

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



May 7, 2020

**NAACP STANDS WITH GOVERNOR WHITMER;
CALLS FOR PROTECTION FOR HIGH RISK POPULATION
AND DEMANDS STATE SENATOR ZORN RESIGN**

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. --The West Michigan branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People stand with Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and praise her efforts to keep the current State of Emergency in place during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

African Americans account for approximately 13.6% of the state's population but reportedly 40% of COVID-19 deaths. Therefore, The NAACP branches of West Michigan including the Greater Grand Rapids Branch, Muskegon County Branch, Metropolitan Kalamazoo Branch, Lake Newaygo County Branch and the Albion Branch are unitedly throwing support behind Governor Whitmer as she leads the state through the pandemic response.

All organizations are also calling for the resignation of State Senator Dale Zorn, who wore a confederate flag into the state capital as a mask, denied any wrongdoing, then issued an apology after an immense amount of public backlash.

One week later, White Supremacists and racists began their fear and hyper-intimidation tactics, with malicious protests on the State Capitol to influence an economic agenda in direct contrast to the public health agenda laid out by Governor Whitmer.

The NAACP will not stand for this. The organization denounces the waving of Confederate flags, Swastikas and threatening signs aimed at the Governor.

This is representative of the gross negligence by the Michigan Legislature that Michigan citizens experience, and continue to experience, evidenced by the Flint Water Crisis.

The NAACP also requests the Michigan Legislature support Executive Order 2020-55, which establishes the Michigan Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities, and EO 2020-64, which affirms anti-discrimination policies and ensures equitable access to care protocols for disabled people.

In addition to the State Senator stepping down, the NAACP is also requesting safeguards be put in place to protect workers as the economy begins to slowly re-open,

since people of color and lower income communities are at-risk populations who, mostly, do not have the option to work from home.

Safeguards would include:

- Equal access to COVID-19 testing before returning to the workplace, especially for uninsured and underinsured individuals
- Proper protection (face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer) provided for those who are cleared to return to their place of business
- Proper protection and forehead temperature monitors provided to neighborhood leaders, non-profit organizations and/or churches in high risk areas to distribute throughout their communities
- Survey of at least sixty percent (60%) of those who have contracted the novel Coronavirus in the State of Michigan to investigate the trajectory of the infections within the African American, Latino, Asian, Arab and Native American communities
- Testing and treatment to all individuals who have had recent social contact with anyone who has died from COVID-19, regardless of their immigration or health care status

The NAACP is also concerned about the at-risk youth population failing to receive an adequate education because of a potential lack of access to technology for e-learning. The organization requests The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) prioritize lower income school districts when assigning the \$389,796,984 in emergency relief funds to eligible school districts.

Although the US Department of Education handed down a broad guide to allocating funds, the NAACP West Michigan branches are requesting The Michigan Department of Education prioritize local school districts who apply with the following needs:

- Activities to address the unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, including how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population.
- Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local school district that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and students with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.

- Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.

Please contact Crystal Hilliard for interviews with All Branch Presidents.

Cle J. Jackson, President Greater Grand Rapids Branch
Phyllis Loudermill, President Lake Newaygo County NAACP Branch
Carey Whitfield, President Battle Creek NAACP Branch
Wendy Fields, President Metropolitan Kalamazoo NAACP Branch
Eric Hood, President Muskegon County NAACP Branch
Bob Dunklin, President Albion Branch