CONFRONTING RACISM

WHEREAS:

Racism persists in America. American institutions and systems operate to reinforce existing inequities, often in ways not fully acknowledged or understood. People of color, and African Americans in particular, are disadvantaged and denied opportunities to earn fair incomes, accumulate wealth and live free and healthy lives with opportunities afforded to their white counterparts; and

WHEREAS:

AFSCME’s past, present and future are deeply rooted in the fight against racism and the struggle to build the bridge connecting labor rights, economic rights, human rights and civil rights for all. These fights are our fights, as exemplified by the historic 1968 Memphis Sanitation Worker Strike and the sacrifice of 1,300 men and their families who stood in the face of oppression, bigotry and brutality to demand change, a change that ultimately cost Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., his life; and

WHEREAS:

To confront racism, we must reform the systems that undermine fairness and reinforce bias. Individual achievement such as educational attainment, employment status, home ownership, propensity to save, financial literacy and entrepreneurship do not account for the substantial and persistent income and wealth disparities between white and Black Americans. Researchers at the Samuel Dubois Cook Center on Social Equity and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development argue that this and other factors are the result of structural racism rather than the root causes of unequal wealth and income distribution; and

WHEREAS:

America’s social and economic systems must be significantly changed to overcome the enduring legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. These systems have disadvantaged African American and other communities of color by providing unequal access to vital infrastructure, inadequate health care and education, insufficient social services, disenfranchisement in our democracy, lack of employment and training opportunities and limited access to the financial support necessary to make capital investments and own a home. At the same time, our nation’s criminal justice system has, in many respects, reinforced these injustices; and

Committee Assignment ______________  Committee Recommendation ______________  Convention Action ____________
WHEREAS:

African Americans have unequal access to assets, which in turn creates unequal opportunities to preserve or increase wealth to be passed on to subsequent generations. Today, the typical white household has 10 times more wealth than the typical Black household. According to a 2019 Center for American Progress study, just 41% of Black households own their own home, compared to more than 73% of white households. The study also found that college educated Black people are less likely to own their own homes than white people who never finished high school; and

WHEREAS:

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 brought an end to legal housing discrimination, yet people of color continue to endure rampant discrimination in the housing market today. Forty-five percent of African Americans report experiencing discrimination when trying to rent or buy a home; by contrast, just 5% of white Americans report experiencing housing discrimination; and

WHEREAS:

Compared with whites, Black men and women face higher risks of chronic illness, infection and injuries. Combined, the average lifespan for African Americans is three-and-a-half years shorter compared with whites. Today, a Black woman is 22% more likely to die from heart disease than a white woman. She is 71% more likely to die from cervical cancer than a white woman. Her baby has two times the infant mortality rate of a white infant. According to APM Research Labs, Black Americans have the highest COVID-19 mortality rates, about 2.3 times the rate for whites; and

WHEREAS:

Predominantly nonwhite school districts across the country receive $23 billion less in funding than their predominantly white counterparts each year. On average, poor nonwhite school districts receive 19%, or about $2,600, less per student than affluent white school districts. This leads to schools that are more likely to be under-resourced, outdated and in many cases hazardous to their health. According to a June 2020 U.S. Government Accountability Office report, more than half of the nation’s public school districts need to update or entirely replace multiple systems, such as HVAC or plumbing, in their school buildings—and many of these districts are concentrated in high-poverty areas; and
WHEREAS:
While underfunding of schools is part of the problem, it does not fully capture all the systems of racism that students of color face today. With the introduction of “zero-tolerance policies” in schools, out-of-school suspensions have risen by 40% and these policies disproportionately target Black and other disempowered youth. Black girls are six times more likely than white girls to receive suspensions. Black boys are three times more likely to receive suspensions than white boys; and

WHEREAS:
Research confirms that people of color are disproportionately impacted by environmental threats. Black and brown people are more likely to live near air pollution emitting sites, landfills and hazardous waste facilities, and Black children are nearly five times more likely than white children to suffer from lead poisoning. Children of color, especially those in rural areas of the nation, disproportionately lack access to clean and safe drinking water. And extreme weather events linked to climate change disproportionately impact communities of color; and

