

# THE FLINT WATER CRISIS:

Systemic Racism  
Through the  
Lens of Flint

## ONE YEAR LATER

An update on the  
recommendations of  
the Michigan Civil  
Rights Commission

MARCH 26, 2018





# **A One-Year Update on the Recommendations in *The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism Through the Lens of Flint***

**March 2018**

**By Dr. Agustin V. Arbulu and Daniel Levy**

On February 17, 2017, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission (the Commission) released its Report: [\*The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism Through the Lens of Flint\*](#) (Flint Report), outlining seven principal recommendations to address systemic racism and separation of wealth and opportunity based along racial lines. The Commission also requested that the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (the Department, or MDCR) provide annual progress reports. Twelve months later, it must be acknowledged that none of the seven principal recommendations included in the Commission's Flint Report have been fully achieved. Many of the recommendations are beyond the control of the Department or the Commission and depend on the actions of others. Some are generational at best. They require not only legislative, structural and institutional changes, but equally important cultural, interpersonal and even intrapersonal changes. Yet even though the Commission's recommendations may be aspirational rather than practical, they have provided a road map where incremental steps forward are being taken.

The Department has from time to time described itself as being in the business of trying to put itself out of business. It is our aspirational goals that motivate our individual actions and short-term efforts. It is with those goals in mind that the Department has taken certain concrete steps which are outlined in this report. This is our approach to these recommendations. They are not a checklist to be completed and tucked away. Nor are they only about Flint. They are continuous and universally applicable across the State of Michigan. They are guideposts that mark the way to achieving equity while building trust in underserved communities. In fact, the Department will outline some steps that have been taken in a number of other communities in Michigan. As we recount the steps that have been taken and are being taken since the issuance of the report, we rededicate ourselves to the letter and spirit of each recommendation.

**RECOMMENDATION 1. *The Michigan Civil Rights Commission and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights must do a better job of listening to the constituencies we represent and of making their priorities our priorities.***

- a. *The Department will develop a mechanism for Department staff to identify and inform the Commission of instances in which the civil rights of a community or constituency are being ignored.*
- b. *The Commission will relocate scheduled meetings to affected communities when appropriate.*
- c. *The Department and Commission will facilitate communication of concerns even when not adopting them as a priority of their own.*



The conclusion of the Commission’s Flint Report began with a look inward. The Commission, like so many other entities, had not come through when the people of Flint needed us most. It was not sufficient to simply acknowledge the failure to live up to the standards to which we aspire; active steps were required of the Commission and Department if we were to improve our performance.

Over the course of the past 12 months, the Department has redoubled its community engagement efforts. We have assigned community liaison positions to individuals on our public affairs team. We are monitoring issues of special geographical concern, as well as those of particular importance to different minority groups. In recognizing that raising awareness of the Department is critical to serving communities of color, the Department placed civil rights investigators (CRIs) at



The Michigan Civil Rights Commission held three hearings on the water crisis in Flint in the summer of 2016. They issued their final report, *The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism Through the Lens of Flint*, on February 17, 2017.

organizations in various communities in Michigan to increase visibility, provide education on the complaint on September 1, 2016, designated CRIs were on-site monthly at select organizations that provide services and resources primarily to African Americans, Hispanics and Arab Americans in Detroit, Grand Rapids and Flint. Services offered by CRIs include answering questions and taking formal complaints as

well as providing education on civil rights laws, the complaint process and other department services. CRIs also provide formal presentations on housing, employment, public services and other issues upon request.

For example, we have reached out to organizations that primarily provide services to African Americans, including the Grand Rapids and Flint NAACP offices, where on-site assistance has been in effect since the inception of the program. We also began scheduling CRIs at the Baxter Community Center in Grand Rapids and the Battle Creek NAACP/Urban League in April and May of 2017.

From September 1, 2016, through January 31, 2018, this on-site assistance at the NAACPs and Baxter Community Center in Grand Rapids resulted in 173 requests for service, including the investigation of 64 formal complaints.

Moving forward, the Department looks to expand this educational and enforcement presence in other communities in Michigan, including Muskegon, Jackson, Western Wayne County and Macomb County.

