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N.C. Center for Public Policy Research
at (919) 832-2839.

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North Carolina Minorities Trail Whites on Broad Range of Indicators, Center Says

In a report unprecedented in scope, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research examines racial disparities across a broad range of indicators and finds North Carolina minorities trail whites in education, economic well-being, housing, voter participation, Internet access, health, and criminal justice. The study released today offers a series of eight recommendations to address these disparities – including a need-based tuition assistance program, a long-term effort to increase voter turnout, funding for interpreter services at local health departments, and a Governor’s Summit to address these broad-ranging disparities in the public policy outcomes for some of the state’s population.

“Minorities in North Carolina face stark disparities in health care they receive, their educational opportunities, and even the likelihood that they will be arrested or executed for a crime,” says Mike McLaughlin, editor of *North Carolina Insight*, the journal of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research. “As a state, we need to bridge the gap and move from disparity toward parity if we hope to move forward.”

According to the U.S. Census, North Carolina’s population grew 21 percent from 6.6 million in 1990 to more than 8 million in 2000. The state’s population is now 72.1 percent white, 21.6 percent African American, 4.7 percent Hispanic, 1.4 percent Asian, and 1.2 percent Native American. The census indicates that all minorities combined – African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans together – now account for nearly one-third (28.9 percent) of the state’s population. Between 1990 and 2000, the Asian population in the state grew by 128 percent. However, the Hispanic population grew by 394 percent, the largest percentage growth of any state in the country.

The Center’s study is thought to be the first effort to bring so many measures of racial and ethnic disparities in public policy outcomes into focus in one report. The Center timed the release of its research to come one month past the 50th Anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* which desegregated the nation’s public schools. Center director Ran Coble says, “We thought it was time to take stock of where we are in North Carolina – not just in education, but also in economic well-being, housing, health, voting participation, Internet access, and criminal justice. “And what we found are gaps by race and ethnicity in all these areas that we must bridge if we are truly to become One North Carolina.”

Education Outcomes

The first area where the Center found disparities is education. On North Carolina’s *end-of-grade tests*, nearly nine out of 10 white students (89 percent) score at or above grade level in both reading and math for grades three through eight. That compares to 72 percent of Native Americans, 70 percent of Hispanic students,

and 67 percent of African American students. Asian students' performance ranks second highest behind whites at 87 percent.

African-Americans are underrepresented in *classes for gifted students* and among students who take *advanced placement classes*. By contrast, African Americans are more likely to be *identified as needing special education*, particularly in the more subjective categories such as behaviorally or emotionally disabled or mentally disabled. Indeed, North Carolina labels a higher percentage of African-American students as mentally disabled than do any of its neighboring states.

These disparities translate into problems in *high school graduation* rates. Among whites, 81 percent of North Carolina residents are high school graduates, compared to 79 percent of Asians, 71 percent of African Americans, and 63 percent of Native Americans. By contrast, those least likely to graduate from high school are North Carolina's Hispanic residents, with only 44.5 percent attaining a high school degree.

The educational achievement gap is not limited to performance on end-of-grade tests or high school completion. African-Americans and other minorities also score lower than their white peers on Scholastic Achievement Test (*SAT*) scores. The SAT is required for college admission in North Carolina. *College completion rates* also are much lower for the state's minorities – except among Asians who have the highest college completion rates at 44 percent. Whites are second at 25 percent, then African Americans at 13 percent, Hispanics at 10.5 percent, and Native Americans at 10.4 percent.

Economic Well-Being and Housing Outcomes

Minorities also trail on measures of economic well-being. *Per capita income* for whites in North Carolina averages \$23,237. Asians earn \$19,815, while African Americans earn an average of \$13,548, or 58 percent of the white average. Native Americans earn an average of \$13,441, and Hispanics \$11,097, or 48 percent of the white average.

The federal poverty rate for a family of two is \$12,490. Only 8.1 percent of whites *live in poverty* in North Carolina, but 21 percent of Native Americans, 23 percent of African Americans, and 25 percent of Hispanics live in poverty.

In a further indicator of poverty, according to the U.S. Census, 1.3 percent of African Americans and 1.2 percent of Hispanics lived in *homes without complete plumbing* facilities. Native Americans are the next most likely group to live in homes without complete plumbing at 1.1 percent. That's followed by Asians at 0.7 percent, and whites at 0.4 percent. Minorities also are more likely to reside in *houses without complete kitchen facilities*.

