

**STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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Benicia Black Lives Matter statement regarding the Benicia City Council subcommittee's preferences to the mayor for nominees to the CURE subcommittee

The standing City Council subcommittee called the Committee United for Racial Equity (“CURE”), so named by Benicia Black Lives Matter (“BBLM”) in collaboration with current City Manager Erik Upson, is an embodiment of Resolution 20-103 that was adopted at the August 25, 2020 City Council meeting. The resolution, as well as the formation of BBLM, were borne out of the anger, grief, and exhaustion felt nationwide after the viral murder of George Floyd. His tragic and avoidable death, one of many instances of police against Black and Brown communities that tapped into the voyeuristic interest of an American populace that had numerous times before and sadly numerous times after ignored the cries of Black and Brown communities, was said to be the beginning of a racial reckoning in America.

In Benicia, this energy was harnessed into youth-led demonstrations and organizing, all of which culminated in the founding and expansion of BBLM as well as the consideration of a resolution to address systemic inequity in Benicia—namely, Resolution 20-103. The content of this resolution was based almost entirely on recommendations emailed by BBLM co-founder Brandon Greene to then Mayor Elizabeth Patterson in response to the changes Brandon and our Black and Brown communities wished to see in Benicia. Through a series of meetings with the former City Manager and Erik Upson, who was Police Chief at the time, along with additional members of BBLM, the emailed proposal was formalized into the resolution and submitted for consideration and approval to the City Council. Though a year has now passed since that time, the memory of the August 2020 meeting is still vivid in the minds of BBLM members. At that meeting, not only was the necessity of such a position such as the one Dr. Maliika Chambers now holds subject to intense and painful scrutiny, but the resolution was also almost not passed due to a disagreement over the comparatively trivial amount of money that position would require the City to pay. Indeed, rather than make the position permanent, the position was made temporary. This was done under the auspices that Benicia was not in need of an equity study

and that it was questionable whether Benicia even has a racism problem.

One year later, after patiently waiting for the work of CURE to begin, and after being promised that two of its members would have a place on the subcommittee that would not exist without them, BBLM members had to sit and watch as the Council—against public outcry—voted to reconstitute the membership of CURE, making all of the seats at large. BBLM members who had for a year been in constant contact with Dr. Chambers, whose position was established by BBLM's own efforts, about when the work would start were told that they would have to apply and interview for the subcommittee. Three members applied: 1) Brandon Greene, Director of the Racial Justice and Economics Program for the Northern Californian arm of the ACLU; 2) Amira Barger, Public Health and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion consultant; and 3) Kashanna Shaw-Patten, experienced medical professional and educational/health advocate. Of the three BBLM members who applied, only Amira was advanced.

The City Council subcommittee's preferences to the mayor for other candidates despite the obvious qualifications of the BBLM applicants, were made without adherence to nor respect for the work of those who are responsible for the proposed mission and mandate of CURE—in particular, the work of Brandon Greene. Instead, the subcommittee's choice to advance other candidates who, at a glance, do not hold the qualifications of BBLM's two rejected applicants appears to be a concerted action on behalf of City Council to erase the work of BBLM and to dilute the work of the CURE subcommittee before that work has even begun, an action in line with the current reporting about the lack of fidelity to the value of actual change, supposedly promised by the cries of allyship at the inception of this country's so-called racial reckoning. Indeed, just one year after making a series of grand promises to its Black and Brown communities, Benicia is now a hub of the inevitable backlash that accompanies any attempts to take bold steps to address racial inequity. With no voyeuristic element in the form of public attention to buoy its progress, Benicia's leadership has begun to retreat from its promises, even as it asks us to trust its intentions.

This outcome would be dismaying if not for its painful predictability. As the *Mother Jones* article, [*One Year After George Floyd's Murder, the Racial Reckoning Gave Way to a Backlash.*](#) describes:

"...the data suggested that the surge in approval in 2020 was due to the shocking nature of the viral video of Floyd's grueling death, not an actual embrace of the Black Lives Matter movement. All of this adds up to what appears to be yet another example of the inevitable backlash that occurs after a broad movement for racial justice takes place. It's a cycle that repeats itself throughout American history..."

"Why does this pattern keep repeating? Why does it seem like with every pivotal moment, like when thousands were taking to the street to protest police brutality, we eventually end up with some version of the status quo? Perhaps it's the final result of the inherent friction between two

competing ideas that are embedded in the American experience: That racial inequality is pervasive in our society—and the illusion that it’s actually a problem of the past.”

The positive contributions BBLM has made to Benicia are numerous and substantive, with impacts felt both within our local community and beyond. Since its inception, BBLM has been involved in organizing everything from poetry readings, youth-focused dance classes, community-wide education events in collaboration with local programs, to backpack and food giveaways, to the inaugural Juneteenth flag-raising and annual community celebration—the last being another provision of the resolution that was passed. Future planned events include a warm coat drive and food giveaway for our community’s most vulnerable residents, an educational forum led by Indigenous community leader Mary Ann Buggs, an educational event that will introduce the history and nature of the Kwanzaa celebration, and a march to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and more. Despite veiled suggestions otherwise, BBLM has shown over and over again that it stands in solidarity with the Benicia community, and is here to stay.

For two eminently qualified BBLM members—whose many years of professional, community, and *lived* experience in imagining and implementing real change are truly substantial—to be overlooked in the subcommittee’s selection process is an affront to the effort BBLM has put into the drafting, passage, and realization of Resolution 20-103 along with its co-authors. BBLM strongly objects to the perceived efforts of the subcommittee to dilute and mismanage the CURE subcommittee before it has even had a chance to start working, and seeks active, meaningful dialogue with City Council, its staff, and the community in general to address these real and substantial concerns.

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About

*Benicia Black Lives Matter is a grassroots community group organized to address anti-Black racism in the city of Benicia. There is a lack of Black representation across City leadership, departments, and voluntary boards. The lack of Black representation tells a story of our complacency as a community and more so, the impact on our Black Benicians lived experience. The good news is, we can rebuild the City of Benicia into a better Benicia, one commitment and one change at a time – and we have a strategy to do so. Our Strategy: **Actively Commit to Change**. The City of Benicia must commit to a specific vision of what a better, more inclusive and equitable future looks like. For additional information see beniciablacklivesmatter.com.*