



ALF voters give virtual thumbs-up for anti-racism bylaws referendum

by Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff, Associate Editor

Leaders of the AAP at the 2020 virtual Annual Leadership Forum (ALF) voted unanimously to approve the development of a bylaws referendum that codifies that the AAP does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or national origin.

All AAP members will have an opportunity to vote on the referendum question this fall; two-thirds must vote in favor for approval.

The vote for a bylaws referendum follows the July 29 release of the AAP policy statement *Truth, Reconciliation, and Transformation: Continuing on the Path to Equity*. In the policy, the AAP commits to pursuing a robust equity agenda and apologizes for treatment of the first two Black members whose membership applications in 1939 were originally denied. The ALF resolution acknowledges that treatment.

"I am pleased the AAP is vocalizing what has for so long gone unsaid and proud that we are turning those pangs of conscience into plans of action because statements are not enough," said AAP President Sara "Sally" H. Goza, M.D., FAAP, who introduced the resolution during the meeting Aug. 16-17. In her [address](#), [Dr. Goza](#) added that the AAP will continue to confront bigotry and racism through child health policy, programs and other means.

Two additional resolutions were passed on anti-racism in public health or health care.

"Hate is not innate, and racism can be dismantled," AAP Board Member Joseph L. Wright, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, said in [his address](#). Dr. Wright is a member of the board committee on equity and has spearheaded other AAP efforts. He highlighted how the Academy began work on equity, diversity and inclusion several years ago and noted the 2019 policy *The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health* as well as the continuous work of the Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, and Task Force on Addressing Bias and Discrimination.

"The Academy is not starting from scratch," Dr. Wright noted. "Work is afoot."

While presentations and discussions centered on equity, racism and social justice, other key topics addressed during the first virtual ALF were COVID-19, school reopening and telehealth.

In [his remarks](#), AAP CEO/Executive Vice President Mark Del Monte, J.D., updated leaders on the state of the Academy and upcoming opportunities and programs. He detailed the AAP's work to help members respond to COVID-19, as well as efforts to address racism as a public health issue.

"Systemic racism calls for a systemic response," he said, thanking member experts who stepped forward to help the AAP help pediatricians and their patients in the wake of recent events.

Adding perspective to the discussion was an [address by Aletha Maybank](#), M.D., M.P.H, chief health equity officer and vice president of the American Medical Association (AMA).

In 2008, the AMA issued an apology to the National Medical Association for the exclusion of Black physicians from the organization. Referencing the AAP apology, Dr. Maybank said, "I think that's an important part of demonstrating anti-racism work: To acknowledge that there was history in the context of us not only as individuals but also as institutions."

Dr. Wright also stressed the importance of "lived experience" - sharing personal details - and elaborating on racism and implicit bias as public health concerns. He talked about the importance of the reconciliation policy,



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emphasizing "the path to equity ahead."

The AAP statement about the delay in accepting first Black members Drs. Alonzo deGrate Smith and Roland P. Scott is a personal inspiration, Dr. Wright said.

"I feel that it is appropriate to honor these ... members in the way that our *Truth, Reconciliation, and Transformation* statement has, but also important to acknowledge that the apology is coming on a platform of work to be done, and that the AAP is operating from a position of leadership and strength in this regard.

"There is opportunity ahead," he said.

The ALF brings together chapter, committee, council and section leaders from the U.S. and Puerto Rico, drawing on their perspectives and expertise to advise the AAP Board of Directors.

Resources

- [ALF presentation links and handouts \(log-in required\)](#)
- ["Top 10 ALF resolutions address racism, mental health, vaccine hesitancy"](#)
- ["Awards presented at Annual Leadership Forum"](#)