborhoods; ensure communities of color have a voice in our democracy; strengthen movement-building; and shift public investments toward programs that benefit all Californians—not just the privileged few.
- [The Greenlining Institute](#) envisions a nation where communities of color thrive and race is never a barrier to economic opportunity. Greenlining advances economic opportunity and empowerment for people of color through advocacy, community and coalition building, research, and leadership development.

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