WHEREAS:
States continue to suppress the votes of people of color following the Supreme Court’s Shelby County v. Holder decision in 2013 and the Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute decision in 2018. As a result, states have closed polling places in Black and brown precincts and cut back on early voting, leading to long lines and hours-long waits to vote. States also have removed eligible voters from the rolls through aggressive voter caging practices; and

WHEREAS:
Black Americans are disproportionately penalized in our nation’s criminal justice system, which has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Black men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men and 2.5 times more likely than Hispanic men. Research shows that Blacks and whites use drugs at the same rates, and whites are more likely to deal drugs, but Blacks are far more likely to be arrested for selling and possessing drugs. Felony disenfranchisement laws in turn restrict the voting rights of one out of every 13 African Americans. Even in Florida, where voters approved a ballot measure to restore the voting rights of some formerly incarcerated people, state lawmakers have inserted restitution requirements that constitute a modern-day poll tax; and

WHEREAS:
Few institutions in America are free from the scourge of racial bias and disparate treatment. AFSCME, at all levels, has a moral obligation to combat personal and systemic racism.
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That because systemic racism endures, our efforts to eradicate it must endure as well.
AFSCME shall recommit to confronting and taking active measures to address racism in our union and in America; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That AFSCME shall renew our work to address systemic racism throughout the public sector.
AFSCME will vigorously oppose policies, such as privatization, that seek to extract unfair payments from poorer communities and communities of color. We will advocate for more infrastructure, especially infrastructure that improves lives such as transportation, broadband access, parks, libraries and modernized schools. And we will work to ensure that infrastructure is fairly distributed among our neighborhoods so that poorer communities and communities of color are not denied their fair share of infrastructure; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That we will call out and address unequal application of public assistance program rules, eligibility determinations and service delivery that unfairly deny benefits and services to which people are entitled. We will work tirelessly to ensure that our tax systems are fair and that everyone in America has equal access to the ballot and the levers of democracy; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That we will fight for better labor standards, mandatory paid leave requirements and a minimum wage of $15 an hour with subsequent automatic adjustments for inflation. We will work to strengthen and enforce equal employment opportunity laws. And we will continue our struggle to bring the opportunity to join together in a union to every American because we know the most important way to create economic justice is to empower workers to fight for it for themselves and we have seen how union rights are civil rights; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That people of color have fair access to education, job training, housing and capital to support a business and buy a home so that all who live in America have access to the vaunted American Dream; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That AFSCME will vigorously advocate for the restoration of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act and the repeal of any and all felony disenfranchisement, strict voter ID, modern-day poll tax and discriminatory voter purge policies; and
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:
That AFSCME reaffirms our commitment to Resolution 51, Racial Justice and Public Safety, adopted at our Convention in 2016. That resolution resolves our union to:

a. Address vital issues related to public safety.
b. Recommit ourselves to promoting an economy that works for all.
c. Build relationships between community leaders and our members working in police and corrections to identify and solve problems.
d. Play a leadership role as our nation unites to make our society more just, more tolerant and less violent.

But we must ask more of ourselves to address implicit bias and systemic racism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:
That while education and training are a starting point for confronting racism, training alone is not the answer. AFSCME and its affiliates commit to expand on training by hosting discussions, forums and readings, showing videos, facilitating planning sessions, campaigns and debriefs — all to create change by transforming minds and organizational culture. These programs may include:

• History of Race and Labor in America
• Racial Anxiety as a Barrier to Progress
• Effective Conversations about Race & Equity
• Types of Racism
• Interrupting Systems of Power and Oppression
• Unpacking White Privilege
• Interrupting Oppressive Moments
• Developing Shared Language and Understanding; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED:
That AFSCME shall examine our own institutions, procedures and cultures to identify and address bias to become a more perfect union.

SUBMITTED BY: INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD