



**2022 Report to Gov. Whitmer**

**Convened by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in late 2020, the Black Leadership Advisory Council (BLAC) has been charged with identifying barriers in the Black community in education, community safety, health and business leadership. BLAC is acting in an advisory capacity to the governor to develop, review and recommend policies and actions designed to eradicate and prevent discrimination and racial inequity in Michigan.**

To accomplish this goal, the Council is charged with:

- ▶ Identifying state laws, or gaps in state law, that create or perpetuate inequities to promote economic growth and wealth equity for the Black community.
- ▶ Collaborating with the governor's office and the Black community to promote legislation and regulation that ensures equitable treatment of all Michiganders and seeks to remedy structural inequities in this state.
- ▶ Serving as a resource for community groups on issues, programs, sources of funding, and compliance requirements within state government to benefit and advance the interests of the Black community.
- ▶ Promoting the cultural arts within the Black community through coordinated efforts, advocacy, and collaboration with state government.
- ▶ Providing other information or advice or taking other actions requested by the governor.

The council's work is done in its four committees:

#### **Business Leadership Committee**

Examines how state government can better serve black entrepreneurs, encourage Michigan businesses to have inclusive hiring and promotion practices for Black workers and ensure that Michigan businesses don't exploit black consumers.

#### **Community Safety and Justice Committee**

Examines all elements of the criminal justice system to build safer and more just communities.

#### **Education Committee**

Identifies gaps and challenges facing Black students and educators and proposes short- and long-term solutions to boost educational achievement in the Black community.

#### **Health Committee**

Holistically examines Black Michiganders' physical and mental health, the gaps in care options, and the conditions that have created race-based health disparities.



# BLAC ACTIVITIES



**In its first year, council members have engaged in collaborative research and heard presentations from experts in state government and academia about important issues to Black Michiganders. This research has formed the basis for the body's first recommendations.**

Since its first meeting in December 2020, BLAC has sponsored three webinars:

▶ **Aug. 18, 2021**

BLAC's Education Committee hosted a virtual town hall featuring State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice, Yamah Bahdkeh, a senior at Renaissance High School in Detroit; Alsina McMorris, a parent of an autistic student and Trishandra Williams, a teacher in the Flint school district. The panelists discussed how online instruction affected K-12 students during the COVID-19 crisis and addressed attempts to censor the teaching of history in Michigan schools.

▶ **Nov. 9, 2021**

BLAC's Business Committee hosted a webinar featuring State Representative Sarah Anthony and Omari Hall of GreenPath Financial Wellness, who presented information about debt reduction strategies and other tools to build financial health and resiliency.

▶ **Jan. 22, 2022**

BLAC's Health Committee hosted a conversation about mental health in the Black community that featured speakers Dr. Rahn Bailey, MD, and Dr. Demetrius Ford, J.D., PSY.D., Ph.D.

Additionally, they have issued statements about critical social issues:

- ▶ [A Message from the Michigan Black Leadership Advisory Council on Voter Suppression](#)
- ▶ [Statement from the Michigan Black Leadership Advisory Council \(BLAC\) on COVID-19 Protocols and Vaccine Hesitancy in the Black Community](#)

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



**Over the past year, subject experts have presented to the Black Leadership Advisory Council on a wide array of issues. Based on those presentations and other forms of research and analysis, BLAC now offers the following recommendations regarding 11 policy issues.**





## BLACK CULTURE RECOMMENDATION

### 1 Support the CROWN Act

In 2020, researchers at Michigan State University conducted four studies that found that Black women with natural hairstyles face bias in job recruitment. The studies showed that black women with natural hairstyles were perceived as less professional and competent.

Black children are four times more likely to be suspended from school than white peers. Often, Black children face punishment for minor infractions such as violating a school's dress code. Some schools' dress codes prohibit hairstyles that feature one's natural hair texture or are expressions of cultural pride.

Since 2019, a coalition of Black organizations and activists has advocated for the CROWN Act, which stands for, "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair." The legislation, introduced at the local, state and federal levels, prohibits race-based hair discrimination, which is the denial of employment and other opportunities because of hair texture or protective hairstyles such as braids, locs, twists or Bantu knots.

Since 2019, 12 states have adopted legislation that makes hair discrimination illegal. Following

are the states who have adopted the CROWN ACT in the order of adoption: California, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Colorado, New York, Washington, Maryland, Connecticut, New Mexico, Delaware, Nebraska and Illinois.

Michigan State Representative Sarah Anthony introduced versions of the CROWN Act in 2019 and again in 2021 that would amend the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include hair texture and protective hairstyles as, "traits historically associated with race." House Bill 4275 would create legal protections for Michiganders who face discrimination based on their hair's texture, color, and styling. The bill has been referred to the Michigan House Judiciary Committee, but the bill has not had a hearing scheduled. Gov. Whitmer has indicated that she supports the legislation.

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### Recommendation

The Black Leadership Advisory Council urges the Michigan Legislature to pass, and Gov. Whitmer to sign, the Michigan CROWN Act to outlaw hair discrimination in Michigan.



## BUSINESS RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2 Support a Michigan payday loan interest rate cap

As many Michiganders struggle to keep up with the rising costs of gas, groceries and other expenses, payday lending operations promise hope for people who lack access to traditional bank loans. Michigan was the last state in America to authorize payday lending and has been reluctant to reform the industry, despite evidence that payday lenders' usurious repayment terms leave vulnerable consumers locked in a cycle of escalating debt that they find difficult to escape.

**A two-week loan from a payday lender can end up costing a consumer more than 300% the original loan.**

While Michigan law does not allow a two-week loan to be renewed, the state has no cooling-off period between loans, which means consumers often take out another loan when they pay off a loan. According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the

average payday lender customer takes out 10 loans in a year, paying off old loans with a new loan. According to CFPB data, 70% of payday loans in Michigan are taken out on the day a previous loan is paid back and 86% of payday loans in Michigan are taken out within two weeks of an earlier loan's payoff.

It has been estimated that these operations, which are primarily headquartered outside of Michigan, drain close to \$100 million from Michigan's economy each year.

Payday lending operations are primarily concentrated in communities of color. While there are 5.6 payday stores per 100,000 people in Michigan, communities with a significant African American population have 7.6 payday lenders per 100,000 people.

Michiganders for Fair Lending, a coalition of consumer activists, has launched a ballot proposal to cap interest rates for payday loans at 36% APR. 16 states and the District of Columbia have capped payday loan interest rates at 36%.

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### Recommendation

The Black Leadership Advisory Council urges the Michigan legislature to adopt, and Gov. Whitmer to sign, legislation that would cap interest rates for payday loans at 36% APR. If the legislature fails to adopt this legislation, BLAC encourages Michigan voters to support the Michiganders for Fair Lending ballot proposal.

### 3 Include Black businesses in Michigan's \$10B federal infrastructure projects

**Michigan has a unique opportunity to help Black businesses overcome the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in state contracting opportunities.**

Through the historic 2021 federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Michigan will receive \$10 billion. The money includes \$7.3 billion to fix roads, \$563 million for bridge replacement or repairs, \$1 billion to improve public transportation, \$1.3 billion to improve water infrastructure, \$100 million to expand high-speed internet access, \$1.5 billion in broadband investment and \$110 million to boost the state's electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

These investments are welcome news in Michigan's Black communities, where infrastructure deficiencies have been well documented. The Digital Divide and the need to expand quality public transportation options in Black communities are persistent economic barriers for Blacks in Michigan.

In recent years, there has been positive momentum in the state's investments in disadvantaged business enterprises (DBE). For example, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) awarded \$73 million more to DBEs in 2021 than it did in 2019, a 41% increase.

In 2019, MDOT rolled out its Consultant Mentor-Protégé Program, which matches MDOT-certified DBEs or small business enterprises that are financially prequalified by MDOT to perform engineering or technical services with prime contractors to foster long-term business relationships and increase



the number of DBEs and small businesses that receive MDOT contracts and subcontract awards. Since 2019, there have been 54 mentor-protégé projects, with an average protégé award amount of \$225,000.

### **But more can and should be done to help Black-owned businesses thrive.**

The federal investments represent an opportunity for Michigan businesses to secure significant state contracts, hire workers and increase profits. Unfortunately, Black-owned companies often face serious challenges in contracting opportunities for large-scale infrastructure projects due to factors such as the lack of capital, inability to secure bonding or insurance and the lack of access to credit and less experience navigating the state's bidding process and the lobbying landscape. Furthermore, more established white-owned firms have more experience navigating the

state's bidding process and the lobbying landscape. The Black Leadership Advisory Council believes state officials should work diligently to ensure that Black businesses are not shut out of the infrastructure bill's contracting opportunities as they essentially were in the first round of funding for the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act's Paycheck Protection Program. According to a Bloomberg analysis, 27% of businesses in white-majority congressional districts received relief loans in the first round, compared with 17% of companies where people of color made up more than half the population.

Because the federal government's diversity goals supersede a Michigan state constitutional amendment that aims to block special programs to help disadvantaged businesses, Michigan has a unique opportunity to help Black businesses overcome the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in state contracting opportunities.

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### **Recommendation**

The Black Leadership Advisory Council urges the Whitmer administration to work closely with business organizations that serve Black business owners to help Black entrepreneurs get the resources, credit and training they need to be able to participate in a meaningful way in contracting opportunities presented by the federal infrastructure investments that are coming to Michigan.





#### **4 Support diversity on corporate boards and in c-suites**

### **There is ample evidence that including people of color on corporate boards and c-suites is good for companies' bottom line and corporate culture.**

For example, a 2020 study by McKinsey & Co. found that companies in the top-quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity in their c-suite positions are 36% more profitable than those in the bottom quartile.

However, a 2021 analysis published by the Washington Post found that only 8% of c-suite executives, or the most senior corporate leaders, are Black. In 2019, more than a third of S&P 500 firms had no Black board member, and Black directors comprised only 4% of Russell 3000 Index board members. A 2020 Harvard Business Review study outlined why boards have so few Black directors, including boards' reliance on their social networks for recruitment, lack of Black directors in officer roles on boards and poor onboarding processes. The study also found that when there is only one Black member on a board, that person thinks their contributions are ignored or undermined. This is especially a problem for Black women board members.

According to a 2022 analysis by Inforum, more than half of Michigan's most prominent companies (55%) lack a Black director. Among 742 board members in 82 publicly traded firms, only 21 Black women (2.8%) and 30 Black men (4%) hold board seats.

Some governmental bodies and business organizations have taken bold steps to address the lack of board diversity in recent years. Gov. Whitmer has demonstrated her commitment to the cause by assembling a cabinet and staff that reflects Michigan's rich diversity.

House Bill 4597 is legislation that State Representative Padma Kuppa introduced to encourage Michigan public companies to add more women to their boards and have a pipeline to c-suite positions and board seats. The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Workforce, Trades and Talent, but there has been no movement.

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#### **Recommendation**

BLAC supports HB 4597 but believes it should be expanded to include people of color. We urge the legislature to hold hearings on the expanded bill and to pass it. We also encourage Gov. Whitmer to sign the legislation upon the legislature's passage of the bill.

## COMMUNITY SAFETY & JUSTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

**There is an undeniable racial disparity in outcomes, and inequitable treatment demonstrated towards persons of color at all stages of our criminal justice process.**

### 5 Better collection and analysis of criminal justice data

In Michigan, data that address the racial disparity of those incarcerated either lacks accessibility or is inconsistent at best. However, available information validates what people of color have known all along– that there is an undeniable racial disparity in outcomes and inequitable treatment demonstrated towards persons of color at all stages of our criminal justice process..

As we examine the sources of available data and information about the criminal justice process and procedure, it appears that many decisions that have life-altering, traumatic and adverse consequences for persons of color and their families, may boil down to the exercise of discretion of a single official, such as a police officer, a prosecutor, a probation/parole officer or a judge. Ensuring that the discretion of these public officials is exercised in a manner accountable to the demands of community justice and is not exercised in a racially discriminatory way is critical to ensuring that our criminal justice system operates equitably and in a manner that recognizes the total value and humanity of all.

According to University of Connecticut, Florida State and University of

Iowa studies, Black men are incarcerated at disproportionately higher rates than whites, despite lower risk scores on nearly all variables on a standardized tool that accesses risk.

According to a Vera Institute study on incarceration trends in Michigan, Blacks comprise 15% of Michigan but populate 37% of our jails and 53% of our prisons. Potential and probable causes for this disparity include but are not limited to:

- ▶ Bail bond – how it is set/determined
- ▶ Plea bargaining – how structural factors may lead to racial disparities in who accesses quality defense counsel and the lack of transparency, re: the elements used to offer plea deals and how to enter plea negotiations
- ▶ Habitual offender sentencing – data needed on how this specifically impact persons of color
- ▶ Juvenile and adult sentencing
- ▶ Recidivism
- ▶ Probation violation
- ▶ Sentencing guidelines

According to the [Prison Policy Initiative](#), 253,000 Michigan residents are behind bars or under criminal justice supervision. Of those, 172,000 are on probation and 17,000 are on parole.

Some tools are routinely used by the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) and the Michigan courts, such as Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sentencing (COMPAS), to understand offenders and identify and assess risk, criminogenic factors for recidivism for assessment, case planning and rehabilitation. It's not clear if these tools reinforce inequity by race by reducing the person's humanity through aggregate conceptions of offenders. For example, factors listed in COMPAS as criminogenic are whether the offender is determined to have residential instability, social isolation, criminal associates or peers, family criminality, substance abuse, a criminal personality and access to vocation education issues.

While these tools may focus on the person's part before a judge or a parole/probation officer, the impact of measuring more than just the propensity of an offender to re-offend, the human cost of themselves, their family and the community of depriving a person of their liberty should also be weighed and recognize equal value of the lives and families of persons of color and the cumulative impact of social and economic marginalization on their current COMPAS scores.

Frequently, decision-making in these areas is left to the discretion of one individual or office in our criminal justice system. Unfortunately, that discretion may be abused or inconsistent, causing devastating racial disparity.

The adverse outcomes of these issues are:

- ▶ Loss of jobs due to absence from work because of the inability to post bond.
- ▶ Automatic jail or prison sentencing because of the lack of finances to hire an attorney, resulting in plea bargaining.
- ▶ The repetition of one specific felony can subject an individual to habitual offender status.
- ▶ Inconsistent parole or probation guidelines that are personality-driven.
- ▶ The changing of Michigan Sentencing Guidelines from mandatory to advisory, leaving sentencing below or above the guidelines to the Judge's discretion.
- ▶ Inconsistent decisions on trying a juvenile as an adult, resulting in disparities in felony classifications.
- ▶ According to the Michigan Department of Corrections, the recidivism rate is 26% and the racial disparity is embedded in that percentile.







Generational incarceration can be initiated due to racial disparity in our criminal justice system, negatively impacting Black families and communities due to the absence of Black males.

In the Black community, there is a widespread belief that the root cause of racial disparity in our criminal justice system is the opportunity to use discretion and its abuse, beginning with arrests followed by prosecution, sentencing, parole, and probation.

However, believing that these things are accurate and the emotion it initiates rarely affects change. There is a critical need for data collection in all these areas to determine whether the abuse of discretion exists.

There are encouraging signs that the Whitmer Administration is looking to collect, analyze and use data to address gaps in the criminal justice system. The Michigan Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration created a Data Convening Advisory Board in 2021. With the support of the Michigan Justice Fund, the board is working on data integration between the criminal and legal systems. The board's diverse membership includes advocates, law enforcement officials, judges, MDOC, The Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB), legislators, and professors/academia. The group recently completed a draft blueprint for cross system integration and is soliciting feedback.

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### **Recommendation**

The Black Leadership Advisory Council recommends data collection and professional analysis be initiated with the assistance of our Michigan State Attorney General, Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards (MCOLES), Association of Michigan Prosecutors and other stakeholders to collaborate, collect and analyze data strategically. We believe this collaboration would be invaluable in the effort to effect real change and create planning strategies for the following areas:

- ▶ Training of law enforcement
- ▶ Implementing programs that emphasize the importance of law enforcement commitment to communities they serve; to build empathy in communities and to move away from detrimental, fear/stereotype-based policing
- ▶ Developing meetings/townhalls and information sessions with Michigan stakeholders and groups to create policing strategies that check abusive discretion



## 6 Ban no-knock warrants

Dating back to English common law, “knock and announce” has been the standard practice of American law enforcement officials who are making a forced entry. In the landmark 1955 *Miller v U.S.* case, the U.S. Supreme Court solidified this standard with a decision that made it unlawful for law enforcement officials to force entry without first giving notice to the occupants of their authority and purpose for entering.

With the escalation of the so-called, “War on Drugs,” the number of “no-knock” warrants that are obtained from judges and allow law enforcement officials to enter a dwelling without notice or “quick-knock” warrants that will enable them to enter with little notice, has increased exponentially. According to researcher Peter Kraska, “no-knock” or “quick-knock” warrants were issued by judges for use by local police agencies about 1,500 times in the early 1980s. By 2010, local police conducted an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 “no-knock” or “quick-knock” raids.

In the wake of Grand Rapids native Breonna Taylor’s death, calls to end no-knock warrants have grown louder. Taylor was killed in Louisville, Kentucky, when her boyfriend shot at police who entered her home without warning during an investigation involving Taylor’s former boyfriend, who did not live there. Situations like this have led leaders such as Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel to affirm the need for reform.

Furthermore, no-knock warrants pose a danger to the officers who execute them because the castle doctrine empowers Michiganders to use deadly force for self-defense when they believe an intruder poses a threat to them in their home, car, or business. Confusion about officers’ intentions who don’t announce their affiliation with law enforcement could needlessly put their lives in danger.

**By 2010, local police conducted an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 “no knock” or “quick knock” raids.**

At least four states have banned the practice (Florida, Oregon, Connecticut and Virginia). Last September, the Department of Justice limited federal law enforcement officials’ use of no-knock warrants. However, Michigan lawmakers have been slow to reform the practice. In 2021, Michigan State Representative Tenisha Yancey introduced HB 5013, legislation that would ban no-knock warrants in Michigan. The bill was referred to the House Government Operations Committee and there has been no action on it. Senator Ericka Geiss has introduced a bill (SB 479) that has bipartisan support that would limit the use of no-knock warrants but would not ban the practice. An earlier bill that proposed limiting no-knock warrants was introduced in 2020 and attracted bipartisan support.

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### Recommendation

The Black Leadership Advisory Council urges the House Government Operations Committee to hold hearings on HB 5013 and other legislation that would ban or limit the use of no-knock or quick-knock warrants. We also urge the state legislature to pass meaningful reform and advise Gov. Whitmer to sign the bill after the legislature adopts it.

## EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS



### 7 Increase school funding

While Gov. Whitmer has made the largest state K-12 education investments in the past 40 years and has worked diligently to bring equity to the state's school funding, Michigan faces daunting challenges on the school funding front. According to Michigan State University education professor David Arsen, Michigan has been the last among all states in school funding growth since the passage of Proposal A. Per capita and school funding declined by 22% between 2002 and 2015. But even these devastating numbers don't fully describe the impact on Black students. During that same period, funding for at-risk students dropped by 60%. Meanwhile, districts are still dependent on their local property tax base to fund school facility construction and repair, replicating existing inequity.

In 2018, the School Finance Research Collaborative (SFRC) released the results of

a comprehensive adequacy study, including a recommendation for a new, "weighted" funding formula that would take into account student needs like poverty, special education, language status, as well as the size and location of the district. The study also recommended total funding for universal early education. It noted that further research would be needed on transportation, food service and building costs, which were not included in this initial step. Professor Arsen estimates that implementing these recommendations would require at least \$3.6 billion in additional funding.

Since her election, Gov. Whitmer has worked with the Legislature to allocate the School Aid Fund to equalize the foundation allowance across all districts and increase investment in funding for students in special education, students in poverty and students in English as a second language programs.

**The FY 2022 budget represents a historic investment in public education and includes:**

**\$723M**

to eliminate the gap between the minimum and maximum foundation allowance by setting both at \$8,700 per pupil.

**\$168M**

an increase of \$32.5 million – to expand the Great Start Readiness Program. The program helps four-year-old children at risk of school failure to reach a statewide target enrollment rate of 90% when combined with the children served by the federally funded Head Start Program.

**\$240M**

for schools to hire psychologists, nurses and social workers in the districts with the greatest need.

**\$155M**

from the American Rescue Plan for reading “scholarships” to pay for tutoring and other materials for students struggling with reading proficiency.

**\$135M**

in grants and additional per-pupil funding for districts that operate year-round.

**Governor Whitmer’s FY 2023 budget continues to recommend a weighted student funding formula and includes increases:**

**\$222M**

for at-risk students

**\$150M**

for special education

**\$30.8M**

for career and technical education

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**Recommendation**

Michigan needs statutory changes to increase the School Aid Fund revenue by at least \$3.6 billion and establish a permanent weighted funding formula based on student and community need and universal early education (0-3). Although the Governor cannot implement either of these unilaterally, we recommend she convene legislative leadership to draft and introduce this legislation and propose more significant increases in categorical funding to at-risk students and students in special education through the budgeting process.





**American history is complex and deserves rigorous academic examination and inquiry.**

American history is complex and deserves rigorous academic examination and inquiry. As State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice has said:

“It is important for us to teach the full breadth of U.S. and world history—about major historical themes, movements, and groups. We have a responsibility to teach history comprehensively. Some of history’s chapters are challenging, uncomfortable, or even searing—particularly those that deal with race, racism, xenophobia, and sexism—but our young people need to learn about all of history and to wrestle with the complexity.”

The goal for Michigan schools should be history instruction that is presented by professionals with the subject matter expertise, pedagogical skills, and judgment necessary to present complex information to students that is grounded in provable facts and adds to the understanding of modern-day America.



**Recommendation**

Gov. Whitmer should veto any bill that prohibits discussion of, or academic inquiry into, the complex history of America, including our nation’s history of race and gender discrimination, as well as any bill that attempts to ban efforts by schools to correct discriminatory practices.



## HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS

### Constant subjection to racial discrimination and socioeconomic disparities has contributed to increased mental health challenges in the Black community.

#### 9 Mental health supports for the Black community

There is a stigma in Black communities as it relates to mental health. This is a topic that is rarely discussed or acknowledged and has thus led to a crisis that affects adults and suicide rates among Black teens. It is also a fact that constant subjection to racial discrimination and socioeconomic disparities has contributed to increased mental health challenges in the Black community. Suicide rates have consistently risen, especially among young Black men. The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this number, especially in cases where mental health issues have not previously been addressed or diagnosed. Additionally, there is a lack of Black mental health service providers accessible to the Black community.

“Black and African American Communities and Mental Health,” a 2021 infographic by Mental Health America, charts the disparity in Black and white teens’ suicide rates, whereby Black and African teens are more likely to commit suicide with a percentage difference of 9.8 to 6.1.

Despite the escalating rates of mental health issues and suicide in the Black community, less than 2% of American Psychological Association (APA) members are Black.

According to a 2021 report from the National Alliance on Mental Illness, cultural competency can result in misdiagnosis and inadequate

treatment, inevitably leading to mistrust in the health care system (Mental Health in Black Communities: Challenges, Resources, Community Voices, 2021). One example of an unbalanced provider ratio is Berrien County. The county’s population is 156,000 people. Blacks make up 14% of that population, but there is only one (1) Black mental health provider in the county.

#### State officials should aim to:

- ▶ Increase the number of qualified and eligible Black service providers that serve marginalized communities.
- ▶ Use a standard assessment tool that helps school staff and counselors identify mental health behaviors in adolescents so they receive treatment sooner.
- ▶ Decrease the number of suicides among teens in Black communities.
- ▶ Expose adolescents to alternative behaviors that prevent severe mental health issues.

Recognizing the critical importance of improving access to behavioral health services, Gov. Whitmer has proposed the expansion of the Michigan State Loan Repayment Program (MSLRP) program for behavioral health providers and increasing funding for mental health professionals in our schools.



This expansion will help retain or recruit hundreds of mental health care providers to Michigan. Last year, Governor Whitmer also proposed MI Healthy Communities, a \$1.4 billion proposal that would increase capacity for community-based behavioral health and substance use disorder treatments. These proposals are important acknowledgments of the need to increase the number of Michigan's behavioral health professionals. The Black Leadership Advisory Council urges state leaders to also prioritize cultural competency and racial and ethnic diversity as they work to expand the state's behavioral health workforce.

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### **Recommendation**

Michigan should set a goal of increasing the number of Black mental health service providers by 20% each year over five years. The health committee recommends reviewing state licensure policies to address the barriers that Black psychologists face in obtaining licensure in Michigan.

### **Strategic Tactics:**

- ▶ Station mental health services and programs in the heart of the communities most affected by a high number of suicides. The program should welcome and promote alternative behaviors, address the consumers' social-emotional needs, and conduct thematic analysis research.
- ▶ Utilize one standard assessment for screening of adolescent mental health issues.
- ▶ Establish an online system that requires state bureaucratic departments to list the number of Black applicants who achieved or were denied licensure by demographic location to ensure transparency and data-driven decisions are being made.
- ▶ Institute accountability of larger institutions that are the recipient of most mental health funding, and ensure they delegate funding to smaller entities that provide mental health services to Black populations. Establishing satellite locations in communities with the greatest need offers Black residents increased access to mental health services and the option to receive care from a professional that looks like them and understands their culture.



## 10 More equitable distribution of state health funds

State and federal funds, RFPs and grant awards seldom reach the outlying cities in the state of Michigan. Funding for health disparity issues is frequently awarded to larger cities in southeastern Michigan. This tends to happen because larger counties in our state have a larger demographic population and, thus, more people who meet the poverty guidelines.

BLAC understands that health issues such as diabetes, Black infant mortality, heart disease, hypertension, affordable housing and safe, clean water are issues in all communities of color in our state. Still, they remain prevalent, unresolved and unaddressed in smaller counties due to a lack of philanthropic or organizational support in providing funding or resources to support these underserved populations.

### Solutions should aim for:

- ▶ A more equitable distribution of funding to more diverse counties in Michigan.
- ▶ More Black residents in Michigan receiving the health care services needed to address their chronic conditions.
- ▶ All communities receiving the funding needed to address community health so we can elevate the health status of all Michigan residents.

### Recommendation

Ensure all Michigan communities with a significant Black population receive adequate funds to address mental health issues.

### Strategic Tactics:

- ▶ Re-establish the criteria for distributing federal and state funds, typically awarded to counties with the most significant demographic population.
- ▶ Increase awareness of severe health inequity and health issues in smaller counties, especially on the west side of the state, that have the same problems as larger counties, but the funding never reaches those communities.
- ▶ Evaluate the requirements and demographic criteria listed in state-issued RFPs that often do not allow or include qualifications that will enable those smaller counties to apply for these funds.



## CIVIL RIGHTS RECOMMENDATION

**There is compelling evidence that strict Voter ID laws disproportionately restrict voting access for voters of color.**



### **11 Protect Black voting rights**

A 2021 *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* study of Michigan voters showed that minority voters were about five times more likely to lack access to ID than white voters. The same report found that would-be voters in states with ID requirements for voters are more likely to incorrectly believe that access to ID is required to vote, even when those states allow for provisional voting.

Michigan's current election laws allow voters who cannot present ID at the polls to sign a legally-binding affidavit asserting that they meet the qualifications to vote. In the state's 2016 general election, more than 18,000 voters were able to vote because they signed affidavits.

Because Michigan voters approved Proposal 3 in 2018, the 2020 election was the most accessible and secure in the state's history. The proposal was adopted with the support of 67% of Michigan voters and introduced innovations such as automatic voter registration, same-day voter registration and no-excuse absentee voting.

While Michigan's 2020 election integrity was confirmed by 250 post-election audits, there have been legislative attempts to turn back the clock on voter access in the name of so-called voter security. Last October, Gov. Whitmer vetoed legislation that would have eliminated the affidavit option for voters and prevented elections officials from proactively mailing absentee ballot applications. Gov. Whitmer has also issued an executive directive that orders state department directors and agency heads to "identify and assess potential opportunities, consistent with applicable law, to expand the ability of eligible Michiganders to register to vote and gain access to reliable information about voting."

BLAC applauds Gov. Whitmer for her efforts to protect the voting rights of Black Michiganders and expand eligible Michiganders' access to the vote.

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### **Recommendation**

BLAC urges state officials to remain vigilant in the fight against schemes to disenfranchise Michiganders of color.



# BLAC STRUCTURE AND WORKFLOW

BLAC members represent many professional backgrounds, including economics, law, public safety, health and wellness, arts and culture and media. They leverage their experiences and expertise to make recommendations to the governor on critical issues affecting the Black community.



## **Black Leadership Advisory Council Co-Chairs**

(at the time of report's adoption)

Donna L. Bell, Ph.D.  
*Southfield*

Robert Womack  
*Grand Rapids*

## **Black Leadership Advisory Council Members**

(at the time of report's adoption)

Christopher Burtley  
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Kathy Purnell, Ph.D., J.D.  
*Kalamazoo*

Joel Rutherford  
*Warren*

Michelle Sourie Robinson  
*West Bloomfield*

Michele Samuels  
*Farmington Hills*

Seydi Sarr  
*Detroit*

Kim Trent  
*Detroit*

Carl Williams\*  
*Saginaw*

*\*Members who have since left the council*

## **BLAC Committees**

### **Business Leadership**

**Chair:** Karen Carter

Donna L. Bell, Ph.D.

Christopher Burtley

Kelli A. Ellsworth Etchison

Michelle Sourie Robinson

Jonathan Quarles

Keith Williams

### **Community Safety and Justice**

**Chair:** Teferi Brent

Kathy Purnell, Ph.D., J.D.

Joel Rutherford

Seydi Sarr

Jerry Clayton Sr.

### **Education**

**Chair:** Terrence D. Martin

Jamilia Martin

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