The work of our community liaisons has allowed the Department to respond expeditiously to issues affecting underserved communities, providing assistance with developing community capacity. These efforts include assisting in the launch of a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) process in Grand Rapids where racial incidents involving law enforcement and the African American community have been reported. The Department is also involved in racial equity efforts focused on fair housing in Kalamazoo, racial equity training of city employees in Kalamazoo, building trust between African American youth (high school and college age) and law enforcement in Berrien County, and providing cultural competency training to law enforcement in Jackson.

Particularly successful on a regional basis have been the ALPACT chapters - Advocates and Leaders for Police and Community Trust - in 10 Michigan communities. At its heart, ALPACT is about bringing together area law enforcement and community leaders for discussions intended to expose each to the other's perspective and help participants understand the motivation behind what others do and say. Engaging in these conversations about issues of concern and even conflict in a constructive way that is not driven by any particular incident develops the trust and knowledge that permits these leaders to react with understanding when incidents do inevitably occur.

Although the Department has acted as a convener for these groups, its ongoing role is in facilitation rather than programming. Each regional group is different based upon that locality's unique structure, concerns and issues. This structure not only best serves the communities involved, it has

provided MDCR with a regular opportunity to observe and identify local issues where we can step in to provide guidance or training. Although the ALPACT chapters focus on issues involving law enforcement, bringing community leaders together on a regular basis has proven to develop trust and the kinds of relationships that ensure other local issues are explored because there is a desire to work together. Further, working collaboratively increases the understanding that what affects a part of the community affects the entire community.

In this way, the ALPACTs as well as the Department's other outreach efforts help to ensure that MDCR is part of the discussion. By being aware of issues that are unique to local communities, we are able to address problems before they escalate. It also allows the Commission to participate, when appropriate, and hold a meeting or meetings in a community and provide residents with the opportunity to voice their concerns.

With respect to Flint in particular, the Department (via Charles Schoder) has continued to convene the Flint ALPACT and has used those meetings as a mechanism for MDCR to identify issues of concern to the Commission and the Department. In addition, MDCR has provided consistent participation at monthly Coordination Flint meetings, monthly Flint Community Partners meetings and the Flint Community Relations Council/Job Corps Quarterly Breakfast meetings.

During the past 12 months, the Department has also been instrumental in bringing together faith and community-based Latino organizations in the Flint area to form an umbrella organization, Latinos United for Flint (LUFF), to drive social and economic development targeting the Hispanic/Latino community. The technical assistance provided by MDCR has resulted in increased direct funding (from United Way, the Flint Community Foundation, and federal funders) to improve the Department's reach into the Latino and immigrant community in Flint related to the water crisis. It has also led to the improved engagement and participation of LUFF leaders in the Flint ALPACT, the TRHT process and other local initiatives where previously these voices had gone unheard.

The Department also worked closely with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and other partner agencies in state government beginning in 2016 to leverage a five million dollar federal ReCAST grant from SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) for Flint that brought important new resources in to the community. The ReCAST grant is a five-year funded effort to expand our collective understanding of "trauma informed care" and improve our continued educational outreach and direct service delivery related to the water crisis. During 2017, the Department worked with Flint representatives in identifying partners from the

Spanish-speaking and deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing communities to work on the ReCAST grant process. MDCR’s ongoing work with the Flint ALPACT is important to the overall success of this grant given the central importance of re-establishing trust between local residents and law enforcement in the aftermath of a major crisis. ReCAST updates regarding training opportunities and community engagement are provided regularly at Flint ALPACT meetings. Youth voice and engagement have also been a central focus of this ReCAST work, and an exciting new opportunity in this area has started to grow in Flint with the creation of youth advisory councils that MDCR expects to partner with in 2018. The ReCAST grant has also led to organizing periodic summits to bring together presenters including MDCR and community voices from Flint to better understand the concept of “trauma informed care.”

Starting in 2016 and continuing in 2017, MDCR was also able to leverage its relationship with HUD to fund a housing “Know Your Rights” campaign in Flint that featured advertising on city buses, the development and distribution of updated flyers, and expanded availability of community-based trainings in Flint. As a result of these efforts, the Department held fair housing trainings and workshops in Flint for residents to understand their rights in interfacing with landlords.



