

CUYAHOGA COUNTY
BOARD OF HEALTH
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I would like to address an incident from my past - one that was borne out of ignorance and immaturity.

About 30 years ago, I attended a Halloween party in blackface makeup.

At the time, I did not realize how my actions that night would be interpreted and how they could be hurtful to people I did not even know.

The origins of blackface harken back to the minstrel shows of the 19th century. White actors painted their faces and impersonated slaves or black people who were free.

The nature of those portrayals was not flattering and did more to further stereotypes than to negate them.

The takeaways from that period were that black people were inferior to whites and that it was socially acceptable to mock them on stage and belittle them as people.

Today, I am horrified by those truths and ashamed of myself for having any connection to the furtherance of those beliefs.

Confronting youthful mistakes and transgressions from our past often causes us embarrassment, regret and pain.

I am incredibly embarrassed about what I have done.

I apologize for my ignorance and immaturity and ask for forgiveness.

Since that time many years ago, I feel that my education and experience has brought me to a better place; a place of enlightenment and awareness that has moved me to become a part of the solution.

I have great appreciation for the people I have met over the past three decades who have been a part of my transformative journey from a foolish and immature young man to a person who believes in equity, inclusion and opportunity for all.

I also have faith that my work record speaks to my true intent.

The community-based relationships that I have cultivated on behalf of our agency and still appreciate today are the result of a great deal of collaboration and trust.

Trust among partners that we are headed in the right direction for the right reasons.

Trust that we are in this together because we want to see improved outcomes, primarily the elimination of racism and inequity in our society.

These beliefs are the foundation for the work we do every day at the Board of Health.

Our goals are to be open, non-judgmental and accommodating with all people.

I have apologized to the Board of Health staff for the embarrassment I have brought to our agency.

Please know that my work, however blemished by this incident, is firmly rooted in our core belief system and always will be.

To the people of Cuyahoga County, I ask for your forgiveness. I fully understand that what I did was wrong. I only wish to own up to my mistake and accept the consequences that may result.

In summary, I realize the gravity of my actions.

They have served as a reminder of the unfortunate realities that African Americans still face to this day.

My hope is that one day, all Americans will be free from the stains of slavery, racial prejudice and unequal treatment.

Tomorrow, I will again go to work and do my part to bring those hopes closer to becoming a reality.

Terry Allan
Health Commissioner