

## Needham's Unite Against Racism Initiative is just the Beginning

On June 29, 2020, the Town of Needham took a step in the right direction when it announced the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative. This initiative is the first step on a long road of attempting to be unambiguous about the immorality and existence of racism in our society and in our policing.

There are those in town who will not agree with this initiative and there are those in town that will believe that this is not enough. The answer is that there is no moral choice but to start the process. We must strive forward to become a town that not just speaks about racism, but is actively anti-racist in all our institutions.

What does it mean to be anti-racist?

Professor Laura Morgan Roberts, at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, identifies an anti-racist leader as one that "recognizes that there are policies, procedures, unspoken norms and routines that push people into different paths of opportunity, where some individuals have greater access and less, due to race."

An anti-racist approach acknowledges the existence of systemic racism and actively works to make opportunities and access to justice fairly and transparently open, to those who were denied equitable access before. It goes beyond an awareness of racism to acting against it.

Needham's Unite Against Racism Initiative makes a "commitment to ensure that residents in Needham are safe and free from racism, discrimination and hate."

This is a bold promise from the Town and highlights the strength and leadership of our Needham community. Within Needham, there are organizations who are already vested in various aspects of ensuring that Needham is inclusive, fair and equitable. We recognize that we are all in this together. That we cannot feel safe, if any of our neighbors do not feel safe.

So, let's be anti-racist. Let's do the hard work together. The July 21st listening session on racism hosted by the Needham Select Board is a start, but let's continue the engagement beyond this session. Let's also begin by relying on and building the coalitions needed to hold ourselves and Needham's institutions transparent and accountable.

Needham Diversity Initiative  
Needham High School SAFE - Students Advocating for Equity  
METCO Needham Parent Council  
Needham Interfaith Clergy Association  
Progressive Needham  
Equal Justice in Needham  
Citizens for Needham Schools  
Needham Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)  
Indian Community of Needham (ICON)