MDCR launched a HUD-funded housing “Know Your Rights” campaign in Flint that featured advertising on city buses.

Educational outreach and meetings like these are essential to the Department’s ability to maintain open lines of communication within the Flint community, and they allow the Department to stay informed about concerns that may not have come to our attention otherwise.

In addition to these efforts, Lee Gonzales, the Department’s legislative liaison, has continued to work with city leaders, community-based organizations and community-based foundations to identify pressing issues particular to Flint. With this in mind, the Department will be scheduling a forum in Flint over the next two to three months for the purpose of bringing together different voices to assess efforts made on the recommendations outlined in the Commission’s Report, to learn about opportunities for the Department to build on, and to identify obstacles that still exist.

MDCR also assisted the city of Flint in reaching vulnerable populations with vital information related to the contamination of the city’s water supply. City officials had begun airing a series of radio town hall meetings designed to address specific problems related to lead contamination and to communicate important information on dealing with the crisis. Flint and Genesee County are home to



MDCR produced a series of videos in American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting the city’s radio town hall meetings on the water crisis.

one of the largest concentrations in the state of individuals who are deaf or deafblind – people who would not be able to access important information delivered over the radio. In meetings with city officials in 2017, MDCR’s Annie Urasky, Director of the Division on Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (DODDBHH), along with

MDCR’s Communications team, recommended interpreting the radio town halls into American Sign Language and making videos of the ASL interpretation available on the city’s website. By July, DODDBHH and MDCR Communications staff had produced video ASL interpretations of the radio broadcasts and provided them to the city to make available to area residents. Also, the Department worked with city officials in providing needed translation services to reach the Spanish-speaking community and other vulnerable populations when disseminating important information.

Finally, MDCR’s executive director and members of the senior management team have regularly engaged and continue to engage with leaders from Flint as well as presenting in Flint to various groups and initiatives while exploring ways to rebuild Flint, identify challenges and forge ahead.



**RECOMMENDATION 2. Develop a deeper understanding of the roles of structural racialization and implicit bias and how they affect decision-making throughout all branches of state government and specifically within all the state departments.**

- a. *The Governor’s Office should invite experts on the cognitive psychology and neuroscience of implicit bias to provide training to the Cabinet and Mission Flint Action Team and require all state departments, including DEQ and DHHS, to do the same for their staff.*
- b. *Government at all levels must gain and encourage a better understanding of structural racialization and the role it plays in perpetuating disparate outcomes.*
- c. *Government must recognize that an unfair advantage cannot be corrected simply by refraining from being unfair in the future; policies must be adopted to counteract the continuing harm caused by past racism.*



The discussion of the second recommendation contained in the Report began bluntly:

“Unconscious bias is real, it is neurologically driven, it is unavoidable, and without exception every one of us has it. These unconscious biases are created and reinforced by media messages and dominant social narratives about history, politics, power and the economy. By definition, this means that we must be conscious of race if we are to avoid making decisions that are influenced by it. Never stopping to challenge ourselves about whether our unconscious biases are directing our actions means we are accepting that they will do so.”

The same thing can be said about structural and institutional racism of the sort that the Report documented in Flint. The Flint Report clearly establishes how racial inequality, over time, has been built into the system in ways that will continue to produce racially disparate outcomes even **without the presence of explicit bias**. These racially disparate outcomes occur in health, employment, law enforcement, education, income, transportation, housing and the environment.

Pretending we do not see color or race is not only unrealistic, it guarantees the perpetuation of past racism and inequity. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, professor of sociology at Duke University, describes color blindness as the dominant racial ideology of contemporary America, in which the dominant group denies or minimizes the degree of racial inequality as the result of factors unrelated to racial dynamics (such as Black cultural values or economic forces unrelated to race). If racial equity is ever to be achieved, we must consciously and intentionally address these forms of unconscious, built-in and invisible racial bias. Even when perpetuating racial disparity is unintentional, the failure to address it is.

