Forward Through Ferguson: St. Louis County’s Commitment

The Forward Through Ferguson report encapsulates feedback gathered from more than a year of meetings with leaders and residents throughout the St. Louis region. The report, “A Path Toward Racial Equity,” includes numerous recommendations.

St. Louis County has an ongoing commitment toward ensuring equitable economic opportunities for all, improving and protecting the health and safety of our residents and operating a government that is responsive and responsible. St. Louis County Executive Steve Stenger has led and continues to lead the County’s efforts toward fulfilling these goals.

The County Executive has provided the following details on how the County is implementing Forward Through Ferguson’s recommendations.

1. Recommendation: Create a civilian review board at the County level to investigate and provide civilian oversight.

   - The St. Louis County Board of Police Commissioners is composed entirely of civilians. Through the County Charter, the Board possesses the power to subpoena witnesses when conducting personnel and other internal investigations. This process ensures the public has trust in its police department and that officers are held accountable for their actions. In addition to subpoena power, this board also appoints the St. Louis County Police Chief. Roland Corvington, a retired FBI Special-Agent in Charge for St. Louis, chairs the board.

2. Recommendation: End hunger for children and families

   - The Stenger Administration has doubled the number of free meal sites in the Summer Food Program, which provides free, healthy meals for children. With the support of the Department of Public Health, we have established sponsorships to fund and implement programs that offer healthy food year-round to children in target areas where food insecurity is high. In addition, the Office of Community Empowerment has played a significant role in expanding the program and securing the necessary resources to keep and store food safely.
The St. Louis County Department of Public Health operates five WIC sites. The WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education.

The St. Louis County Public Health Department (DPH) also participates in the promotion of the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and in the expansion of farmers market double bucks promotions for SNAP credits.

DPH and St. Louis County Parks started a community teaching garden at St. Vincent Park in Normandy for over 100 residents and created a toolkit for other communities. DPH is a member of the East West Gateway Council of Governments Committee on Food Insecurity and provides data for the identification of food deserts.

The St. Louis County Parks Department sponsored a community garden in the Castle Point neighborhood. In 2017, the garden produced over 300 pounds of fresh vegetables that were distributed free of charge to households.

3. Recommendation: Supporting Early Childhood Education

Recognizing the importance of investment in quality early childhood education, our administration’s Education Liaison, Barbara Fraser, inventoried all 23 St. Louis County school districts’ Early Childhood Education programs. She collected data on each school district, its early education programs and the participants. Our goal was to identify gaps and opportunities in Early Childhood education in our public school community.

Fraser also participated in the early Childhood Education Children’s Summit planning meeting at Vision at Risk. The summit-planning group worked with the following groups: Forward Through Ferguson; For the Sake of All; the Regional Early Childhood Council; and Ready by 21 St. Louis.

The Education Liaison was head of the committee on engaging public officials and helped invite Early Childhood directors and legislators and other public officials to the summit.

Fraser helped plan and kick off the Ready Readers first County-City combined literacy initiative, “Turn the Page STL.” The group’s goal is ensuring that children who enter third grade are reading at or above grade level.
• The St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund funds the LUME Institute, which trains teachers on the LUME approach. LUME is a professional development model that creates a support system to help educators and schools better understand behaviors that stem from toxic stress and Adverse Childhood Experiences. The curriculum provides educators with a deeper understanding of children, their needs, and ways to mitigate negative long-term effects; nurturing positive relationships early in life increases the chance that children and youth will become productive adults. The St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund Board awarded LUME $350,000 for the 2018-2019 core funding cycle. These funds will be used for training educators in early childhood centers and elementary schools in University City and in the Normandy Schools Collaborative.

4. Recommendation: Raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour

• In 2017, County Executive Stenger announced his support for a statewide initiative petition that would ultimately raise the minimum wage to $12 an hour. Raising the minimum wage provides workers the opportunity for upward economic mobility and to improve the lives of their families.

5. Recommendation: Preferentially fund job training programs that show impact

• Under the Stenger administration, new job centers opened in Ferguson, Spanish Lake and Wellston. These job centers have provided employment services while linking employers with prospective workers looking to find good-paying jobs; the placement rate at these facilities is nearly 70%.

