

Meeting of New Jersey Human Relations Council

October 21, 2020

The meeting of the New Jersey Human Relations Council was held on October 21, 2020 via the Zoom Video Conferencing software.

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: The meeting was called to order by Ashton Burrell at 10:05.

Reading of Public Meeting Act.

Each person present introduced themselves.

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

Those serving on the Advisory Group and guests in attendance were as follows: Binyanin Newmark, Valerie Barnes, Donald Beetham, Lisa Burke, Claudia Demitro, Denalerie Faniel, Heather Hadley, Amy Heath, Eddie Kerr, Francis Koch, Jennie Lamon, Vanessa Lawson, Chiqeena Lee, David Leonardis, Yolanda Marlow, Robert Murphy, Louisa L. Soto, Reisa Sweet, Tisha Leonardo Santiago, John Wenz.

The Minutes of the February 19, 2019 meeting were read and approved with some corrections.

Chair's Report: Ashton is excited to be back on the lines.

Advisory Board Report: There was no meeting today. Reisa reported on Ocean County project where people will connect with each other beyond boundaries and beyond religion. Reverend William Simmons will be a sponsor of the project. Hats with "Say hello" will be distributed. There had been a program planned but it was cancelled because of the virus.

Old Business: Open Nominations for secretary: The Board has been trying to get nominations to the Governor's Office.

Reactivation of some of the towns' HRCs: Karen and Yumiko are working on a message to be sent to county prosecutors and local officials to make sure local HRCs are properly supported and functioning. The Council used to have a budget and used to give out grants to locals groups. This led to a more active roster of local and county people. These groups often got support from the county government or county prosecutors' offices. The State Office of Bias Crime and Community engagement had the local HRCs under their wing and kept a roster of all the active HRCs. Karen located an old roster and reached out to people whose names were on the roster; she did not much of a response at all.

Claudia will reach out to the prosecutors to determine who is operating in the State. The membership of the State HRC has also fallen off. The Executive Board has determined that the legislators and governors need to make the appointments that are needed.

New Business:

Political Disagreements: Ashton discussed the intensity of political disagreements locally. The State HRC could have a role in moderating the tone of political disagreements, i.e. for people to agree to disagree. What kind of things are others doing? This led to a number of suggestions and reports. Lisa Burke noted that some discussions are not about solutions but, especially in public discourse, are about devaluing some people's dignity. It was noted that with so many inactive HRCs, we are not in position to address this on a local level. The underlying issues go beyond elections. There are institutional issues. The Council may want to investigate whether there are initiatives relating to human interaction in the social media world. Yolanda Marlow mentioned the need for training especially on minority issues. The undercounting in the census in NJ is responsible for NJ only getting \$.77 per tax dollar back from the Federal government. Local HRCs can provide a place where people can get their issues heard in a respectful manner. The Council should coordinate with the Prosecutor's Office on their community engagement efforts. Dave Leonardis said that HRCs are great resource for prosecutor's office's efforts and that every county should have an HRC. A Community Outreach Liaison meeting is coming up; these are all the outreach people in all of the county prosecutor's offices. Perhaps there could be a brief presentation from the Human Relations Council about the benefits of connecting. Yolanda Marlow suggested that there be more publicity about what the prosecutor's offices and HRCs are doing. When the prosecutor liaisons meet, all of the counties share information. The Ocean County and Union Counties HRC have been working closely with the respective county prosecutors' office. A suggestion was made for a monthly email with news about events. Social media also was mentioned for getting out information. John Wenz suggested securing the memberships and the support for the Council, and then to publicize that information. Yumiko noted there are supposed to be 18 appointed members as well as representatives. About half of those slots are filled but only three of those show making it impossible to have four officers. The Advisory Board also needs to be built up. A starting point for the Advisory Board is identifying the local and county people. The members list for, and the legislation creating, the Council can be seen at:

<https://www.nj.gov/oag/dcj/hrc/council.html>. Ashton reported that Ocean County, Union County, Highland Park and South Brunswick have HRCs. Princeton has one with a different name. Please let Ashton know about any others. Dr. Denalerie Johnson-Faniel contributed the link to the Lawrenceville Human Relations Committee: <http://lawrencetwp.com/com-hr.html>.

Racism and Resources:

Ashton said that a resource catalog is needed to help with various issues people are facing like housing bias, etc. This could be placed on the website. The Union County HRC has Spanish language meetings to disseminate this kind information. Mercer County also has training events including the need to report bias incidents.

Lisa Burke spoke about the **Judiciary Committee**. The courts have been open remotely and now are in phase II with more on site court activity. The National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts four part webinar series. The November 13 webinars are re-imagining Policing and the Elimination of Monuments to the Confederacy. The link is: <http://www.national-consortium.org/conference/2020-virtual-symposium>. The following is the link to the Judiciary's COVID-19/remote operations information page: https://www.njcourts.gov/public/covid19_one-stop.html.

The next meeting will be November 18 with official nominations for officers for the next year. Nominations should be sent to Claudia Demitro.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:34.