Recognizing the importance of developing a collective impact approach firmly grounded in inclusion and equity to help eliminate racial inequities in our communities, the Department has begun to build its capacity and knowledge base in implicit bias and structural racialization with a special focus on educating local units of government. Through this approach, government at all levels can play a key role in fostering and building collaborations for achieving racial equity, centering community and leveraging institutional partnerships. During the past 12 months, the Department has delivered presentations on racial equity to both the City of Flint and Genesee County Commissions, the City of Jackson, Kent County, the City of Muskegon and Muskegon County. The Department also expects to roll out the following resources for local units of government:

1. A continuum tool to assess their organizational level of inclusiveness,
2. A pledge by units of government to commit to inclusiveness and racial equity, and
3. A community-based resource toolkit centered on racial equity.

The Department has also led the effort in creating a workgroup partnering with the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI), the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). The workgroup has been meeting regularly, exploring and identifying ways to address structural racialization and implicit bias in the decision-making process within branches of state government, as well as identifying ways to collaborate from a state level perspective in working externally with local units of government.

The workgroup, MPHI, MDE, MDHHS and the Department have jointly become active members of the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) (GARE). GARE is a national membership network of government agencies (state and local) working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all, and to identify best practices for embedding racial equity internally and externally. GARE was founded as a joint effort of the [Center for Social Inclusion](#) and the [Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society](#). Our membership in GARE places the Department among a cohort of jurisdictions that are at the forefront of work to achieve racial equity. Through this network, the Department has the opportunity to work with national experts on racial equity, as well as to learn from the experiences of other government agencies that are working in this area in order to build our internal capacity.

The Department's senior leadership team recognizes the importance of being intentional about dedicating time and resources to the dismantling of practices and processes that create inequities – inequities that are often sustained by structures and systems that repeat patterns of exclusion. In building on the recommendations outlined in the Flint Report, the Department created an Equity Officer position, the first in any branch of state government or unit of local government in Michigan. The

Department's Equity Officer will guide the internal process of building capacity required to operationalize a racial equity lens, and externally to sustain the long-term implementation of equity within local units of government. In January 2018, the Department hired Alfredo Hernandez to fill this



position. Alfredo comes to the Department with a wealth of experience centered on racial equity as well as working with communities and government.

Finally, in an effort to embed racial equity into the work we do, the Department provided more than 15 hours of training to all staff, with an additional eight hours of training for staff working directly with communities

In January of 2018, MDCR hired Alfredo Hernandez to serve as the Department's Equity Officer.

throughout Michigan. This training will serve as a base for the ongoing work in building the Department's internal and external capacity centered on racial equity.

**RECOMMENDATION 3. Provide environmental justice to all people in Michigan.**

- a. *Write and legislatively adopt a robust environmental justice plan that provides (1) meaningful public (community) participation, (2) integration of governmental decision-making, (3) interagency cooperation, and (4) a means for the public to request responsive state action, i.e., to appeal certain decisions.*
- b. *A major component of environmental justice is community participation in decision-making – therefore, Michigan’s emergency manager law must be amended to provide for local representation and the possibility to appeal an adverse decision.*
- c. *Acknowledge the cumulative effect of environmental hazards, and make cumulative effect part of the official decision-making process.*
- d. *Require a more holistic review of the cost-benefit analysis conducted when assessing and placing potential environmental hazards.*



We began our third recommendation by noting previous efforts to develop and adopt a comprehensive environmental justice plan. We were among many who recognized the necessity, and



MDCR Director Agustin V. Arbulu with Flint Mayor Weaver at the Resiliency Summit held in Flint on March 26, 2018.

therefore urged the adoption, of such a comprehensive approach to the complex problems that exist in Flint. In February 2017, Governor Rick Snyder created the [Environmental Justice Work Group](#) (EJWG). The EJWG included individuals from environmental justice communities across the state, environmental organizations, businesses, state and local government, academia and federally-recognized tribes. The Department was represented in

this work group by Sylvia Elliott, a senior attorney for the Department who had been involved in prior similar efforts.