• Ranken Technical College has been awarded a $2.35 million federal grant to establish an incubator facility at its north St. Louis campus in the Promise Zone1. The incubator facility will support the region’s manufacturing sector by providing pre-apprentice and apprenticeship workforce training, and encouraging entrepreneurial startups. The center will support 100 student workers who will generate $4 million annually in products and services for local businesses as part of the integrated work-based learning model.

1 The Stenger administration secured this Federal designation that is a partnership between the Federal Government, St. Louis County and City. The goal of the Promise Zone is increased economic activity and job growth, improved educational opportunities, lower crime, and leveraged private investment to improve quality of life. The St. Louis Promise Zone includes 28 St. Louis County municipalities and 11 city wards. To date, Federal agencies have awarded over $63 million in federal grants to these areas.
Through a $3.5 million federal grant for the Promise Zone, St. Louis County’s workforce development offers a healthy marriage program that teaches the link between stable relationships and productivity at work.

6. **Recommendation: Build healthy, affordable housing**

   - Construction of STAR Residences in Jennings was a 2015 priority in which we invested low income housing tax credits to ensure seniors in that area have access to affordable housing in their community.

   - St. Louis County also provided financial assistance in the construction of Alexandria Place, a development of new, affordable single family homes in Jennings.

7. **Recommendation: Engage the faith community in the Racial Equity Mission**

   - Among County Executive Stenger’s first actions after his election was the creation of the Office of Community Empowerment. In 2016, the County Executive appointed Ethel Byndom as Director to lead the office, including outreach to faith leaders in order to build lasting, sustainable relationships. Since then, the office has coordinated numerous events with local churches connecting people who need them the most with St. Louis County resources. These events have included health clinics; financial advisory fairs; backpack giveaways for children; and food drives.

8. **Recommendation: Clearly define municipal court procedures**

   - The Stenger Administration won a $2.25 million MacArthur Grant to address disparities in the justice system. One of the areas this grant addresses is the municipal court process. The administration has been working with local officials to make the municipal court process more transparent and to ensure that all citizens understand the process and their rights under the law. It is anticipated that in the near future program efforts will result in development of a system that sends reminders about court schedules and required appearances to those charged with offenses.

   - St. Louis County was recently awarded a $1,000,000 grant from the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program to improve community-police relations in
the Castle Point neighborhood in the Promise Zone. The program will focus on community policing, monthly events, such as movie nights and basketball games, co-hosted by the St. Louis County Police Department and community associations, and beautification of abandoned properties.

9. **Recommendation: Build trust among youth**

- Through the Police Athletic League (PAL), the Police Cadet Program, and the Police Community Recruiter Program, St. Louis County has taken a robust approach to building trust in our community between law enforcement and citizens. The Police Cadet Program and Community Recruiter Programs work with community leaders to increase recruitment of minority police officers. This allows the department to implement community-policing strategies while working to build lasting relationships.

10. **Recommendation: Reform school discipline policies**

- The St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund (CSF) hosted a symposium on the school to prison pipeline in November of 2017. School-based services are essential to creating and sustaining safe schools. For this reason, the CSF devotes a significant portion of its funding to behavioral health services in schools. Mentally healthy students are more likely to go to school ready to learn, engage in school activities, use appropriate problem-solving skills, have nonaggressive behaviors, and add to positive school culture. In 2017, CSF partnered with Ready by 21 to conduct a thorough analysis of school-based services. Through continued partnership, CSF is working to ensure that schools are getting the necessary support to implement policies such as the elimination of out-of-school suspensions through the third grade.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded the St. Louis County Department of Public Health a 4-year, $1.7 million grant to implement and evaluate efforts to improve academic performance and reduce violence among teenagers. Project RESTORE – an acronym for ‘Reconciliation and Empowerment to Support Tolerance and Race Equity’- began in August. Partners with the County Department of Health in the research effort include the St. Louis County Police Department, the Police Athletic League, the Department of Criminology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and three area school districts: Hazelwood School District, Normandy School District, and The School District of University City.
RESTORE implements a series of violence intervention strategies including peer mentoring and life-skills training, academic tutoring, after-school and summer programs, training for educators, and proactive parent engagement. The violence rate and other outcomes among the students participating in these programs will be compared to outcomes among students from similar demographics. Researchers hope that successful interventions will improve academic outcomes, reduce disciplinary actions, decrease crime and gun violence, cut down on arrests and court referrals, and promote positive behavioral health and family engagement.

