

A5679 (Darling)

S2987 (Parker)

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

An act to declare racism a public health crisis and to establish a working group to promote racial equity

NYSNA represents more than 42,000 registered nurses throughout New York and is a leading advocate for universal access to high quality health care for all New Yorkers, regardless of ability to pay.

The proposed legislation would declare that racism constitutes a public health crisis in New York and would establish a working group within to Department of Health to study the impact of racism on inequalities and disparities in access to health care services and health outcomes. The working group would be charged with issuing a report to address the problem and provide concrete recommendations to eliminate the effects of racism in our health care system. The first report would be received by the end of 2021 and every two years thereafter.

State health care policy for decades has focused on reducing capacity and services, motivated by a desire to reduce state spending and encourage private providers to employ market mechanisms to restructure care and increase their financial viability by focusing on revenue growth.

The result has been an increasingly two-tiered system of care that promotes rising racial and class inequality, paralleling the broader tendency toward concentration of income and wealth in fewer and fewer hands.

The inequities in our broader economy and health care system have been vividly highlighted by the COVID pandemic. Blacks, Latinos and low-wage workers, disproportionately low income and working in essential industries, have suffered infection, hospitalization and mortality rates that are more than twice the rate faced by whiter and more affluent New Yorkers.

These systemic racial and class inequities have long been known, but the economic and health effects of the pandemic have revealed this underlying inequality in jarring and vivid terms that can no longer be ignored.

It is now time for the state to seriously address inequality in our economic structure and in our health care system. The enactment of tax increases on the wealthiest New Yorkers during this year's budget process was an important step forward. We must also directly address racial disparities in health care and health outcomes by expanding services to underserved communities, implementing universal single payer health coverage for all residents, and eliminating disparities in the quality of care in our hospitals

This legislation will formally acknowledge the effects of racism as a health care emergency and is a necessary first step toward implementing concrete policy changes to provide equality in health care to all.

NYSNA strongly supports enactment of A5679/S2987.