

A Resolution Calling for the Recognition of Health as a Human Right

WHEREAS Orange County is committed to the health of its residents;

WHEREAS although Orange County has made major gains in achieving high levels of health for the people of Orange County, there is much to be accomplished;

WHEREAS the critical health issues facing Orange County and the state of North Carolina include lack of access to health prevention, diagnosis and treatment; that specific lack of access occurs particularly in prenatal, mental health, and dental care; and that such lack of access is experienced more acutely in certain populations, manifesting itself in conditions such as infant mortality and low birthrate, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, lung disease, HIV diseases and death, cancers, and obesity;¹

WHEREAS in Orange County, particularly disparate outcomes are found in diseases such as nephritis, diabetes, prostate cancer, colon cancer, breast cancer, cerebrovascular and heart disease, and lung cancer;² in particular, Orange County most notably includes comparatively low rates of early lead poisoning testing;

WHEREAS the Orange County Board of Commissioners is committed to promoting and protecting the human rights of its residents, including citizens, non-citizens, adults and children;

WHEREAS international law establishes health as a human right;

WHEREAS various international agreements provide a comprehensive framework for improving the health of people around the world, and that nations in support of the agreement have agreed to follow the prescriptions of international agreements, for example:

- The right of everyone, not only to the “preservation of health,” as set forth in the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man, but also “to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,” as set forth in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), affirmed by the Declaration of Alma-Ata, and reinforced for children in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- The right of women, in particular, to equal “access to health care services, including those related to family planning [and to] appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation,” as set forth in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which the North Carolina General Assembly has resolved to urge the United States Senate to adopt in H.R.388 (1999);
- The “right of everyone, without distinction as to race, color, or national or ethnic origin, to . . . public health, medical care, social security and social services,” as emphasized in the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination;

- And to ensure these standards for health are met, the “right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family,” affirmed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights;

WHEREAS Orange County shares the goals of international agreements affirming faith in human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person;

WHEREAS the mission of the Orange County Health Department is to “enhance the quality of life, promote the health, and preserve the environment for all people in the Orange County community” and the bylaws of the Orange County Human Relations Commission state that the commission shall “[s]eek to prevent and eliminate bias and discrimination because of race, color, creed, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, affectional preference, disability, age, marital status, or status with regard to public assistance”;

WHEREAS it is fitting and appropriate to support ratification of the most important international agreements affecting the health of people throughout the world, and yet few of these agreements have been ratified by the United States;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Orange County Board of Commissioners:

Section 1. Recognize health as a fundamental human right, and that it applies to every human being, regardless of race, class, gender, citizenship, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or any other divisive categorization, both globally and locally;

Section 2. Encourage our state and federal legislative and administrative health agencies to recognize health as a fundamental human right;

Section 3. Encourage Congress to ratify and fully implement the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;

Section 4. Strive to provide Orange County residents with the “highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,” as promoted by the ICESCR;

Section 5. To attain this higher standard of health, encourage such actions as ensuring that lead poisoning testing and surveying be provided to all Orange County children;

Section 6. Strive to eliminate disparities in health outcomes by ensuring equal access to health services;

Section 7. Recommend the Orange County Health Department, in its State of the County Health Report, to include statistics on lead poisoning testing and surveying;

Section 8. Urge the Orange County Human Relations Commission to make health as a human right a priority in its Social Justice Agenda;

Section 9. Forward this resolution to our state and federal legislative delegations on behalf of the residents of Orange County.

Resolved this day of _____ (date) and forwarded to:

George W. Bush, President, United States of America

Richard Burr, Senator, United States Senate

Elizabeth Dole, Senator, United States Senate

David Price, Congressman, United States Congress

¹ Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities in North Carolina Report Card, NC Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities and the State Center for Health Statistics, NC Department of Health and Human Services, 2006.

² State of the County Health Report, Orange County Health Department and Healthy Carolinians of Orange County, 2006 (Data from the NC Center for Health Statistics, 2002-2004).