

Meeting of New Jersey Human Relations Council

January 16, 2019

The meeting of the New Jersey Human Relations Council was held on January 16, 2019, 10:00 a.m. at the Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex, 25 Market Street, Fifth Floor, West Wing, Trenton, New Jersey, 08625.

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: The meeting was called to order by Ashton Burrell at 10:17.

Each person present introduced themselves.

HRC Officers in Attendance: Ashton Burrell, Chairman, Yumiko Mishima, Vice Chairwoman, Karen Positan, Treasurer.

Those serving on the Council and guests in attendance were as follows: Angeline Dean, Philip Freeman, Jennie Lamon, Joseph Santagata, Reisa Sweet, Bryn Whittle, Reisa Sweet, Pauline Bey, and John Wenz, Donald Beetham, Theresa Cannon, Kinya Harris, Kimberly Holmes, David Leonardis, Gladys Redd, and Kinya Travis.

Philip Freeman reminded the Council of the attendance policy. There should be a record of who attends the meetings. If one misses three consecutive meetings, and has not appointed a proxy, the Council will have to decide what to do about it.

Chairpersons report: Ashton said he was happy to be here and was looking forward to working with everyone.

Overview of the Council. Presentation by Philip Freeman about the Council: The Council was created in 1997. The mission is to promote "prejudice reduction" education and address the problem of bias and violent acts based on the victim's race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or disability.

There are 10 public members representative of racial, ethnic, gender and religious groups. There are 2 members appointed by the Senate and 2 members appointed by the Assembly. There are 7 representatives of county human relation commissions and 15 ex-officio.

Slide1: Ex-Officio Members:

- Attorney General, NJ Department of Law and Public Safety
- Secretary of State, NJ Department of State
- Commissioner of the Department of Education
- Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs
- Commissioner of the Department of Corrections
- Commissioner of the Department of Human Services
- Public Defender, NJ Office of the Public Defender
- Acting Administrative Director, Administrative Office of the Courts
- Director, NJ Division of Criminal Justice
- Superintendent, NJ Division of State Police
- Director, NJ Division on Civil Rights

President of the County Prosecutors Association of NJ
President of the NJ State Association of Chiefs of Police
President of the Bias Crime Officers Association of NJ
County Superintendent of Schools
President of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association
President of the NJ Education Association

Slide 2: Duties of NJHRC:

The main focus of the Council is to develop policy proposals, make recommendations to government entities, and develop policies and procedures for the State and assist with the coordinating efforts to promote "prejudice reduction" and prevent and deter crimes based on a victim's race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or physical, mental or cognitive disability.

Slide 3: Duties of NJHRC:

The most productive ways the Council assists the people of the State of New Jersey is through training to the local, county and interest community leaders. The Council can work with agencies such as the Division on Civil Rights, State Police, Division of Criminal Justice, and the educational; community, to provide cultural diversity training to]members of the county human relations commissions and other interested community leaders.

Slide 4: Duties of NJHRC:

When the need arises, the Council steps in to assist the county and municipal commissions in diffusing tensions within the community and provide conciliation assistance. All activities are conducted in confidence and without publicity.
Among its many activities, the Council will cooperate with state, county and municipal agencies to educate. encourage, develop, promote, and strengthen respect for human rights and cultural diversity and prevent and combat racism, intolerance and bigotry.
The Council acts as a clearinghouse for information and program ideas among the municipal and county Commissions in existence.

Slide 5: NJHRC Advisory Board

The Advisory Board was created to offer advice and assistance to the Council in carrying out its mission. Board members are selected by a majority vote of the Council and the term is one year. The Board meets one hour before the Council at their bi-monthly meetings and discuss issues with their communities and they provide recommendations to the Council regarding activities, projects and goals that best assist the Council.

Slide 6: Highlights of Past and Present NJHRC Initiatives:

The NJHRC was instrumental in the creation and implementation of the NJ Cares about Bullying Campaign and the passage of The New Jersey Anti-Bullying Rights Act. Children of Incarcerated Parents: A four-ear campaign looking at the lives of those affected from all sides and bringing together service providers for all parties involved to address the issues faced by this vulnerable population. And Justice for All: restoring our Faith in Police and Community Relations.