The [EJWG released its report](#) on March 2, 2018. It is an impressive document, and apart from not specifically referencing Michigan’s emergency manager (EM) laws, it adopts both the letter and spirit of the Commission’s findings and recommendations. It also expands upon them to describe in detail the comprehensive and inclusive process that the Commission determined Michigan needed.

The work of the EJWG will have little impact if the plan is not now adopted and fully implemented. Going forward, that must be the Commission’s goal.

**RECOMMENDATION 4. Replace or restructure Michigan’s emergency manager law.**

- a. *A law intended to help a community recover from a fiscal emergency must also focus on solving the problem that caused the emergency, thereby returning the community to sustainable fiscal health.*
- b. *Provide emergency managers with regional authority; not all solutions are local because not all problems are local.*
- c. *Bifurcate the process of naming an emergency manager and providing special authority or powers.*
- d. *A declaration of a fiscal emergency that requires emergency management or other state usurpation of local government powers must include a statement that analyzes the root cause of the emergency and outlines how it will be addressed.*
- e. *Locally-elected representative government must continue to play some role, and an emergency manager must have direct accountability to an elected official (the Governor).*



This recommendation illustrates how Flint’s state-appointed emergency managers, purportedly expert management professionals, completely missed their overarching responsibility to assure essential services for the good of all Flint residents. The [Report of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission](#) on the Flint water crisis (February 2017), the Governor’s [Flint Water Advisory Task Force Final Report](#) (March 2016) and the [Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Flint Water Emergency](#) (October 2016) share a common theme that there are much-needed reforms to the Emergency Manager Law (PA 436 of 2012).

These studies make an unimpeachable case for the underlying factors that created this public health fiasco. There were failures in the existing legal framework and flawed implementation of applicable laws that intensified the Flint water crisis and unprecedented public health issues. Looking at the modes of implementing policy, we see how the impact of mismanagement by certain participants created this calamity. Administrative thickets grew in part because the mission of the emergency manager was too narrowly focused on budget matters at the expense of community participation and essential public services. Throughout the crisis and to this day, Flint residents do not trust government at any level.

Upon the release of the *Final Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Flint Water Emergency*, committee chair Senator Jim Stamas said, “. . . the government has failed the people of Flint.” The committee provided more than 30 policy proposals intended to prevent a crisis like this from

happening again. It listed reforms to the Emergency Manager Law, section VI, with 5 subsections, including the following:

*Proposal VI-1: The Legislature should consider replacing the single-person emergency management structure with a three-person Financial Management Team comprised of a Financial Expert, a Local Government Operations Expert and a Local Ombudsman.*

Additionally, MCRC's Recommendation #4 is strongly supported by a passage in the executive summary (page 2) of the *Flint Water Advisory Task Force Final Report*, as follows:

*We cannot begin to explain and learn from these events – our charge – without also highlighting that the framework for this decision-making was Michigan's Emergency Manager Law. This law replaces the decision-making authority of locally elected officials with that of a state-appointed emergency manager. While one must acknowledge that emergency management is a mechanism to address severe financial distress, it is important to emphasize that the role of the emergency in Flint places accountability for what happened with state government.*

Conceivable improvements to PA 436 include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adding intent language regarding economic development and tax base, as well as focusing on health, safety and general welfare of the local unit of government.
- Requiring an EM to hold a public hearing any time they amend the local government's financial and operating plan.
- Requiring an EM to submit to the local governing body any action that the state financial authority determines may jeopardize public health.
- Allowing the state financial authority to appoint a broad-based citizens' advisory committee for the purposes of providing input on EM decisions.
- Mandating that the EM report to a new Emergency Manager Review Panel that would consist of the state treasurer, Michigan Economic Development Corporation CEO, and the local chief administrative officer, who may override an EM decision.
- Making most of the existing reporting requirements to the state treasurer the responsibility of this new panel.

