

[Nebraskans of color are becoming infected and dying of COVID-19 at disproportionately high rates](#) and racial unrest has intensified in Nebraska and many other parts of the country. The Nebraska Legislature has an opportunity in the final 17 days of the 2020 session to adopt policies to start removing barriers that hold back many Nebraskans and to help ensure our economy is delivering broadly shared prosperity to all residents. Here are some actions the Legislature could take to start the process of unraveling the racial inequity that has long faced Nebraskans of color.

Change the Legislative Rules to require racial impact statements for bills referred to the Legislature’s research office (See [LR 217](#)).

Policy changes, especially with regard to how the state raises and spends money, can have major impacts on racial and ethnic equity and racial impact statements would help ensure policymakers have as much data as possible when debating such changes in future legislative sessions.

Pass [LB 918](#), which would create the Commission on African American affairs and require a study.

The Commission would help policymakers assess the racial and ethnic impacts of policy changes, in addition to helping collect new data in areas like health, education and transportation. The new Commission, along with the Commission on Indian Affairs and the Commission on Latino-Americans, also would be responsible for completing a disparity study in government contracting to be submitted to the Legislature every two years.

Pass [LB 255](#), which would increase the income limit for purposes of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

LB 255 would increase the income limit 10% (from 130 to 140% of the Federal Poverty Level); however, the state could raise the limit to the 200%, which would not only help families during the current economic downturn, but also would ensure maximum available federal dollars are coming into the state. People of color are four times more likely to live in hunger and poverty than whites in Nebraska, according to Bread of the World.

Pass [LB 305](#), which would enact the Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act that would require certain employers to provide employees with access to paid sick and safe leave.

LB 305 would require employers with four or more employees to provide paid sick and safe leave, which would be accrued at a minimum of one hour for every 30 hours worked, up to a maximum accrual of 40 hours in a year. Only 15% of U.S. workers had access to employer-sponsored paid leave, according to a 2017 survey, and the [Bureau](#)

[of Labor Statistics](#) has found access varies among racial and ethnic groups. Studies have shown paid leave programs can reduce racial disparities. For example, several studies have found such programs result in improved infant health, especially among black and unmarried mothers.

Pass [LB 1060](#), which would ban natural hair discrimination.

LB 1060 would prohibit racial discrimination in employment based on hair texture and protective hairstyle. Four states have already passed similar laws and more than 20 others, including Nebraska, have legislation pending. Inclusive policies like this help people access economic opportunity regardless of their skin color or hair texture and have been shown to promote economic growth.¹

Decoupling from CARES Act tax changes also could help lessen racial inequities.

Along with passing legislation above, lawmakers also could help reduce racial inequity in Nebraska by decoupling from tax changes in the federal CARES Act. [The CARES Act tax changes](#) would cut personal and corporate income taxes and reduce state revenue by \$250 million over three years, including by \$125 million in FY21 alone. These tax cuts would predominantly benefit wealthy, white Nebraskans and more than 80% of the corporate tax cuts would benefit non-residents. This reduction in revenue, which would be in addition to expected revenue reductions from the COVID-19 recession, would likely lead to cuts in K-12 funding, reducing revenue for those districts that educate the vast majority of Nebraska public school students of color. Decoupling from the CARES Act tax changes would help preserve our state's vital investments in education in our communities of color and better ensure students in these communities stay on a path toward success and economic prosperity.

¹ Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor, "Diversity and Inclusion for the 21st Century Economy: An Imperative for Chambers of Commerce," February 2017, accessed at <https://everettprogram.app.box.com/s/fx99v7pi2c1gg4to5nd9sxmeyw254qf8> on July 15, 2020; see also Chante Griffin, "How Natural Black Hair at Work Became a Civil Rights Issue," JSTOR Daily, July 3, 2019, accessed at <https://daily.jstor.org/how-natural-black-hair-at-work-became-a-civil-rights-issue/> on July 15, 2020.