

Meeting of New Jersey Human Relations Council

March 17, 2021

The virtual meeting of the New Jersey Human Relations Council was held on March 17, 2021 using Goto Meeting Conferencing software.

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: The meeting was called to order by Ashton Burrell at 10:07.

Attendees introduced themselves, along with their organizations, in the chat log.

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

Those in attendance were as follows (reverse alphabetical order): Patricia Williamson, *Community Relations Specialist in DCR*; El-Rhonda M Williams-Alston; Bryn Whittle, *Director of Community Engagement, Office of the Attorney General*; Thomas, Major Carla, *New Jersey State Police*; Esther Suarez, *Hudson County Prosecutor*; Ashley Riker, *Community Relations Specialist NJ Division on Civil Rights*; Christopher Paz, *Legislative Aide for Assemblywoman Aura Dunn of the 25th Legislative District*; Ian Mosley, *NJ State Democratic Committeeman (Camden County)*; Tisha Leonardo-Santiago, *A.G.'s Office Division on Civil Rights*; David Leonardis, *Division of Criminal Justice*; Chiqueena Lee; *NJ DOC*; Libby Klein, *Community relations Specialist, DCR*; Kimberly K. Holmes, *Dept. of Community Affairs*; Heather Hadley, *Mercer County Prosecutors Office*; Vincent Funelas, *Office of Volunteerism*; Denalerie Faniel, *PhD, DCR, Community Relations*; Kimberly Douglas; Edmund DeVeaux, *Somerset (Franklin), NJ, Executive Vice President*; Natalie Cureton; Don Beetham, *Highland Park Historical Commission*.

Reading of the Public Meeting Act. The next meetings will be Wednesday, June 16, Wednesday, September 15 and Wednesday, December 15, 2021.

The **Minutes** of the February 17, 2019 meeting were read and approved.

Chair's Report: Is very excited with the momentum of the HRC. Look forward to working with everyone. Good to see new faces. Big salute to Karen, Claudia, Bryn and Yumiko for making that a big success. Excited to keep things moving.

Advisory Board Report: There was no Advisory Board meeting today.

Old Business: Update on the identification of local HRCs. Great list was made ready. We reached out to county prosecutors and local organizations throughout New Jersey so they could get re-acclimated with the State HRC. Ashton asked if anyone on the team knew of any groups let them know so they could reach out to

them, even if it was just a former group. Any kind of information would be helpful. Send to Aburrellhp@gmail.com.

Planning Virtual Programming. Upcoming webinar conference. Ashton asked for people with talents to speak up so a program can be planned around it.

Karen Positan requested the sharing of anything going on in departments for the table at the webinar. Everyone knows what the problems are but would be helpful to create empathy, perhaps by sharing stories from a place of openness including people who are active in the community and striving for change.

In-depth Introductions:

Yumiko Mishima, the Vice Chair, has been involved in the HRC since the beginning and has seen it evolve and change over the years. Unfortunately one of the changes was that the HRC lost its funding a number of years ago. Without a budget it has been difficult to do the kinds of program the HRC used to do. Anti-bullying in schools was one of the signature pushes. The HRC also gave attention to children of incarcerated parents. Big topics received focused scrutiny. Nevertheless the HRC has held a conference fairly regularly and they have been well attended. Involvement under the Office of the Attorney General gives us reach to a particular audience. Yumiko finds it more engaging to attend programs in person. The next big topic? Policing?

David Leonardis is with the Division of Criminal Justice Training Bureau, and develops Community Relations Training for law enforcement. There are a number of courses on the Black community, Asian community, Latino community, and LGBTQ community to give law enforcement a better understanding and to bring law enforcement and the communities closer together. Leonardis also coordinates with each of the prosecutor's offices and their bias crimes liaisons. Training is provided on investigating bias crimes and Zoom bombings; these Zoom bombings take place every day.

At this point there was a break in the introductions for the guest speaker.

Guest speaker: Major Carla Thomas of the New Jersey State Police.

