



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: May 7, 2025

TO: Honorable Mayor Todd Gloria, City of San Diego

FROM: Sean Elo-Rivera, Councilmember, City of San Diego, Ninth District
Henry L. Foster III, Councilmember, City of San Diego, Fourth District

SUBJECT: Ensuring the Sustainability and Effectiveness of San Diego's Office of Race and Equity

The Office of Race and Equity (ORE) was established within the City of San Diego (City) as a department in November 2020, following the passage of Ordinance O-21248 N.S. Through the leadership of then-Councilmember Monica Montgomery Steppe, the City Council created ORE to commit to addressing system inequities. The primary mission of the office is to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity across City operations, public programs, and policies.

The explicit intent behind creating ORE was to ensure it would be sustained and institutionalized within our government structures, remaining protected from elimination or reduction through administrative reorganization. The recent decision to place ORE within the Human Resources Department and eliminate the Executive Director position undermines this intent and raises significant concerns about the ORE's ability to fulfill its critical mission and carry out essential functions, including, but not limited to:

- Developing and overseeing Tactical Equity Plans for every City department, establishing a foundation for systematic integration of racial and social equity into municipal operations.
- Reviewing and evaluating City policies and programs to identify and address disparities that disproportionately impact historically disenfranchised communities.
- Facilitating meaningful community engagement efforts to amplify the voices of historically underrepresented communities in City decision-making processes.
- Collecting and analyzing data to measure racial and economic disparities, holding City departments accountable for progress toward equity goals.

- Ensuring equity is embedded in budget decisions by requiring departments to demonstrate how their proposed spending advances our City's equity priorities.
- Advancing workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion by shaping hiring and promotion policies that reflect our City's diverse population and values.
- Coordinating interdepartmental collaboration to ensure every facet of City government operates through an equity lens, creating alignment and consistency in our approach to equity.

These responsibilities and functions are fundamental to San Diego's ability to serve all residents equitably. They are not just moral imperatives but also practical strategies for effective and inclusive governance, especially as the City continues to struggle with eliminating systemic racism and advancing racial equity across its operations, public programs, and policies.¹

With this in mind, we respectfully request to receive the following:

1. A clear organizational structure detailing ORE's placement within the Human Resources Department, including staffing levels, reporting structures, and decision-making authority.
2. An explanation of how ORE will retain the independence and authority necessary to provide oversight and leadership on racial and social equity initiatives across all City departments.
3. A description of how ORE's core functions previously led by an Executive Director will be maintained, including who will be specifically accountable for ensuring the ORE's mission is fully realized.
4. A comprehensive breakdown of the resources allocated to ORE to ensure it can effectively fulfill all its responsibilities.
5. A detailed accounting in the Mayor's proposed budget of how each department's budget incorporates its respective Tactical Equity Plan and metrics for measuring progress.

This request comes at a time when equity work is under direct assault at the federal and corporate levels. The Trump administration has aggressively dismantled diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, rolling back policies that address systemic inequalities.

Your recent public statements affirming San Diego's commitment to equity are important, especially at this critical moment when equity work faces significant challenges at multiple levels of government and in the private sector. As you have acknowledged, San Diego has an

¹ The Office of Race and Equity was established in response to data highlighting significant racial disparities across various indicators, emphasizing the need for the City to implement systemic measures prioritizing racial equity. However, the [Fiscal Year 2024 Business Diversity Annual Report](#) continues to indicate the City is not meeting its business diversity goals. These, along with other ongoing disparities, highlight the City's failure to implement meaningful equity measures and underscore the urgent need for the Office of Race and Equity to receive the necessary support, attention, and resources to fulfill its mission effectively.

opportunity to demonstrate leadership by maintaining our commitment to equity even as others retreat from this essential work. The question now is not about intentions but about implementation—how we structure and resource this work will determine its effectiveness.

The residents of San Diego—our neighbors, workers, children, and families—deserve a government that actively works to dismantle barriers to opportunity and ensure all communities can thrive. The Office of Race and Equity laid the initial groundwork for long-term systemic change, but this work requires time, continuity, and institutional support to yield measurable outcomes. We cannot allow the erosion of these efforts in the name of reorganization, efficiency, or cost-cutting.

We look forward to your response outlining how your stated commitment to equity will be operationalized through specific structures, resources, and authority for this office. We believe we share the same goals, and we are eager to work collaboratively to ensure San Diego rises to the forefront of advancing equity for all our residents.

SER:mw

cc: Paola Avila, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
Charles Modica, Independent Budget Analyst
Matt Vespi, Director of Finance
Daniel Horton, Chief of Staff, Office of Councilmember Henry L. Foster III
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