



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI California

March 9, 2021

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The Honorable Bill Dodd
Chair, Senate Committee on Governmental Organization
State Capitol, Room 2082
Sacramento, CA 95814

SB 17 (Pan) Office of Racial Equity – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Dodd:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness - California (NAMI-CA), I am writing to request your support for SB 17 (Pan), a bill that establishes the Office of Racial Equity and the Racial Equity Advisory and Accountability Council. Establishing an Office of Racial Equity will help the State practice equity; turning our commitment equity into actionable strategies in our immediate response to the crisis of the pandemic, our recovery efforts, and as the world reshapes the global economy.

NAMI-CA is the statewide affiliate of the country's largest mental health advocacy organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Our over 110,000 active advocates and 62 affiliates include many people living with serious mental illnesses, their families, and supporters. NAMI-CA advocates on their behalf, providing education and support to its members and the broader community.

In recent years, the state has acknowledged that racial disparities exist and has made efforts to confront them. However, equity has consistently been treated as an afterthought or as a siloed strategy. For the state to deliver meaningful, equitable outcomes, equity must be explicit and centered in any approach to address disparity for California to thrive. Addressing these disparities cannot and will not happen by itself; it requires a consciously designed mechanism to identify and correct inequities, including those that have become salient by the COVID-19 pandemic. If the state does not center racial equity in its current and future COVID-related discussions, it cannot create the tailored policies necessary to address the needs of impacted communities equitably. California can and must play a more active role in dismantling racial inequities, particularly those exacerbated by the coronavirus.

Passing SB 17 and establishing a statewide Office of Racial Equity is crucial to excavating the intersectional nature of structural racism baked into this state's public systems and policies. A fully resourced and appropriately authorized office is a powerful mechanism not only to stem the tide of bad, racist policies but also to generate new pathways to close the opportunity gap for communities of color throughout the state. For this reason, we respectfully request your "Aye" vote.

I may be reached at jessica@namica.org or (916) 567-0163 with any questions you may have. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS
Chief Executive Officer