Many positions are vacant or the appointees have not shown up. There is the possibility to lower the number needed for a quorum from 12 to 9. Anyone who knows people who may be interested should contact Ashton. There was a question about whether there was a representative from every county and the answer is no.

Camden County as well as Camden City have dissolved their Human Relation Councils. It was advised that concerned citizens address the County Freeholders on the importance of the Council. The city also might be encouraged to reinstate the Council.

Advisory Board Report: The Highland Park Human Relations Commission, chaired by Ashton Burrell, assisted by John Wenz, recognized that poor children who were eligible for free lunch when school was in session, often had no lunch on days when school was closed. These represented about 38% of the school population, not enough to get federal aid. The Commission worked with a local food pantry in New Brunswick, Elijah's Promise to provide bag lunches at first. Later the Highland Park mayor set up a fund called "HP gives a Hoot" (named after the high school mascot Owl). The free lunches are provided to the children at the international cafe at the local Reformed Church. The lunches are not provided on weekends when presumably a parent would be home to provide for the children.

The Trenton commission partners with Mercer Friends to provide free lunches on weekends.

Old Business: The secretary position was left vacant at the last meeting. The duties are the recording of minutes and providing the agenda. There were no members interested in taking this on at this time. It was proposed and passed that Ashton would appoint a non-member to do the minutes. Donald Beetham, a member of the Highland Park Human Relations Commission was appointed by Ashton as interim secretary until the position can be filled.

New Business: Conference Planning: Ashton opened up the discussion of the topic for our 2019 conference by reading the list of topics arising from the survey taken after the 2017 conference. The suggestions were Racism, Implicit Bias, Cultural Competence, LGBTQ Issues, Women's Issues and Mass Incarceration. there was a discussion about Mass Incarceration, Hate Crimes and safety of students from elementary to college. In the ensuing discussion the following topics were proposed: when free speech descends into hate speech, immigration, the 400th Anniversary of African slavery, school to prison pipeline, and human trafficking.

In the ensuing discussion, there was an attempt to narrow down the list to a manageable few for voting. The following points were raised:

- Many of the topics were related to Bias. There were 6,800 confirmed incidents in New Jersey schools last year. BIAS incidents have been increasing and affects all schools and colleges in New Jersey.
- The Attorney General's office has been investigating whether school districts acted on bias incidents.
- All the colleges and universities in New Jersey have white supremacy groups actively recruiting.
- New Jersey reduced its prison population by one third.
- Pre-trial reform includes addressing economic disparities including bail. The inability to pay minor traffic tickets can lead to a criminal record.
- There is a need for education about criminal justice i.e. what is a summons? what is a warrant?

- The Attorney General is focused on immigration, the opioid crisis, and bias in 2018-2019. The Attorney General met with faith based groups, law enforcement agencies, social agencies, and educators to discuss these issues.
- In the past, the HRC would conduct police training. Now those police departments do their own training.
- Mental health--can choose treatment rather than incarceration. The HRC should consider expungement as well; Angeline Dean runs the expungement program through Trenton. It is free.
- The duty of Ombudsmen is to help people navigate their way through the courts
- One in four people have a criminal record; four in four have committed criminal acts. weareallcriminals.org. Emily Baxter gives talks about this. It is important to have empathy.
- It was felt that some topics might be presentations at the bi-monthly HRC meetings. It would be beneficial if more visitors could be encouraged to attend these meetings.
- After some discussion it was suggested the topics could be put together. Two broad categories began to emerge: Criminal Justice Reform (expungement, mass incarceration, school to prison pipeline, courts, re-entries, and juvenile justice) and Bias (racism, immigration, implicit bias, protected classes, free speech into hate speech). A vote was taken and **criminal justice reform was chosen 6-5 over bias**. It was determined that bias would be the topic next year.

Announcements: There is a need for a conference planning committee. The following volunteered: Ashton Burrell, Yumiko Mishima, Karen Positan, Tanya Hoffer, Kimberly Holmes, Reisa Sweet and Pauline Bey.

The Martin Luther King event will be on Sunday at the NJ State Museum. The HRC is a sponsor. The theme is economic justice.

The Highland Park Martin Luther King celebration will be on Monday in the Highland park High School at 7 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 pm.