

Governor Cooper Creates Task Force To Address COVID-19 Impact On Communities of Color

By Administrator

Monday, 15 June 2020 10:57 -

Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order 143 to address the social, environmental, economic, and health disparities in communities of color that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Order directs state agencies and offices to provide targeted measures to help communities of color that have been affected by the pandemic. "COVID-19 is shining a light on disparities that have long existed in our health care and economic institutions for communities of color," said Governor Roy Cooper. "Today's Executive Order will expand our state's efforts to help North Carolinians recover from the pandemic and improve access to affordable healthcare and quality economic opportunities in our state."

To make sure all North Carolinians can recover physically and economically from the COVID-19 pandemic, this Order identifies specific actions North Carolina departments and agencies must take to eliminate disparities across sectors.

The Order does the following:

Establishes the Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental, and Health Equity Task Force to focus on economic stability, health disparities, and environmental justice in North Carolina;

Tasks the North Carolina Pandemic Recovery Office to ensure the equitable distribution of pandemic relief funds;

Directs the Historically Underutilized Business Office to provide small historically underutilized businesses with access to opportunities, tools, and resources that promote equitable economic recovery and procurement of State contracts;

Directs the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to ensure all communities have access to COVID-19 testing and related health care;

Tasks the Office of Public Engagement to increase awareness about COVID-19, COVID-19 relief services and resources, and provide education on eliminating disparities;

Directs the Division of Emergency Management to continue coordinating efforts to protect the food supply chain and support feeding operations at food banks and school systems;

Directs the North Carolina National Guard to provide planning and logistical support and personnel where feasible to support mass testing of food processing plant workers in impacted communities and migrant farm workers; and

Tasks the Department of Environmental Quality to create a common discourse on environmental justice and coordinate with state executive agencies on the integration of

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environmental justice considerations into current and future policies, programs, and procedures.

COVID-19 disproportionately affects communities of color for several reasons, including existing social, environmental, and health inequities. Despite making up 22 percent of North Carolina's population, as of June 1, African Americans account for 30 percent of confirmed COVID-19 cases and 34 percent of COVID-19 deaths in cases where race is known. Similarly, Hispanics account for 39% of confirmed COVID-19 cases, in cases where race or ethnicity is known, despite only making up about 10% of the population in North Carolina.

The Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental, and Health Equity Task Force

The Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental, and Health Equity Task Force will identify best practices to create economic stability, eliminate health disparities, and achieve environmental justice in North Carolina. Andrea Harris dedicated her life to eliminating disparities in North Carolina, co-founding the non-profit North Carolina Institute of Minority Economic Development and serving on the Advisory Council for Historically Underutilized Businesses. Secretary of the Department of Administration Machel D. Sanders will chair the task force.

"Health inequities are the result of more than individual choice or random occurrence -- they are the result of the historic and ongoing interplay of inequitable structures, policies, and norms that shape lives," said NC Department of Administration Secretary Machel Sanders. "I am deeply honored to carry Andrea Harris' torch on this new task force, as we grapple with these complex and critical issues for North Carolina."

Direct Health Assistance

The Order directs the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) to use funding from the COVID-19 Recovery Act to provide COVID-19 related health services to uninsured North Carolinians during this public health emergency.

This will include health services provided by community health centers, local health departments, rural health centers, and clinics. NC DHHS is also tasked with reporting racial and ethnic demographic data; providing testing supplies and PPE to community health centers and

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nonprofit providers that service vulnerable communities; and partnering with community organizations to establish testing sites easily accessible to communities of color.

Economic Recovery for Historically Underutilized Businesses

Governor Cooper established the North Carolina Pandemic Recovery Office (NCPRO) to help North Carolina recover from the pandemic. In this Order, NCPRO has been tasked to work with each state agency to ensure COVID-19 related stimulus funds and resources are delivered equitably; to work with the Historically Underutilized Business program and advocate for the economic recovery of minority-owned businesses in the state; and to work with the Department of Commerce to guarantee the equitable distribution of Community Development Block Grants.

A certified historically underutilized business (HUB) is a business that is 51% owned by, and the day-to-day management and daily business operations are controlled by a person of color, woman, disabled, or socially and economically disadvantaged individual. The Historically Underutilized Business Office is tasked with developing and implementing a plan that stimulates economic recovery for small, historically underutilized businesses.

Government-Wide Focus

The Order also involves the Governor's Office of Public Engagement, the Division of Emergency Management, the North Carolina National Guard, and the Department of Environmental Quality.