

OPINION

## Rafferty: DEI attacks show need for vigilance

**Michael Rafferty**

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New Detroit has been watch-dogging efforts to dismantle race specific programs that promote diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) for several years. The recent Appellate Court ruling against the Fearless Fund, a private venture



capital firm's grant program for Black women business owners, piles onto the wave of reverse discrimination lawsuits that prohibit the private sector from using race-based affirmative action and DEI programs.

It is disheartening and outrageous to see the Civil Rights Act of 1866 being distorted and used as a central strategy to dismantle race specific programs. The original intent of the act was to rectify laws that prevented Black people from entering into contracts and being full participants in the economy. It is now being used to claim reverse discrimination.

The fact of the matter is that for decades after the abolishment of slavery, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and still today, Black people continue to experience systematic inequity in the workplace, health care access and outcomes and in financial and social opportunities. From the Black Codes that restricted equal participation in the workforce to the redlining that prevented their financial prospects, the playing field has not been level for Black people.

To now say that those who want to level that field for people of color are discriminatory is ludicrous and based on fear and a sense of entitlement that ignores economic reality.

Numerous studies show that equitable economic participation grows the economy. Most recently, a 2021 paper promoted by the Brookings Institute, “The Economic Gains from Equity,” calculates that GDP would increase by \$22.9 trillion over a 30-year period if labor market outcomes were more equitably distributed by race and ethnicity. The authors concluded persistent systemic disparities are costly and that systemic barriers waste the talents of millions of people, resulting in lower prosperity for everyone.

It is critical for people to understand the root causes and implications of racism and what actions, such as the Fearless Fund, are needed at all levels to undo it and achieve racial equity.

Now is not the time for us to turn our back on racial equity and DEI. We must dismantle racism and advance racial equity. We must build bridges, racial equity and a nation that is better for all. The country is stronger when everyone is successful. The Fearless Fund ruling shows that we can never rest when it comes to dismantling systemic racism. This latest case proves every legal right we have is constantly under threat by those who do not act in the best interest of all people, regardless of race.

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Now is the time to come together. What can you do? First, vote. Second, educate yourself and understand that racism is systemic. Third, grow the

economy by supporting Black owned businesses. Finally, open your heart and your mind and have conversations with people unlike yourself.

Let us support life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for everyone.

*Michael Rafferty is president of New Detroit.*