

Virginia Health Advocacy Organizations Denounce Commissioner Greene's Views on Racism and Public Health

Advocacy Organizations Call for Strong Support for Workers at VDH Addressing Racial Disparities

In 2021, Virginia lawmakers passed a [resolution](#) recognizing that racism is a public health crisis, becoming one of seven states to do so according to the [American Public Health Association](#). That resolution was supported by a substantial body of evidence linking racism and racial disparities in outcomes for [maternal and infant health](#), [quality of care](#), [pain treatment](#), and [mental health](#). This basic acknowledgment — that racial discrimination and health outcomes are connected — has paved the way for ongoing work between non-profit organizations, community advocates, state agencies, and lawmakers to address these disparities and come together to build a public health system that works well for everyone — white, Black, Latino, Asian American — who calls the Commonwealth home.

Yet an article published in the [Washington Post](#) makes clear that the views held by Dr. Colin Greene — the current Commissioner of Virginia's Department of Health — are mired in racial stereotypes and antithetical to the most basic expectations we hold for Virginia's public servants. Dr. Greene has repeatedly ignored clear evidence of the damaging impact of racism on health outcomes for people of color and dismissed the hard work of dedicated and passionate public service employees who lead the state's efforts to ensure more Black mothers and infants can enjoy good health and well-being.

The views espoused by Dr. Greene show a stubborn refusal to reflect and learn even when presented with facts and opportunities for growth. The individual leading Virginia's public health efforts cannot hold these dismissive and harmful views and have any hope of meeting the unique health needs of every Virginia family. Understanding of the historical and modern-day impact of racism on the health and well-being of people of color is asking the bare minimum of anyone charged with leading public health initiatives.

Commissioner Greene is quoted as saying, "America's been dealing with racism as long as I've been alive, and it'll continue dealing with it after I'm gone I suspect, so it's not a crisis." In other words, Dr. Greene — Virginia's chief public health official — is telling us in his own words that he is refusing to lead. This lack of urgency to address critical issues related to racism, such as the higher than average rates of Black maternal and infant mortality in Virginia, is dangerous.

The signed organizations want to reiterate our commitment to working with all stakeholders to continue to build a public health system that works well for everyone in the state. We call on state officials to strongly support the ongoing efforts of the public service employees leading work in Virginia's Department of Health to address the impacts of racism on the health of our friends and neighbors and to reaffirm that racism remains a public health crisis in Virginia.

The following organizations have signed on in support of the statement and sentiments shared above:

American Cancer Society - Cancer Action Network
Birth in Color RVA
Care in Action
Families Forward VA
Federation of Virginia Food Banks
Hamkae Center
Honoring Choices Virginia
League of Women Voters of Virginia
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Women's Political Caucus of Virginia (NWPC-VA)
New Virginia Majority
PUSH Maternal Health Coalition
Rx Partnership
SEIU Virginia 512
The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
Virginia AFL-CIO
Virginia Health Catalyst
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
Virginia Organizing
Virginia Poverty Law Center
Virginia Rural Health Association
Voices for Virginia's Children



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