11. Recommendation: Expand internship and apprenticeship opportunities

- As a result of a meeting between County Executive Stenger and the United Auto Workers (UAW), St. Louis County job centers are working to put applicants into training programs, such as advanced manufacturing, that will prepare them for careers in the automotive industry. These jobs, on average, pay $25 an hour. As of November 2017, the program has graduated 37 applicants who now have careers to which they can look forward. Former State Rep. John Bowman of North County has been instrumental in coordinating this apprenticeship program. All training is free of charge.

- Current courses include Electrical Maintenance and Repair, Plumbing Maintenance and Repair, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Maintenance and Repair, Appliance Maintenance and Repair and Interior and Exterior Maintenance and Repair. Students who complete 8 weeks of training will be offered a paid internship through St Louis Apartment Association. Upon completion of the internship participants can eventually earn up to $25 an hour as an apprentice.

- Our Department of Public Health hosts over 100 interns each year from high school, college and graduate schools.

12. Recommendation: Protect the rights of workers to organize

- Although many labor issues relate to the General Assembly and actions taken by the Governor, County Executive Stenger has been a strong voice of opposition to any legislation – especially the so-called “Right To Work” law -- that eliminates or limits workers’ rights to organize. In addition, the County Executive supports all local ordinances that eliminate any chance of wage theft or misclassification designed to cheat employees out of the benefits they have earned.
13. **Recommendation: Implement a statewide M/WBE program**

- Although the state of Missouri has enacted a statewide Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and Woman Owned Business Enterprise (WBE) program, County Executive Stenger commissioned the County’s first-ever Disparity Study that, when complete, will provide a baseline information and recommendations for implementation that will result in begun to develop a countywide program to build a diverse supplier base and boost participation by M/WBE firms in prime contracting and sub-contracting. This program will ensure that ALL business owners receive fair treatment on County contracts. This program will include a Chief Diversity Officer and adequate staff to supervise the program and ensure its implementation.

14. **Recommendation: Expand funding for job training and wage support programs**

- St. Louis County has received multiple grants from the U.S. Department of Labor and State Division of Workforce Development that expand access to job training programs and support economic upward mobility. The St. Louis County Division of Workforce Development will aggressively pursue grants that will allow us to continue to build on our success. Most recently, St. Louis County received a $4.4 million grant for 3 job training centers in Ferguson, Wellston and Spanish Lake.

15. **Recommendation: Broadly apply a racial equity framework**

- The Disparity Study is a landmark effort in establishing a racial equity framework in the critical area of contracting. The study effort has been directed by the leadership of the Office of Community Empowerment.

- Through County Executive Stenger’s creation of the Office of Community Empowerment, St. Louis County government now has the capacity to analyze governmental functions in impoverished areas and address disparities in policy development and implementation. Different regions of St. Louis County face different challenges. The Office of Community Empowerment has enabled government to identify disparities and rectify them through engagement and inclusive policies.

- The St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund is partnering with the National Conference for Community and Justice of Metropolitan St. Louis to provide cultural competency training to partner agencies. The Inclusion Institute for St.
Louis Children’s Service Fund will launch in early December 2017. The goal is to help community leaders to address equity and inclusion in their organizations.

- Our Department of Public Health adopted a strategic priority and plan for Racial Equity in 2015. DPH received a Promising Practice Award from the National Association of City and County Health Organizations for its internal training program of six courses teaching the racial equity framework to all staff.

- Two programs, Project ReCAST (Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma) and RESTORE were both modeled entirely on a racial equity framework and include evaluation components. The St. Louis County ReCast program is funded by a five-year, $4.7 million Promise Zone grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The program will include the St. Louis City Department of Health, the St. Louis Mental Health Board, and over 70 local non-profits and municipalities. ReCast hosted a series of six community-voting events to determine which resiliency programs will be funded. Those programs are ongoing.

