

IOWA-NEBRASKA NAACP STATE AREA CONFERENCE OF BRANCHES

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

1620 Pleasant Street, Suite 210, Des Moines, IA 50314

515.288.7171 | IowaNebraskaNAACP.org

Betty C. Andrews, President

MOVING POWERFULLY FORWARD! →

April 9, 2020

Honorable Kim Reynolds, Governor
State of Iowa
State Capitol
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Governor Reynolds:

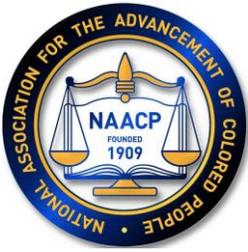
I hope this letter finds you in good health. We recognize that this is a challenging and uncertain time for our State, our Nation and in truth the whole world. Thank you for your service and commitment to the citizens of Iowa during this COVID-19 Crisis.

A common saying in the African American Community is “When America sneezes, the Black community catches pneumonia.” The expression signifies that when crisis hits our country, it hits the African American Community with even more devastation. As you may be aware, emerging data across the country is showing that African Americans have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis at significantly higher levels than white people. They are more likely to be affected and to succumb to this illness. They face the challenges of access to testing in their communities; and because of the disparities in risk factors such as diabetes and heart disease, they are more likely to experience the severest brunt of the virus.

As President and State Health Chair of the Iowa NAACP - a strong voice in the African American Community, and representing branches across this state, we write to request (1) that racial data and disparities be tracked, monitored, and considered in the State’s decision-making processes and (2) that our State Government take careful and deliberate measures to close any gaps in the availability of health care, the economic impact of the crisis, education resources and other measures on account of the COVID-19 Pandemic. We also request that this data be made available for public access through electronic means.

We understand that this pandemic is ongoing, is altering substantially familiar and traditional paradigms of governance and dialogue, and will likely have unforeseen consequences. Below are a few of our concerns at this time to which we would ask you as our Governor and your Department and Agency Directors to pay close attention, addressing them through the lens of disparate impact. Many of them are amplified because gaps in health, health insurance, wealth, and well-being already exist.

- **Data Collection on Race:** In addition to the request above, data delineated by race is a critical part of tracking the pathology of a disease and will also provide vital information on how to address future crises of this nature (God forbid).
- **Access to Testing & Disparate Treatment:** Many people of color do not have easy access to testing in their neighborhood, or do not have a primary care provider, or lack transportation resulting in less access to testing for COVID-19. Further, and painfully sadly, a number of African Americans report not being believed when it comes to reporting the severity of their health symptoms; and of course they still face challenges of not having adequate health insurance.
- **Wealth Gap:** With African American wealth being dramatically less than their white counterparts, they will run out of resources first and also take the longest to recover. Being less likely to own their homes, and unable to “work remotely” and instead having to go to work because they are essential workers, for example, in the health care and services sector, worrying about exposure of their families in consequence, and wondering how they will survive financially, they understandably are experiencing an unhealthy anxiety which the crisis is compounding.
- **Small Business:** Many small businesses in the Black community are bootstrap businesses that have had very little engagement with traditional business funding efforts and that in consequence may need additional support to



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ensure intended access to and commensurate participation in government subsidies. This extends to small businesses and non-profits like churches that also see a substantial resource gap when compared to the white community.

- **Education:** With African Americans experiencing a wealth gap and technology gap, many school systems have announced and/or are considering online learning. This is a problem for students who do not have access to technology, computers or the internet. As libraries and other technology hubs are also closed, this is even more critical. Additionally, many parents in these households may need resources and assistance for appropriately teaching their children.
- **Food Security:** Many students rely on schools for one or two meals each weekday. Schools also send some students home each weekend with extra food. Because students are not attending school, they miss out on these stopgap efforts and may not have access to adequate food.
- **Criminal Justice:** A couple of weeks ago the NAACP joined the ACLU in sending a letter addressing issues with criminal justice. The letter can be found at https://www.aclu-ia.org/sites/default/files/covid19_and_iowa_criminal_justice.pdf. We have seen and appreciate several of these measures being taken up by the Department of Corrections and some law enforcement agencies, but we believe more can be done.

We imagine you have seen and read the recent accounts in the press of the disparate impact the coronavirus is having on African Americans. A quick Google search will reveal several stories related to our concerns. Here are just a few:

- New York Times – Outcry Over Racial Data Grows as Virus Slams Black Community
<https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/04/08/us/ap-us-virus-outbreak-race.html>
- NPR - Racial Disparities: <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/08/830030932/cdc-hospital-data-point-to-racial-disparity-in-covid-19-cases>
- Dr. Fauci on the impact of COVID-19 on African American Communities:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8eDzI4MiYQ>
- CNN – Coronavirus Pandemic Disproportionately Hurts Blacks
more: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/07/us/coronavirus-black-americans-race/index.html>
- New York Times – COVID-19: Who will be saved?
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/us/coronavirus-medical-rationing.html>

This letter is written based on the developing data in Black communities, but our concerns apply to all communities of color and we ask that our request be so regarded. The NAACP would like to assist you in any way it can. To that end, we would like to propose a videoconference call with representatives from communities of color to talk about the importance of monitoring race during this pandemic and how to effectively consider it and address the concerns about disparate impact. We believe that we are all Iowans and that vulnerable communities in this state need a particular level of focus.

Governor Reynolds, during this Holy Week, you, your leadership team, and your families are in our thoughts and prayers. Many thanks for all the work and efforts taking place under your leadership. We look forward to hearing back from you soon on this urgent request.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Andrews, State Area President
Iowa-Nebraska NAACP Conference of Branches

Jacquie Easley McGhee, State Area Health Chair
Iowa-Nebraska NAACP Conference of Branches