

ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 165

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 28, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman BENJIE E. WIMBERLY

District 35 (Bergen and Passaic)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes “New Jersey COVID-19 Pandemic Racial Disparity Task Force.”

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** establishing the “New Jersey COVID-19
2 Pandemic Racial Disparity Task Force.”

3
4 **WHEREAS,** The novel coronavirus 2019, also known as COVID-
5 19, has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health
6 Organization and has killed and impacted millions of people
7 around the world; and

8 **WHEREAS,** Early data in the United States suggests that COVID-
9 19 disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minority groups,
10 with an United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention
11 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report observing an
12 overrepresentation of black individuals among hospitalized
13 patients; and

14 **WHEREAS,** Early COVID-19 data for New Jersey also suggests
15 that black individuals are disproportionately affected, with
16 available data noting an overrepresentation of blacks among
17 COVID-19 deaths; and

18 **WHEREAS,** The true extent of racial disparities in the COVID-19
19 pandemic in New Jersey has not yet been captured and the
20 enactment of P.L.2020, c.28, which requires hospitals to report
21 COVID-19 demographic data, can lead to more thorough
22 analysis of COVID-19 health outcomes; and

23 **WHEREAS,** Racial and ethnic groups are often disproportionately
24 affected by public health emergencies because of associated
25 socioeconomic factors, such as crowded living conditions,
26 inflexible work environments, underlying health conditions, and
27 limited access to healthcare, which all contribute to increased
28 exposure and vulnerability to infectious disease outbreaks; and

29 **WHEREAS,** It is important for this State to study racial disparities
30 in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to mitigate
31 resulting adverse health outcomes and recommend actions to
32 policymakers, community leaders, and healthcare systems that
33 prevent future health inequities and address systematic risk
34 factors that leave racial and ethnic minority groups vulnerable
35 during public health emergencies; now, therefore,

36
37 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the*
38 *State of New Jersey:*

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40 1. a. There is established the “New Jersey COVID-19
41 Pandemic Racial Disparity Task Force.” This task force will study
42 racial disparities and associated risk factors in the impact of the
43 COVID-19 pandemic in the State.

44 b. The task force will consist of 15 members as follows:

45 (1) two members of the General Assembly, appointed by the
46 Speaker of the General Assembly;

47 (2) two members of the Senate, appointed by the President of the
48 Senate;

- 1 (3) the Commissioner of Health;
- 2 (4) the Chief State Medical Examiner;
- 3 (5) one representative from the Office of Minority and
- 4 Multicultural Health, appointed by the Governor;
- 5 (6) one representative from the Office of Public Health,
- 6 appointed by the Governor;
- 7 (7) one representative with epidemiological experience from the
- 8 Communicable Disease Service, appointed by the Governor; and
- 9 (8) six members of the public, appointed by the Governor, that
- 10 represent communities and community-based advocacy groups that
- 11 reflect the diverse geographic, economic, racial, cultural, gender,
- 12 and occupational composition of the State.
- 13 c. The members of this task force shall be appointed within 30
- 14 days after the date of enactment of P.L. ,c. (C.) (pending
- 15 before this Legislature as this bill). The task force shall organize as
- 16 soon as practicable after the appointment of a majority of the task
- 17 force's members. The presence of eight members shall constitute a
- 18 quorum. The Commissioner of Health shall serve as the
- 19 chairperson of the task force.
- 20 d. The task force will meet regularly as the task force
- 21 determines, or at the call of the chairperson or a majority of the task
- 22 force's membership.
- 23 e. All meetings of the task force shall be open to the public.
- 24 Agendas, minutes, documents, and testimony from all meetings
- 25 shall be posted on the state's website.
- 26 f. All members of this task force shall serve without
- 27 compensation.
- 28 g. Any vacancies in the membership of this task force shall be
- 29 filled in the same manner as the original appointment.
- 30 h. The Department of Health shall provide stenographic,
- 31 clerical, and other administrative assistants, and professional staff
- 32 as the task force requires to carry out the task force's work. The
- 33 task force shall be entitled to call to the task force's assistance and
- 34 avail of the services of the employees of any State, county, or
- 35 municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as the
- 36 task force may require and as may be available for the task force's
- 37 purposes.
- 38
- 39 2. a. The task force shall study racial disparities, contributing
- 40 risk factors, and Statewide and regional epidemiological patterns in
- 41 the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and make policy
- 42 recommendations to prevent racial and ethnic disparities in future
- 43 infectious outbreaks. The task force shall specifically:
- 44 (1) examine Department of Health demographic data, comparing
- 45 the number of individuals that have died from, have been treated
- 46 for, have been tested for, and have attempted to get tested for
- 47 COVID-19 across racial and ethnic groups;