- The Office of Community Empowerment is working in partnership with Washington University’s Brown School of Social Work on issues related to the “For Sake of All” report. These include initiatives aimed at reducing gun violence, and expanding school-based health services.

16. Recommendation: Special needs and disabled populations

- St. Louis County’s Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) is working with local healthcare providers and vendors to implement a database that would log interactions between law enforcement and citizens with mental health issues. Once this technology is fully implemented, it will serve as another resource law enforcement has available to reduce confusion and increase the safety of all citizens.

17. Recommendation: Prioritize youth-serving job programs

- St. Louis County Division of Workforce Development participated in the Missouri Division of Workforce Development’s Youth Summer Jobs program. The County was allocated 165 participants who could work 280 hours and receive $8.50 per hour during the summer with the possibility of earning up to $2,380.
Demand for summer jobs always exceeds capacity and we will aggressively pursue increased state funding next year.

- Urban League’s Ferguson Community Empowerment Center: The Stenger Administration secured federal New-Markets tax credits for the development of the Empowerment Center. The facility will offer job training and employment services and will house the Urban League’s Save Our Sons program. The center, which will provide a broad range of community support activities, was completed in 2017 and is located off West Florissant Avenue.

- The Children’s Service Fund supports, among many other programs, the St. Louis Artworks, which is an arts and apprenticeship model that teaches students marketable job skills. The students work with private and public entities that commission art projects (murals, video shorts, etc.) while being paid for their work on the project.

18. Recommendation: Create an Innovative Education Hub

- The St. Louis Housing Authority Literacy Program maintains two sites, Arbor Hill and Valley Park, where children participate in year-round reading exercises. Kids may listen to storytellers, check out books, even receive free books for their own collection, and build their capacity to learn and advance in school. Volunteers and public housing officials operate the program. St. Louis County Library has donated books and equipment and library employees have volunteered their time to ensure the success of this program.

19. Recommendation: Increasing Access to Care/Promote Use of Public Transit

- The St. Louis County Department of Public Health will operate a mobile health-screening vehicle that will serve the Wellston, North Hanley and St. Charles Rock Road MetroLink stations along with the North County Transit Center in Ferguson. A Registered Nurse and a social worker will staff the mobile unit and administer screenings for obesity, diabetes and elevated blood pressure. The staff will also provide education and suggestions regarding healthy lifestyles, offer assistance with overcoming any barriers to accessing health care, help complete health insurance applications and make follow-up appointments with physicians as needed. All services are free for anyone 18 and older. The screenings are funded through a $940,000 federal grant aimed at transit riders and communities near transit centers. This program is called Links 2 Health and will start in December.
St. Louis County has also taken a leadership role in improving safety on Metrolink, working to establish a coalition with the City of St. Louis and St. Clair County, Illinois, to increase police presence and take other measures to increase rider safety.

Pending Work on Recommendations

1. **Recommendation: Increase Police Training Hours**
   - The passage of Proposition P in 2017 will allow for increased police training for both St. Louis County and municipal officers.

2. **Recommendation: Expanding access to Public Defenders**
   - The County Executive, in his FY 18 budget, will double the number of public defenders in our Municipal courts; currently, there are two part-time public defenders. Funding for these positions will come from the additional revenue under Proposition P. Investing in public safety is not limited to police and should include resources that ensure all citizens have access to counsel and a fair judicial process.

3. **Recommendation: Continue to maximize the use of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG):**
   - St. Louis County will continue to make strategic investments in impoverished communities through Community Development Block Grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). They will assist local partnerships in a wide variety of community building services, including job training and increased educational opportunities.

4. **Recommendation: Body Cameras for St. Louis County Police Officers**
   - Over $600,000 in the County Executive’s Fiscal Year 2018 budget will be dedicated to the purchase of body cameras. Monies from Prop P will purchase cameras for officers and to establish an IT database that can collect and maintain all data.
Conclusion: St. Louis County has made a significant effort in the last few years to promote racial equity and our administration will continue working to build a community that will benefit all.