In addition, a recently released report from the University of Michigan School of Public Health, [\*Learning from the Flint Water Crisis: Protecting the Public's Health During a Financial Emergency\*](#) (published January 2018), found that the Flint government's ability to respond was hampered by the state's EM law. The executive summary makes this key point regarding the jurisdiction of an emergency manager in Michigan:

*Fourth, the emergency manager's jurisdiction over the city of Flint undermined the local government's ability to respond to an emerging crisis. Once the emergency*

*manager took over, city agencies could no longer act, although state, federal and county agencies retained legal authority to intervene.*

Despite this, the Department's legislative liaison reports that based on conversations with several key policymakers, EM reforms are not a legislative priority for the remainder of this term.

However, during 2017, the Commission did not remain silent. In April, the Commission directed the Department to prepare and submit an [amicus brief](#) in connection with the Writ of Certiorari filed with the U.S. Supreme Court on the case of [Bellant v Snyder](#). In the brief, the Commission argued that the application of Michigan's Emergency Manager Law should be subject to judicial review under the federal Voting Rights Act for the reasons outlined in the Findings and Recommendations set forth in the Flint Report. Ultimately the U.S. Supreme Court denied the Writ of Certiorari.

Notwithstanding the outcome in *Bellant v Snyder*, replacing or restructuring the Emergency Manager Law remains a priority and an issue that the Department will continue to monitor for the Commission.



***RECOMMENDATION 5. Acknowledge the role race and racism have played in our history and how it continues to impact our present, in order to adopt policies that consider and address it.***

- a. *Reject the idea that our society has or should become “colorblind”, which perpetuates the status quo by ignoring or overlooking the impact of decisions made within a racialized system, as well as the implicit biases that assert themselves if we do not consciously recognize them.*



We cannot address existing racial inequity and inequality of opportunity until we recognize the impact of racialized social conditioning and existing patterns of residential segregation and racial isolation that inevitably decrease meaningful multicultural exposure and counter-stereotypic opportunities for learning. A number of studies have shown that even neutral policies and good intentions continue to perpetuate racial gaps in opportunity and wealth because, in practice, the outcomes are not racially neutral. Addressing these gaps will require intentional strategies and structural changes that implement racial equity in practice.

MDCR’s commitment to changing the narrative and legacy of racism is exemplified in the hiring of an Equity Officer. We have also begun to train and equip Department personnel with the expertise necessary to effectively communicate, train, perform and practice their skills through a racial equity lens. MDCR recognizes that the creation of diverse and inclusive spaces requires intentional strategies as well as attention and time. Some strategic goals to develop deeper knowledge and to implement intentional strategies for equity include:

1. Training a core team made up of representatives from every division and unit of MDCR.
2. Providing extensive training on racial equity and related learning for members of the core team.
3. Developing a capacity-building plan and organizational structure to institutionalize equity within MDCR.
4. Utilizing internal outcomes to initiate a process that identifies successful action steps and resources that can serve as a train-the-trainer replication module centered on advancing racial equity within local jurisdictions, government, organizations and other sectors of Michigan communities.

It is important to note that the Department will implement these strategies internally in our own workplace, as well as externally to our work. As a result of presenting to local units of government on the value of adopting a racial equity lens, we recognized that local jurisdictions lack the requisite capacity, tools and resources. Specifically, the Department is working with MDE, MPHI and other

organizations in Michigan to design and develop comprehensive training for leaders from government and school districts/boards who commit to participating in a structured 12-month training program. Participants will receive at least 50 hours of racial equity training, learning about best practices, tools and resources for building and sustaining racial equity efforts in their communities. The Department is expecting to pilot a cohort prior to the end of 2018.

Implicit, institutional, structural, unconscious, racial and other biases are everywhere, and we do not pretend we are an exception. These biases need to be actively recognized and rooted out, and we aim to do exactly that by implementing specific initiatives.

**RECOMMENDATION 6. Rebuild Trust and Credibility:**

- a. *Create a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission.”*
- b. *Build a Racial Equity Framework.*



As part of the effort to rebuild trust and credibility through both the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the integration of a racial equity framework within state government, the Department has adopted the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) process developed by the WK Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) working in collaboration with the Council for Michigan Foundations (CMF). During 2017, four Michigan cities were selected for TRHT processes -- Flint, Lansing, Battle Creek and Kalamazoo – including annual funding over a five-year period.