- 1 (2) receive testimony from relevant community stakeholders in
- 2 impacted areas;
- 3 (3) perform outreach to stakeholders and the general public to
- 4 ensure that individuals are educated about racial and ethnic
- 5 disparities in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- 6 (4) recommend actions and policies to:
- 7 (a) address and prevent racial and ethnic disparities and
- 8 contributing risk factors;
- 9 (b) increase transparency in reporting data regarding the racial
- 10 and ethnic impact of COVID-19
- 11 (c) remove barriers in healthcare access;
- 12 (d) reduce the impact of medical bias in testing and treatment;
- 13 (e) mitigate environmental and infrastructure factors that
- 14 increase exposure during infectious disease outbreaks; and
- 15 (f) develop and improve systems for supporting long-term
- 16 economic recovery and health care following an infectious disease
- 17 outbreak.
- 18 b. The task force shall prepare and submit to the Governor and
- 19 to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164
- 20 (C.52:14-19.1) a final report no later than one year after the
- 21 organization of the task force. The task force shall expire 30 days
- 22 after the submission of the task force's task report.
- 23
- 24 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.
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27 STATEMENT

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29 This joint resolution establishes the "New Jersey COVID-19

30 Pandemic Racial Disparity Task Force" to study racial and ethnic

31 disparities and associated risk factors in the impact of the COVID-

32 19 pandemic in the State. The novel coronavirus 2019 outbreak,

33 also known as COVID-19, is a global pandemic that has killed and

34 impacted millions of people around the world. Early available

35 federal and state-level data on COVID-19 related health outcomes

36 suggest that some racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately

37 affected by the pandemic. Racial and ethnic minority groups have

38 been known to be more susceptible to public health emergencies

39 due to several associated socioeconomic factors including crowded

40 living conditions, inflexible work environments, underlying health

41 conditions, and limited access to healthcare. These factors increase

42 the level of exposure and vulnerability racial and ethnic minority

43 groups face during infectious disease outbreaks. As the State

44 continues to gather more demographic data on COVID-19-related

45 health outcomes, it becomes more important to study racial and

46 ethnic disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic in order to mitigate

47 resulting adverse health outcomes and recommend actions and

48 policies that prevent future health inequities and address systematic

1 risk factors that leave racial and ethnic minority groups vulnerable
2 during infectious disease outbreaks.

3 This task force will consist of 15 members with representation
4 from the General Assembly, the Senate, the Governor, the
5 Commissioner of Health, the Chief State Medical Examiner, the
6 Office of Minority and Multicultural Health, the Office of Public
7 Health, the Communicable Disease Service, and communities and
8 community-based advocacy groups that reflect the diverse
9 composition of the State. The task force will study racial and ethnic
10 disparities, contributing risk factors, and epidemiological patterns in
11 the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The task force will also
12 examine Department of Health demographic data on COVID-19
13 outcomes, receive testimony from relevant community stakeholders,
14 preform educational outreach to the public on racial and ethnic
15 disparities, and recommend policies and actions that address and
16 prevent racial and ethnic disparities and associated risk factors
17 during an infectious disease outbreak. Within a year after the
18 organization of the task force, the task force will submit a report to
19 the Governor and the Legislature of the task force's findings and
20 recommendations.