

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Creating COVID-19 Pandemic Task Force on Racial and Health Disparities

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TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed A4004 wGR/S2410, which would create the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic Task Force on Racial and Health Disparities. Last month, the bill was returned to the Legislature with recommendations to strengthen the task force by adding additional members, including representation from the Division on Civil Rights and the Division of Consumer Affairs, both in the Department of Law and Public Safety. The Legislature concurred with the Governor’s conditional veto.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted our minority communities and we must work together to eliminate the existing racial disparities in health care,” **said Governor Murphy**. “The revisions sent back to the Legislature further strengthen this bill and will bring together the perspectives and expertise necessary to achieve equity and meaningful healthcare reform.”

The bill was sponsored by Senators Cunningham and Pou and Assemblywomen Sumter, Jimenez, and Carter.

“The COVID-19 pandemic ravaged minority communities throughout the United States,” **said Senator Cunningham**. “Predominantly Black counties account for only 30 percent of the U.S. population, and yet they were the location of 56 percent of COVID-19 deaths. In order to effectively help these communities and prevent this from happening again in the future, we must understand why the pandemic hit them so hard and come up with long-lasting strategies to eradicate health disparities.”

“The tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the importance of addressing racial and ethnic health care disparities,” **said Senator Nellie Pou**. “We should take the lessons of this tragedy and learn from them. Inequalities in care and treatment for communities of color and our most vulnerable populations are unacceptable, and establishing this task force is a positive step towards safeguarding all of our residents, regardless of race, ethnicity or geography, during the remainder of the COVID crisis, and in the days and years to come.”

“Long before the COVID-19 pandemic began, people of color faced enormous disparities in our healthcare system,” **said Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter**. “African-American and Latino mothers saw higher mortality rates. A disproportionate number of minority families lacked access to health insurance and care. Communities of color have been impacted by COVID-19 at an alarming rate. We need to understand how and why these disparities are happening, and what we can do to mitigate the harm this pandemic has caused.”

“This public health crisis has exacerbated deep inequities across New Jersey, particularly racial health disparities,” **said Assemblywoman Angelica Jimenez**. “Communities of color have shouldered a large burden in this pandemic and will undoubtedly need unique assistance to recover. The work of this task force will help us get a clearer picture of the extent of the pandemic’s toll on these communities and continue our efforts to promote health equity for all.”

“As our state recovers from this public health and economic crisis, we must begin asking ourselves some tough questions, including why this pandemic is disproportionately affecting people of color,” **said Assemblywoman Linda Carter**. “The numbers are staggering and unnerving. We must take action to end inequalities that impact social determinants of health like access to healthcare, work opportunities and transportation.”

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