

DURHAM BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Resolution

RECOGNIZING THE HARMEFUL IMPACTS OF THE USE OF PEJORATIVE LANGUAGE TO REFER TO JUSTICE-INVOLVED PEOPLE, AND URGING THE USE OF PERSON-FIRST LANGAGE IN DURHAM

- WHEREAS,** nearly eighty percent (80%) of the persons held in the Durham County Detention Center are there awaiting trial having not been convicted of the crime they were charged with; and
- WHEREAS,** people with criminal records endure intense legal and social sanctioning, including segregation, harassment, and harm; and
- WHEREAS,** individuals with criminal records are part of our communities, schools, workplaces, and places of worship; and
- WHEREAS,** language shapes the ideas, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals, societies, and governments; and
- WHEREAS,** language usage that emphasizes or prioritizes a criminal record over the individual undermines, devalues, dehumanizes, demoralizes and dishonors the humanity of that individual; and
- WHEREAS,** dehumanizing language like "prisoner," "convict," "inmate," or "felon" only serve to obstruct and separate people from society and make the institutionalization of racism and supremacy appear normal; and
- WHEREAS,** inaccurate information, unfounded assumptions, generalizations, and other negative predispositions associated with justice-involved individuals create societal stigmas, attitudinal barriers, and continued negative stereotypes that affect access to employment, housing, healthcare, professional licensing, travel, support services, and other integral aspects of community life; and
- WHEREAS,** people-first language places the individual before the criminal record by using neutral, objective, and non-pejorative language; and
- WHEREAS,** people-first language promotes positive, sound, and unbiased communication and diminishes categorization and segmentation for people with a criminal record, such that an individual is not defined solely or primarily by a criminal record, arrest, or other contacts with the criminal justice system.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners of Durham County recognizes that language that is not people-first obstructs the integration, inclusion, participation, and respect of justice involved individuals; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT that the Board of Commissioners of Durham County requests all local government offices and departments, including the Durham courts and judiciary, and the Durham community at-large to adopt people-first language with respect to people with criminal records in all its official written, voice, audiovisual, and signed communications; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT that the Board of Commissioners of Durham County urges adoption and utilization of people-first language in all legislation, co-sponsorship memos, reports, policies, and other documents.

This the 14th day of March, 2022.

Brenda A. Howerton, Chair

Wendy Jacobs, Vice-Chair

Nida Allam, Commissioner

Nimasheena Burns, Commissioner

Heidi Carter, Commissioner