The TRHT process is a comprehensive national, community-based, bottom-up process that seeks to bring about transformational and sustainable change by addressing the historic and contemporary effects of racism, or as WKKF often refers to it, “the hierarchy of human value.” The process seeks to unearth and jettison the deeply-held and often unconscious beliefs created by racism by changing the narrative across all sectors and engaging the voices of all residents in the community. The Department believes the TRHT process is closely aligned with Recommendation 6 and has committed resources and support to each of the four sites while seeking to expand the TRHT process to other communities in Michigan.

The Department is also working with CMF and the TRHT State Advisory Council to maximize possibilities for positive impact and success in these communities, promoting engagement and identifying opportunities to bring this process to other communities across the state.

The Department is committed to building scale and scope towards embedding the TRHT process in communities throughout Michigan. The Department has made a deliberate effort to link our engagement with the TRHT process to the ALPACT initiatives in Michigan, recognizing the importance of leveraging our relationship with law enforcement to improve community relations and trust in local jurisdictions. Moving forward, MDCR will continue to play an important role in the effectiveness of TRHT by serving as a neutral bridge builder/facilitator between communities of color and law enforcement leadership across the state.

MDCR also secured a national innovation grant to launch a fair housing project in Kalamazoo. The Department is partnering with key Kalamazoo community-based organizations to help build racial equity and advance the TRHT process while tearing down structural racial barriers. Through this effort,

the Department has been instrumental in the development of a new partnership between the city, community-based organizations and local funders to assess fair housing issues in Kalamazoo in 2018. This cross-sector collaborative work will be captured in the development of the city's comprehensive plan for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) investment in 2019 and impact the investment of both public and private resources in the city's housing stock for the next ten years. The Department will seek to expand what it learns from the Kalamazoo initiative to other communities in Michigan over the next 12 months.

As noted earlier, the Department is working with the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) (GARE), a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all in collaboration with local jurisdictions. Well over 110 local and state jurisdictions currently make up GARE. As a member of GARE, the Department aims to learn about best practices from across the



MDCR staff took part in GARE training on racial equity at the Lansing Center in July 2017.

country that can be tailored for and adopted in Michigan.

Similar GARE memberships have been established in Grand Rapids, Ottawa County, Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County, all of which have committed to embedding racial equity across their jurisdictions. Also, within the next 12 months, the

Department plans to create a state advisory council composed of local units of

government that will meet periodically. The guiding principle behind this council will be to advance racial equity, identifying obstacles and challenges while also identifying opportunities and best practices that can be adopted and embedded to make equity a reality in communities across Michigan.

In summary, the Department has adopted a three-pronged approach:

- Supporting jurisdictions to operationalize and advance racial equity.
- Building pathways for new jurisdictions to begin doing racial equity work and adopt the TRHT processes.

- Expanding and strengthening local and regional collaborations that are broadly inclusive and focused on achieving racial equity while supporting a bottom-up process that is inclusive of underserved communities.

Trust cannot simply be built or taken for granted; it must be earned. The people of Flint lost trust in government because government failed them. Nothing will be more important in regaining that trust than delivering on services -- and doing so in a consistent and unfaltering way, along with creating opportunities in jobs and education. We also recognize that government faces challenges such as the long-lasting trauma caused by the contamination of the city's drinking water and government actions (or lack of action) that left residents unable to trust government officials even when they are delivering on their commitments. We recognize rebuilding trust will take time and will require interacting in ways that do not delay or destroy it. Rebuilding trust will depend on the transparency, behavior and integrity that government demonstrates in both words and deeds. The Department is specifically exploring various training initiatives and frameworks focused on rebuilding trust in communities like Flint. We anticipate rolling out and piloting this work in Flint over the next 12 months.

***RECOMMENDATION 7. Create and implement a form of regional government (or at least regional cooperation) that would require suburbs and the urban cores from which they grew to work collaboratively to solve problems.***



This recommendation coincides with what Governor Snyder has called “regional reinvention.” With local control as a core issue, governments must work collaboratively (while respecting jurisdictional responsibilities) to carefully examine the role of regions and the future of region-wide service delivery benefitting its residents. It makes sense to coordinate service delivery throughout regions or to share services between communities. Since we are in an era of perpetual fiscal crisis, present and future collaborations must be shaped with next-generation strategies.

