August 25, 2022

Dear Auditor O’Brien,

As core members of the Racial Equity Council, a coalition of various community members invested in ensuring the success of Denver’s Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American Pacific Islander, Immigrant and Refugee communities, we are writing in response to the recent performance audit of the City Equity Program and Practices.

As a council representing multiple non-profit, health, and academic entities, we were dismayed and disheartened that you did not seek the input and perspective of the Denver community when conducting an audit about the Mayor’s Office of Social Equity and Innovation (OSEI), who receives regular input and perspective from us to guide their work. We find this lack of reaching out to community to be an egregious oversight. We therefore are writing this letter to ensure that our voices are heard. We explicitly object to the mischaracterization of the Mayor’s Office of Social Equity and Innovation in this audit.

OSEI was a vital leader as it pertains to a response to center communities of color during the COVID pandemic (March 2020 – June 2021), mass protests in response to the murder of George Floyd (May 2020 – June 2020), and the COVID vaccinations (January 2021 – April 2021). The leadership of the Mayor’s Office of Social Equity and Innovation was tasked by the Mayor and other city officials to lead the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to ensure equity was embedded in all aspects of the City’s response.

Along with OSEI leadership, members of the Racial Equity Council advised the EOC’s decisions by participating in numerous equity-focused meetings that centered on the value of health and community-engaged professionals from across the city. In an effort to ensure equity-based health decisions that improve community health outcomes were made, these meetings placed city agency leaders, including those in OSEI, in front of community members from the Racial Equity Council.

The Mayor’s Office of Social Equity and Innovation- with the charge of its leadership- actively and selflessly served the city, ensuring the often forgotten and ignored lives of Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American Pacific Islander, Immigrant and Refugee communities were not overlooked during an unprecedented worldwide pandemic. This service is at the core of all that is required in Executive Order 146, as it is in fact, equity in action. Traditional structures for how an office should be run came second to saving lives in that time. OSEI leadership took a necessary and culturally responsive approach to the evolving needs of our Denver community. The audit fails to take this same approach in how they view the time spent by OSEI leadership during the same time period.

In signing on to this letter, we desire to share our sincere support for the efforts of OSEI leadership during what we hope will be a once in a lifetime series of events. Additionally, this letter serves to communicate in no uncertain terms our utter discontent with the implications and statements made from your office, Mr. O’Brien, regarding your description of their performance. We ask that this statement be entered into the record and that you reconsider your position and adjust your audit to reflect what we have shared here today.

Sincerely,

Racial Equity Council Core Members