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STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
SHAWN THIERRY

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DISTRICT 146

April 16, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
Governor of Texas  
1010 Colorado St  
Austin, Texas 78701

RE: Establishment of The Emergency COVID-19 Racial Disparities Task Force

Dear Governor Abbott,

Thank you for your steadfast leadership as we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 outbreak throughout the state of Texas. As many would agree, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented and will likely be deemed the most devastating public health crisis of our time. While there are many moving parts and views on handling this crisis, our shared goal as elected leaders is the complete eradication of the coronavirus from our counties, cities, and municipalities.

As you are justly focused on critical issues, including increasing access to testing sites, the availability of personal protective equipment for healthcare professionals, and the issuance of ongoing executive orders for public safety, I, along with a bi-partisan coalition of esteemed House Members, respectfully bring another threatening aspect of this crisis to your heightened attention: the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on African Americans.

Leading infectious disease scientist, and White House Coronavirus Task Force expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, recently revealed that African American patients have the highest rates of COVID-19 intensive care unit intubations. Nationwide, the COVID-19 morbidity and mortality rate for African Americans is as high as five times that of other racial groups. By way of local example, the African American population in Houston (the most populated city in Texas) is approximately 23%, yet 66% of the COVID-19 deaths are Black residents. With new cases coming in hourly and daily, it is an absolute certainty that these morbidity and mortality numbers for African Americans will continue to rise at an alarmingly disproportionate rate. In order to effectively address, and ameliorate these health disparities, we respectfully request that you exercise your powers to establish an Emergency COVID-19 Racial Disparities Task Force. The most immediate objectives and overriding intent of the task force would be identified as: reducing the COVID-19 contagion rate, while examining methods of increasing the survival rate for African Americans in Texas.

The Task Force would collect information, solicit feedback, and assess all data necessary to improve our state's readiness and efficacy in decreasing the coronavirus morbidity and mortality rate for African Americans. We yield to your authority regarding the appointment of specific



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members of the Task Force, however respectfully request a composition of medical experts, epidemiologists, elected leaders, public health officials, faith leaders, and community influencers, reflecting the diversity of our state, with an equitable representation of this most at-risk population.

Suggested charges for the Task Force include, (but are not limited to) the following:

1. Collection and reporting data regarding the number of COVID-19 cases identified by race and ethnicity statewide (per county and city).
2. Identifying safety bundles, guidelines, and uniform treatment plans including ventilator distribution in hospitals for all COVID-19 patients, irrespective of ability to pay.
3. Addressing the role that social determinants of health have on the increase of COVID-19 contagion in the African American population.
4. Addressing the possible role of implicit bias on COVID-19 testing, emergency room protocols, and medical treatment plans of the most at-risk patient population.
5. Building an effective public awareness and education campaign targeted to underserved communities with specific emphasis on reducing community spread.

The implementation of the Task Force is a well-reasoned, timely action. It should be deemed as a proactive, versus reactive, bipartisan approach to reducing the COVID-19 mortality and morbidity rate for African Americans, which essentially, and simultaneously, protects the health and well-being of all Texans.

We are certainly being tested as a state and as a nation, yet our history teaches us to persevere, that a brighter day will dawn. It is our collective hope that with the creation of an emergency task force, we will move one step closer to revitalizing the health of our citizens and the productivity of our state.

Thank you again for your continued leadership and careful consideration of this issue. Should you have any questions or comments, we are available upon your request.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shawn Thierry".

**Rep. Shawn Thierry**  
House District 146





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