Genesee County participates in the [Michigan Association of Regions](#) (MAR). MAR is a state association of 14 regional councils in Michigan focused on regional planning and development. Genesee County is part of Region 5. Services to county and local governments are provided through the Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission. MAR enables Genesee County to work in cooperation with key leaders like the [Southeast Michigan Council of Governments](#) (SEMCOG) to facilitate regional reinvention discussions. Each regional council assists with the implementation of state and federal government programs on a region-wide basis. Areas of concern include transportation, economic and community development, environmental and natural resources, workforce development and local services planning.

Genesee County has explored the creation of an executive form of government several times since the 1980s without success. Several neighboring counties — Oakland, Macomb, Wayne and Bay, which have a geographic, demographic and/or industrial resemblance to Genesee County — have initiated a form of county executive government during the past few decades to institute area-wide planning for growth.

The [Michigan Regional Prosperity Initiative](#) (MRPI) identifies two key questions for thinking about the theories of new regionalism: “Why do we need a formal mechanism for regional collaboration?” and “Why is it important?” MRPI then proposes the following answer:

*As it stands today, many of Michigan’s regions and their various public planning and service delivery entities have overlapping responsibilities yet competing visions for their economic priorities. The absence of a broad-based regional vision and coordination of services create both redundancies and gaps. This creates confusion for local, state, federal, private and non-profit partners seeking to invest in a region’s success. Formalizing a collaborative relationship among local and*

*regional partners will allow the state, as well as private and non-profit stakeholders, to recognize local efforts and work in closer collaboration with local and regional decision makers throughout the state to support their efforts for economic prosperity.*

MPRI's answers closely parallel the need identified in the Commission's Flint Report for the suburbs and the urban cores from which they grew to work collaboratively to solve problems. Without such cooperation, the redundancies and gaps in available programs and resources will continue to perpetuate existing disparities.

In building on the Flint Report, the Commission began in 2017 by focusing on disparities in education in Michigan. The Department met a number of times with interested school-related groups regarding the consolidation of the Willow Run School District and the Ypsilanti Public School District, and



MCRC heard from the Ypsilanti Public School District on disparities in education at their July 2017 meeting in Battle Creek.

the shortcomings that resulted from such a merger. School districts in Michigan are directly tied to the same neighborhood dividing lines that permitted wealth and opportunity to be generated by the exclusion of “undesirable elements”, including not only restricted residential zoning but also initially overt and later structural barriers against people of color. The Flint Report shows how spatial racism restricted African Americans to

housing in urban areas that was losing value, while government and other entities developed suburban communities where whites could invest in property that was gaining in value (and where a growing commercial tax base would keep taxes down). It also showed how public schools, by being apportioned and districted along the same color lines, necessarily resulted in fewer resources being made available to students of color.

Specifically, we believe steps must be taken to review the K-12 educational crisis facing Michigan and the continued disparities existing for students of color which will lead to collaborative

efforts and reform that will improve performance and outcomes. The Department will continue to monitor this recommendation and work actively with both local and county units of government and school districts on solutions that will contribute to increased prosperity for all residents.



## **CONCLUSION:**

The Commission's Flint Water Report covered more than 100 years of public policy that, both when intended and when not, produced racially disparate results and persistent separation of wealth and opportunity based primarily on race. While we hope it will not take another 100 years to address the systemic issues that created the conditions that gave birth to this crisis, we know they cannot be solved overnight or within a year. This update describes what are only our first steps in this pursuit. At the same time, we remain committed to rebuilding and operationalizing the Report recommendations in Flint and other communities in Michigan.

### **Respectfully submitted on March 26, 2018 to The Michigan Civil Rights Commission:**

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The Michigan Civil Rights Commission was created by the Michigan Constitution to safeguard constitutional and legal guarantees against discrimination. The Commission is charged with investigating alleged discrimination against any person because of religion, race, color or national origin, sex, age, marital status, height, weight, arrest record, and physical and mental disability.