The State Police reorganized two months ago. The goal was to improve the efficiency of business processes and building transparency and trust with personnel. Two bureaus were created.

One was the Office of Employee Relations which focuses on the division of culture, employees well being, their safety, and the quality of service to the public. Under this office are four units:

1. Employee Organizational Development Unit staffed by mental health professionals focusing on mental health of employees and their family members;

2. Pier Unit staffed by troopers providing emotional support trooper to trooper;
3. Medical services Unit staffed by two doctors, one male and one female, and nurses;
4. Diversity and Inclusion unit focusing on employers as well as community outreach. Within the last two months they have drafted a diversity and inclusion plan with training goals; drafted a pregnancy policy. The unit engages over 1000 civilian members, close to 3000 enlisted members, and twenty-one chaplains who offer spiritual services and emotional support.

The second bureau is the Community Outreach Bureau that includes the Open Records Unit, the Public Relations Unit, the Recruiting Unit (Online application process <https://njtrooper.com/>), and Community Outreach Unit. Salem city saw a huge spike in murder rate up 500% and shootings up 900%. It involved youth. The unit collaborated with clergy, prosecutor's office, grass roots organizations, the community itself, and organizations that could possibly bring work into the community. There was a walk through the town to do community mapping.

Major Thomas is looking forward to building relationships with the HRC.

Continuation of Introductions:

Patricia Williamson is Community Relations specialist under division of Civil Rights. It is her third day on the job.

Chiqueena Lee, NJ Department of Corrections. Equal Employment Division.

Denalerie Johnson Faniel, Director of Outreach and Community Relations at Civil Rights (DCR) noted that Tisha Leonardo-Santiago was present at this meeting. The previous director Rachel Wainer Apter was recently appointed to the NJ Supreme Court. It is the 75th anniversary of the Law against Discrimination celebrated in April (<https://www.njoag.gov/about/divisions-and-offices/division-on-civil-rights-home/75th-anniversary/>).

Edmund DeVeaux was recently appointed to the commission by Speaker Coughlan. He partners at Burton Trent Public Affairs, is the president of the New Jersey CannaBusiness Association, and serves on the Board of Elijah's Promise which hit a grim milestone of serving 25,000 meals in the month of February.

El Rhonda M. Williams- is new director of the Equal Employment Division of the Department of Corrections.

Vincent Funelas is representing Roweena Madden, Director of the Governor's Office of Volunteerism in the Secretary of State's Office. Congratulations to

Ashton Burrell. The MLK Youth Conference “We Hear You” was held in January (<https://nj.gov/state/mlk-2021-virtual-youth-conference.shtml>). There was a Justice Matters Workshop panel discussion (<https://youtu.be/LU3hbXGZMFg>). Funelas offered volunteer opportunities especially the Food Bank of New Jersey located in Hillside which is down 180 volunteers a week. The American Indian Commission Federal Grant application was approved for \$200,000 a year for three years divided among each of the State recognized tribes to make sure vaccines are distributed to vulnerable groups. Each tribe will be hiring coordinators.

Heather Hadley is Senior Assistant Prosecutor in Mercer County and Bias Crime Liaison and Human Trafficking Liaison for the office.

Kimberly Douglas works for the judiciary and is here for Tonya Hobson who normally attends. There is programming to educate employees of the court system on racial justice issues including the rise of violence against Asian Americans.

Kimberly Holmes is Chief of Staff and Assistant Commissioner for the Department Community Affairs where the commissioner is Sheila Oliver. The department recommends internal education to uplift one another. Trepidations of communities of color about vaccine as well as vaccine disparities can be externally addressed.

Libby Klein is one of the new Community Relation Specialists in the new unit of the DCR.

Natalie Cureton is with the Department Human Services in Bergen County.

Tisha Leonardo Santiago in Division of Civil Rights, emphasized the NJ Bias Portal where people can file a bias complaint electronically with DCR.

Don Beetham is a resident of Highland Park, NJ. Beetham is taking minutes in the absence of a secretary.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:06.