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Government & Regulations

# Coalition of leaders unveils plan to combat racism in Central Ohio



Storefronts were boarded up in the Short North following protests over the death of George Floyd.

JEFFRY KONCZAL



By Doug Buchanan Editor in chief, Columbus Business First

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A coalition of African American leaders is calling for the community to do more to combat racism in the wake of the protests over the death of George Floyd.

The Columbus Urban League hosted a press conference Tuesday featuring elected and nonprofit officials who unveiled a multistep plan to bring about positive change in living conditions for African Americans in the region.

“When we spoke about Covid-19 here at the Columbus Urban League, we decided early on that we simply would not waste the opportunities that come with real crises. While we absolutely deplore the impetus for change, we must find good in it,” Urban League CEO Stephanie Hightower said.

“The same is true with racism. Our hearts break for George Floyd, for Breonna Taylor, for Ahmaud Arbery, for Philando Castile and so many other senseless deaths in this country, so much unnecessary trauma, so great an imbalance in equity, and now a nation’s wounds are exposed to the entire world,” she said.

“And yet, we’re here today, standing together, because in this time of great national pain, unrest and uncertainty lies one shining ray of hope - that maybe now we can finally move

mountains, maybe now we can bring down walls."

Two key planks of the plan involve reforming the Columbus Division of Police and getting state politicians to follow the lead of Columbus and Franklin County by declaring racism a public health crisis.

Specifically, the coalition wants to create a partnership with the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #9, the union representing most law enforcement officers in Central Ohio, and it wants the city to implement recommendations in the "Matrix Report," an operational review of the Columbus Division of Police released last August by Matrix Consulting.

The coalition said four "high-priority" objectives related to law enforcement were to form an independent authority to review police use of force, update crowd dispersal techniques, improve the quality and depth of racial equity training and come up with a deadline for the remaining Matrix Consulting recommendations.

The coalition on Monday sent a letter to Gov. Mike DeWine, Ohio Senate President Larry Obhof and Ohio Speaker of the House Larry Householder asking them to declare racism a public health crisis, something Franklin County Commissioners and Columbus City Council have done.

Franklin County Commissioner Kevin Boyce cited persistent inequities in range of quality of life measures including wealth, education, healthcare and housing. He called on other organizations and businesses to support the resolution as well.

"The resolution does two things. One, it allows you to look at your own organization and begin to think about where you can really move the needle and how you can address some of those disparities that I just identified," he said. "But it also ignites a conversation and a cause. and the value of this cause is to see other entities taking action and doing the same.

"Challenge yourself to be a part of the change," he said.

"Challenge yourself to be a part of the movement. Challenge yourself to invest in our future."

YWCA CEO Christie Angel echoed the call for the community to get behind the effort, saying it "can no longer just be black and brown people's work."

"We need our allies, all of you, all of you and whatever role you play, we need your help," she said. "And that's why it's so important that you are here with us today. This is our issue. It is our time. This is our community. Let's get to work.

"The underpinning of all of this, it's not the fish or the lake that

is sick, it is the groundwater,” she said. “And the groundwater is racism. And so we know we have to get at it and we have to dig in deep, deep, deep to bring about this change.”

The coalition’s press conference overlapped with a coronavirus briefing by Gov. Mike DeWine and Dr. Amy Acton, Ohio’s health director, who also addressed the issue of racism as a public health issue. She cited research showing that your ZIP code can be a reliable determinant of health.

“When we do not realize our full potential, all of us are suffering from that,” she said. “And it isn't a zero sum game. It isn't that there's one thing that one person can have in another can't. We have got to do better. We have a state health improvement plan that puts health equity as the underlying premise of all of it. And all of our cabinets are joining together to move policies and programs and things forward on behalf of the governor for Ohio. And we can't do it alone.

“I'm begging of you. Please use your voice. Speak. Most importantly, listen. Please listen to one another.”

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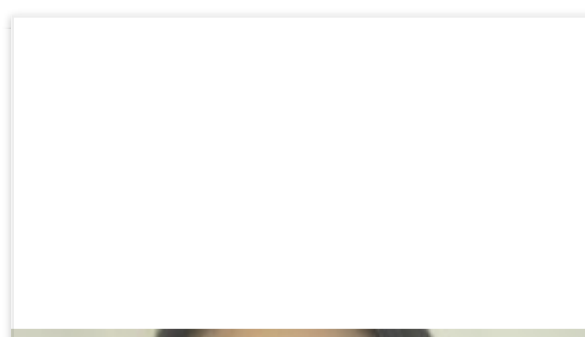
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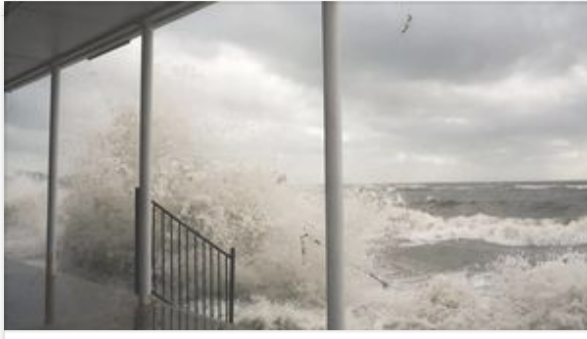
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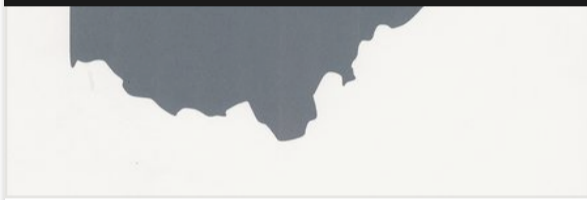


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