

Testimony for Joint Assembly and Senate Legislative hearing

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It is truly an honor to participate in this hearing to explore solutions impact COVID 19 is having on the Black and Brown communities around the New York State

I am have privilege of serving as the conveyor of the African-American Health Equity Task Force

In addition I am the chairman of the Board of the Buffalo Center for Health Equity

In Buffalo we are blessed to have two entities dedicated to this work

1. **The Buffalo Center for Health Equity** – These are community-based organizations rooted in the African-American community whose mission is to eliminate race-based health disparities by focusing on 5 pillars. <https://www.buffalohealthequity.org/>
  1. Research
  2. Advocacy
  3. Community Engagement
  4. Program Development
  5. Public Policy
  
2. **University at Buffalo Community Health Equity Research Institute** – This is embedded in UB and is supported directly by its President. Its main focus is research. <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2019/12/014.html>

COVID-19 did not create a health crisis in Black Buffalo

COVID-19 merely exposed the health crisis that was already existing

A health crisis caused by generations of social and economic neglect rooted in decades of structural institutional racism

Buffalo is the 2nd largest city in the city and is has some of the worst health outcomes in the nation

The Social determinants of health are driving health disparities in every category of chronic disease

High rates of diabetes, hypertension, asthma and cancer

Created a fertile ground for an outbreak of COVID-19 which created high infection rates in the zip codes in the heart of the Black community

Early fatality numbers ran 3 times the county population

So while we need a short strategy of increased testing, access to care for the sick ,quarantine of the infected

Create Regional Task Forces that will develop comprehensive strategy to address the social determinants of health

We must identify key influencers to develop and implement an action plan to specifically address the social determinants of health that are driving poor health outcomes in the African-American community in Western New York.

This work group must be a balance of leaders in the fields of business, healthcare, education, criminal justice and policies

As well as grassroots leaders who are living the realities of suffering caused by health disparities

The success of Economic and community development approaches must measure on how they impact the health equity

Health equity can only occur when we have education, economics, housing, criminal justice environmental concerns

Specifically in Buffalo, our work must focus on:

- Improving academic achievement for African-American students in urban school districts. What are the inside the classroom barriers for success? What outside the classroom forces create obstacles for the child to have academic success? Are there ample resources to address these issues? A child's success is directly connected to his/her lived

environment. We help the child by helping the family. We help the family by helping the community in which they live. All efforts to enhance academic achievement must integrate into this model. Academic achievement is connected to the ability for people to obtain secure employment which will provide adequate income to have a comfortable standard of living. Currently, about 80% of the children in the Buffalo Public schools qualify for free meals. This is an indicator of their families income status.

<https://buffalonews.com/2020/01/16/graduation-rates-lag-in-buffalo-racial-gaps-remain/>

- **Improve the economic condition of African-Americans in the region. Currently, 40% of African Americans living in the city of Buffalo live in poverty.** Despite the economic renaissance in the region the African-American community has been left behind. The unemployment rate is 4 times higher in the African American community. Attempts to connect African-Americans to employment training through the Northland Training Center have not yielded the desired results because of the skills gap which can be traced back to the inadequate educational experience for many of the applicants. We need to connect the economic development strategy to an improved academic experience for African-American children, youth, and adults.

[https://ppgbuffalo.org/files/documents/poverty\\_low\\_wage\\_work\\_income\\_inequality/truth\\_commission\\_report\\_poverty\\_in\\_buffalo\\_causes\\_impacts\\_solutions.pdf](https://ppgbuffalo.org/files/documents/poverty_low_wage_work_income_inequality/truth_commission_report_poverty_in_buffalo_causes_impacts_solutions.pdf)

<https://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/news/2019/01/15/buffalo-posts-the-nations-fourth-worst-poverty.html>

- **The vast majority of African-Americans are concentrated on the Eastside of Buffalo. Many of these neighborhoods have substandard housing.** Old buildings in despair litter the landscape of too many communities. We need to develop a strategy to upgrade the housing stock in Eastside neighborhoods without creating displacement and gentrification.

[https://ppgbuffalo.org/files/documents/data-demographics-history/a\\_city\\_divided\\_a\\_brief\\_history\\_of\\_segregation\\_in\\_the\\_city\\_of\\_buffalo.pdf](https://ppgbuffalo.org/files/documents/data-demographics-history/a_city_divided_a_brief_history_of_segregation_in_the_city_of_buffalo.pdf)

- There continues to be a tense relationship between law enforcement and the African-American community. Many feel their neighborhoods are not adequately protected by the criminal elements which prey on citizens. In addition, tension is increased with the proliferation of fines and fees associated with non-public safety motor vehicle violations. Also, economic hardships are created with excessive ticketing, traffic stops, and towing. Data shows that these communities have a disproportionate amount of ticketing than in white neighborhoods.

<https://www.investigativepost.org/2019/02/27/city-hall-cashing-in-on-traffic-tickets/>

- Many residents in the African-American community have developed chronic illnesses associated with poor water and air quality in their community. This obviously will have a negative impact on health outcomes. Additionally, exposure to lead will also impact the neurological development of school-age children

<https://www.investigativepost.org/2019/05/01/buffalo-lags-on-addressing-lead-poisoning/>

Additionally, a cancer cluster has been created in an African-American community associated with the lack of remediation of the old American Axel site. Many residents who have experienced the death of friends and neighbors dispute NYS claims of smoking being the principle driver for these high cancer rates. We need to help communities address the environmental concerns which cause poor health outcomes.

<https://news.wbfo.org/post/state-says-higher-cancer-rates-along-buffalo-cheektowaga-border-found-mainly-men>

- Access to fresh fruits and vegetables is limited to residents in the African-American because of the lack of quality affordable grocery stores. In addition, the lack of income and transportation also makes it difficult for too many residents to have a healthy diet. Poor eating habits contribute to poor health outcomes. Often in this community, poor

habits are more out of necessity than conscious choice. We need to create more access to healthy foods.

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/buffalo/news/2018/03/10/project-rainfall-aims-to-be-an-oasis-in-a-food-desert>



## **Goal**

Working with The Buffalo Center for Health Equity and University at Buffalo Community Health Equity Research Institute to have an agreed-upon Strategic Plan to eliminate race-based health disparities in the region. In addition, we must create a climate in the region where health equity is a stated priority as we measure our growth and progress.

