
CONFRONTING RACISM

1 **WHEREAS:**

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

6 **WHEREAS:**

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

13 **WHEREAS:**

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

21 **WHEREAS:**

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

29 **WHEREAS:**

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

36 **WHEREAS:**

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

41 **WHEREAS:**

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

48 **WHEREAS:**

49 Predominantly nonwhite school districts across the country receive \$23 billion less in funding
50 than their predominantly white counterparts each year. On average, poor nonwhite school districts
51 receive 19%, or about \$2,600, less per student than affluent white school districts. This leads to
52 schools that are more likely to be under-resourced, outdated and in many cases hazardous to their
53 health. According to a June 2020 U.S. Government Accountability Office report, more than half of
54 the nation's public school districts need to update or entirely replace multiple systems, such as HVAC
55 or plumbing, in their school buildings—and many of these districts are concentrated in high-poverty
56 areas; and

57 **WHEREAS:**

58 While underfunding of schools is part of the problem, it does not fully capture all the systems
59 of racism that students of color face today. With the introduction of “zero-tolerance policies” in
60 schools, out-of-school suspensions have risen by 40% and these policies disproportionately target
61 Black and other disempowered youth. Black girls are six times more likely than white girls to receive
62 suspensions. Black boys are three times more likely to receive suspensions than white boys; and

63 **WHEREAS:**

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

70 **WHEREAS:**

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

76 **WHEREAS:**

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

85 **WHEREAS:**

86 Few institutions in America are free from the scourge of racial bias and disparate treatment.
87 AFSCME, at all levels, has a moral obligation to combat personal and systemic racism.

88 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:**

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

92 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

100 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

105 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

112 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

116 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

117 That AFSCME will vigorously advocate for the restoration of Section 5 of the Voting Rights
118 Act and the repeal of any and all felony disenfranchisement, strict voter ID, modern-day poll tax and
119 discriminatory voter purge policies; and

120 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

121 That AFSCME reaffirms our commitment to Resolution 51, Racial Justice and Public Safety,
122 adopted at our Convention in 2016. That resolution resolves our union to:

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

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

130 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

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

143 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED:**

144 That AFSCME shall examine our own institutions, procedures and cultures to identify and
145 address bias to become a more perfect union.

SUBMITTED BY: INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD