

Collaborative Group Targets Systemic Racism in Delaware

BY MICHELLE A. TAYLOR, PRESIDENT & CEO, UNITED WAY OF DELAWARE & RICK DEADWYLER, DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS LEADER, CORTEVA AGRISCIENCE & CHAIR-ELECT, UNITED WAY OF DELAWARE

» More than 380 years after “Black Anthony” became the first African to arrive in Delaware, and 52 years after the National Guard occupied Wilmington for nine months following MLK’s assassination, racial equity remains elusive for black and brown Delawareans. More recently, COVID-19 has highlighted racial disparities in education, employment, wealth accumulation, health care, and housing, separating Delaware’s majority white community (roughly 65%) from the black and brown communities that are now about 25% of Delaware’s population.

According to the Delaware Black Community Research Project at the University of Delaware (*Racial Disparities in Delaware Remain Deep: Fifty Years After the Kerner Commission Report and the Wilmington Riot*), the poverty gap between blacks and whites in Delaware has not narrowed since the 1970s. And according to the *Racial Wealth Divide in Wilmington* report from Prosperity Now & JP Morgan Chase, the median income for whites in Delaware (\$60,000) is double that of blacks (\$30,034), fostering a racial-economic divide that is “deeply enmeshed” in the city’s culture.

These and other data are the byproducts of policies and practices that have enabled systemic racism in Delaware for generations. Left unaddressed, systemic racism will stifle the individual potential of every black and brown Delawarean, limit our state’s ability to compete in the



global marketplace, and compromise the quality of life for *everyone*. Recognizing this, and in the wake of the George Floyd murder, United Way of Delaware (UWDE) recently formed the Delaware Racial Equity & Social Justice Collaborative (the Collaborative) with the goal of engaging all Delawareans in the struggle to eliminate systemic racism in our state.

The Collaborative includes more than 200 leaders (and counting) from grassroots, civic, business, and nonprofit groups across all three counties. For administrative and fiduciary purposes, the Collaborative (and its related fundraising arm, the Delaware Racial Equity & Social Justice Fund) operates under the aegis of UWDE but is governed by its own members. The group’s strategic objective is to drive transformative gains in racial equity and social justice across Delaware; some specific goals are to:

- Close the academic achievement gap in minority communities
- Promote financial empowerment and wealth creation

- Advocate for Community Policing
- Promote safer, healthier environments in minority communities
- Foster courageous conversations and actions regarding racial equity and social justice to include governments, police, foundations, boards, and corporations

To achieve its goals, the Collaborative is leveraging the work of its grassroots members; serving as a statewide platform to amplify the voices of those organizations; empowering community-based leaders across the state, especially young leaders, with the resources necessary to drive local action, and advocating for immediate and long-term changes in the policies, practices and legislation that enable systemic racism.

Through the summer of 2020, the Collaborative has seen remarkable success in establishing county-level subcommittees, creating a statewide racial equity database, launching a social justice volunteer corps, establishing the Racial Equity & Social Justice Fund, and

completing the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge, an online awareness campaign that attracted more than 8,000 participants.

Systemic racism is not new, nor is it unique to Delaware. But across our nation, there is an undeniable outcry to

finally resolve America's long struggle with racial inequity. Here in the First State, the Delaware Racial Equity & Social Justice Collaborative is a giant step in answering that call. Delaware's business community, which have been supportive of UWDE for nearly 75 years,

has a vital role to play in securing meaningful, sustainable gains in racial equity and social justice. To get involved in this work, contact Michelle Taylor, President and Chief Executive Officer of United Way of Delaware, at mtaylor@uwde.org or 302-983-1643.

Chair Message

BY KATIE K. WILKINSON

As I sit writing this note in September, I can't help but wonder what the social, political and economic landscapes in Delaware – and across the country – will look like when this issue is published. There is so much uncertainty about what this fall and winter will mean for the spread of COVID-19 and our response to rising positive test rates, hospitalizations and sadly, potentially rising rates of death. We simply do not know. With so many months of living with this virus behind us, it is easy to find ourselves slipping back into our old “normal”. But we must remain diligent in our efforts to mitigate any chance of a dramatic resurgence until a vaccine becomes available.

On June 1, Governor Carney announced the creation of the Pandemic Resurgence Advisory Committee (PRAC). This committee was comprised of 3 subcommittees: Health, Business, and Equity. As the chair of the business subcommittee, I had the opportunity to work with a concerned and engaged group of legislators and business representatives to formulate a set of recommendations for moving Delaware forward as well as develop responses to a potential resurgence with a few critical goals in mind:

- Support small businesses
- Keep Delawareans working
- Invest in the long-term economic health of Delaware

The final PRAC report will be published on September 30. Since our interim report in July, there have already been several initiatives rolled out to support the achievement of these goals. They include:

- \$100 Million in the Delaware Relief Grant Program



supporting small businesses with an emphasis on those companies and industries who suffered a disproportionate negative impact of the shutdown – offered through the Delaware Division of Small Business.

- \$25 Million in the Nonprofit Support Fund providing financial support to nonprofits across the state who played critical community support roles during the pandemic – administered by United Way and the Delaware Community Foundation, in partnership with Philanthropy Delaware and the Delaware Alliance For Nonprofit Advancement.

- \$10 Million for the Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Training Initiative to assist Delaware workers who have lost jobs and income due to the COVID-19 crisis – offered through a partnership between the Delaware Department of Labor and the Workforce Development Board.

- \$20 Million towards Broadband Infrastructure to build out additional needed infrastructure across the state, gather data on statewide speed, and acquire equipment and services for families in financial need.

The work of the PRAC's business subcommittee aligned well with recommendations sent to the Governor in early April from the State Chamber board and the Delaware Business Roundtable. They stressed the need to clearly prioritize these items with speed and commitment to move through and past the pandemic's impacts while keeping an eye on the future of the health of Delaware's communities and economy.

I remain hopeful about what will happen this fall relative to our containment and mitigation of the virus. I am encouraged by the community collaboration demonstrated in the development of these programs – as evidenced by the many partnerships outlined above. I am optimistic about our ability to execute these initiatives with speed and accuracy for the benefit of all of Delaware.