The generally accepted definition of *affordable housing* is paying no more than 30 percent of your annual income on housing. But 44 percent of African Americans spend more than this, as do 41 percent of Native Americans, 34 percent of whites, 33 percent of Hispanics, and 32 percent of Asians.

Health Outcomes

In evaluating health status, the Center examined 30 different causes of disease or death and again found major disparities by race and ethnicity. Native Americans in North Carolina have the highest *death rates from heart disease* at 312 per 100,000 population. That compares to 309 deaths due to heart disease per 100,000 for African Americans, 250 deaths for whites, 83 for Asians, and 79 for Hispanics. African Americans have the highest *death rates from stroke* at 99 deaths per 100,000 population, compared to 75 stroke deaths for Native Americans, 70 deaths for whites, 42 for Asians, and 31 for Hispanics. African Americans also have the highest

death rates from diabetes-related causes at 170 per 100,000 population. That's followed by Native Americans at 155 diabetes-related deaths, whites at 78, Asians at 42, and Hispanics at 41.

Chronic obstructive lung disease and lung cancer deaths are areas where whites have high death rates, in part due to heavy rates of smoking. With 49 deaths per 100,000 population, whites are the most likely to die of *chronic obstructive lung disease*, compared to 44 deaths per 100,000 for Native Americans, 32 for African Americans, 9 for Asians, and 8 for Hispanics. African Americans have the highest *death rates from lung cancer* at 62 per 100,000 population closely followed by whites at 61 deaths per 100,000. Native Americans are next at 48 deaths per 100,000, followed by Asians at 25, and Hispanics at 14.

African Americans have the *highest AIDS death rate*, with 21 deaths per 100,000 population, followed by Hispanics at 4, Native Americans at 3, whites at 2, and Asians at 1. As for reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases, African Americans have the *highest rates of infection by HIV and AIDS, gonorrhea, and chlamydia*, while Native Americans have the highest infection rates of syphilis.

Hispanics have the lowest *infant mortality* rate at 5.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, with Asians next at 6.1, whites next at 6.4, then Native Americans at 11.9, and African Americans with the highest death rate at 15.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Whites have the lowest *teen pregnancy rates* at 38 per 1,000 females aged 15 to 17, Native Americans next at 63, African Americans at almost double the rate of whites at 72, and Hispanics the highest at 90.

All minority groups are less likely to *have health insurance* than is the white population in the state. And, all are less likely to *have seen a doctor in the past year*.

Voting Participation Outcomes

Voting is a key way to get elected officials to pay attention to economic, education, health, housing, and criminal justice problems, so the Center for Public Policy Research also looked at available voter participation figures. Whites lead in *voter registration* at 72 percent, while 63 percent of African Americans are registered to vote, but only 12 percent of Hispanics. More important than registering is actually *voting*. After a comprehensive 2003 study of voter turnout in North Carolina, the Center made several recommendations to increase voter registration and turnout because only half (50.2 percent) of the state's voting-age population voted in the last Presidential election. *The Charlotte Observer* found that in 2000, white voter turnout topped that of African Americans in every county they were able to examine (82 of 100 counties), and only 8.4 percent of the Hispanic voting age population actually voted.

Internet Access Outcomes

In terms of Internet access, most minority groups still trail the white majority, though progress is being made in computer use. *Internet use* hovers around 60 percent for whites and Asians, dropping to 40 percent for African Americans and 32 percent for Hispanics. *Computer use* logs in at 71 percent for Asians, 70 percent for whites, 56 percent for African Americans, and 49 percent for Hispanics.

Criminal Justice Outcomes

Minorities in North Carolina also are more likely to be *imprisoned* or sentenced to die for crimes. In 2002, minorities made up 67 percent of the state's prison population but only 29 percent of the overall state population.

Analyzing all homicide cases between 1993 and 1997, two UNC-Chapel Hill Law School professors found the rate of those *receiving death sentences* in cases where the victims were white was nearly twice as high as for cases when the victims were minorities (3.7 percent versus 1.9 percent). Looking beyond the race of the victims to that of the defendant, further racial disparities appear. When minority defendants murdered white victims, 6.4 percent received the death sentence. However, when white defendants murdered white victims, the rate fell to 2.6 percent. When minorities were both the defendant and the victim, death sentences dipped to only 1.7 percent of the cases.

Every Racial and Ethnic Group Shines on Some Indicators

Despite the Center's finding of disparities between whites and minorities across a broad range of indicators, the Center also found that all races and ethnicities fare well on some measures. African Americans, for example, have made the most economic progress and have the lowest percentage of high school students who smoke. Hispanics have the best infant mortality rates and lowest rates of heart disease and stroke. Native Americans do better on measures of teen pregnancy rates and deaths due to AIDS. Asians have the highest median household income and college completion rates, the best record of eating fruits and vegetables daily, and the lowest rates of colo-rectal and breast cancer deaths.

“The bottom line is that all of us have something to learn from each other and areas where we need to bridge the gaps and move from disparity to parity,” says the Center's Mike McLaughlin.

Center Recommendations

While recognizing that addressing these disparities is a long-term process, the Center offers a series of recommendations, including the following:

(1) Because of the gaps found in education, the Center recommends a Hope College Tuition Assistance Program for all students from households earning 200 percent or less of the federal poverty level and who graduate from high school with a B average. This would be a need-based scholarship program funded with state appropriations, not lottery revenues as in Georgia.

(2) Because of the gaps found in voting participation, the Center recommends that the Governor and the State Board of Elections undertake a massive voter registration campaign and Get Out The Vote Drive to get more North Carolinians both registered and voting, making sure to reach those who are less inclined to vote, such as youth and minorities.

(3) Because of the gaps found in health outcomes, the Center recommends increased funding for interpreter services in local health departments, AIDS prevention and treatment, and prevention of child fatalities, as well as a major preventive health campaign aimed at addressing the leading health disparities for all races and ethnicities.

(4) Because of the unexplained disparities by race in North Carolina's use of the death penalty, the Center recommends a moratorium on the death penalty until these disparities can be examined.

(5) And, because the gaps in policy outcomes cut across so many areas of policy — in education, economic well-being, housing, health, voting participation, Internet access, and criminal justice — the Center recommends that Governor Mike Easley convene a Governor's Summit on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in North Carolina in order to set a clear path for progress toward his stated goal of One North Carolina. Such a summit could examine potential solutions to racial and ethnic disparities across a broad range of indicators, the Center says.

Examining these issues unveils big disparities between most minorities and the white majority, but the Center's McLaughlin says the state should apply the philosophy of South Africa's Bishop Desmond Tutu when dealing with problems of such magnitude. “When people see a colossal problem, they wonder whether they can

do anything to make a difference,” said Tutu. “They need to keep remembering what they are told about how you eat an elephant — one piece at a time.”

Center director Ran Coble says, “In 1900, W.E.B. DuBois said, ‘The problem of the 20th Century is the problem of the color line.’ We’ve made a lot of progress in race relations in North Carolina since then, but the Center’s research shows where we are today in education, economic well-being, housing, health, criminal justice, and voting participation. And it’s not where we want to be for the 21st Century.”

The Center’ research on race, ethnicity, and public policy outcomes was funded in part by grants from The Warner Foundation of Durham, The Cemala Foundation of Greensboro, and Sara Lee Branded Apparel of Winston-Salem. The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research corporation created in 1977 to evaluate state government programs and to study public policy issues facing North Carolina. The Center receives general operating support from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, with additional funding from 13 other foundations, 150 corporate contributors, and almost 800 individual and organizational members across the state. In addition to publishing *North Carolina Insight*, the Center has conducted in-depth studies on ways to improve voter turnout in North Carolina, on charter schools, on the pros and cons of state lotteries, and on how all 50 states govern public universities.

Copies of the issue of *North Carolina Insight* containing the Center’s research on race, ethnicity, and public policy outcomes are available for \$20, which includes tax, postage, and handling. To order, write the Center at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call (919) 832-2839, fax (919) 832-2847, or order by email from tbromley@nccppr.org.

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For more information on the Center’s study of race, ethnicity, and public policy outcomes, call Mike McLaughlin, editor of *North Carolina Insight*, or Ran Coble, executive director, at the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at (919) 832-2839.