

Meeting of New Jersey Human Relations Council

June 16, 2021

The virtual meeting of the New Jersey Human Relations Council was held on June 16, 2021 using Goto Meeting Conferencing software.

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

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

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

Those in attendance were as follows (*alphabetical order*): Reginald Bledson, *Alternative* for Kimberly K. Holmes, Chief of Staff Department of Community Affairs; Terry Cannon, Bergen County, Human Commission Relations; Claudia Joy Demitro, Division of Criminal Justice; Edmund DeVeaux, Burton Trent Public Affairs LLC/President, NJ CannaBusiness Association; Kimberly Douglas, Judiciary; Denalerie Faniel, PhD, NJ, Division on Civil Rights; Vincent Funelas, Governor's Office of Volunteerism, proxy for Rowena Madden; Heather Hadley, Mercer County Prosecutors Office; Tonya Hopson, Judiciary; Manjula Khan, Plainsboro Human Relations Council; Libby Klein; Steve Landfield, Former member NJHRC & Former Member & Chair of the Advisory Board; Chiqueena Lee, NJ Department of Corrections, Equal Employment Division; David Leonardis, Division of Criminal Justice; Weldon Powell, Chief Detective, NJ Division of Criminal Justice; Tisha Leonardo-Santiago, *A.G.'s Office Division on Civil Rights*; Ian Mosley, *NJ State Democratic Committeeman (Camden County)*; Binyomin Newmark; Ronald Owens: Christopher Paz, *Legislative Aide for Assemblywoman Aura Dunn of the 25th Legislative District*; Kiyla Peterson, NJ Division on Civil Rights Intern; Dawn Rhinehart, Department of Community Affairs; Ashley Riker, *Community Relations Specialist NJ Division on Civil Rights*; Joe Santagata, *NJ HRC*; Katie Shea, NJ Division on Civil Rights Intern; Esther Suarez, *Hudson County Prosecutor*; Reisa Sweet, Ocean County HRC; John Wenz, Advisory Board; Don Beetham, Recorder of Minutes, Highland Park Historical Commission.

Reading of the Public Meeting Act. The next meetings will be, September 15 and Wednesday, December 15, 2021 using Goto Meeting Conferencing software.

The **Minutes** of the March 17, 2021 meeting were read and approved with one addition. A requested correction was made after the meeting.

There was a **moment of silence** for the people we have lost to gun violence in the past year and the years that have passed.

Chair's Report: Mr. Burrell continues to be excited hearing from local HRCs throughout the State. Will talk to North Brunswick this week. Excited to see positive energy of everyone here; everyone is willing to work together.

Old Business: Reactivating the town HRCs. Ashton is scheduled to speak with North Brunswick to see some of the things they are doing. Asking for continued help identifying grass roots organizations that we can get activated; everyone continue to pass on contacts. Want to find out how we can help them and they can help us.

2021 Goals for the Virtual Community Includes planning for webinar conferences. Virtual conferences allow us to touch people we might not otherwise reach. The HRC can share programming and the things we are doing with other people that we know. Ashton would like to provide more virtual programs to be a help to the people in the State of New Jersey.

Ashton asked for programs currently in existence that could be tapped into:

Reisa Sweet: In Ocean County HRC there has been discussion about the fact that people feel isolated after quating for COVID. Reverend William Simmons, Assistant Pastor of Sixth Street Baptist Church in Lakewood and Ocean County Human Relations Commission member, started a "Say hello to everyone" program. County Prosecutor Bradley D. Billhimer had 250 "Say Hello" hats made up. Magic has been happening. People are starting to engage in conversation. Learning to listen to one another. Soul to soul. Person to person. It was written up in "Out and About" Magazine.

(<https://www.co.ocean.nj.us/WebContentFiles/0e74b478-654d-48d9-8b26-7e220511197b.pdf>)

Vincent Funelas: Did hear from Native tribes joining in, The Indian commission just had elections and a new chair and co-chair were voted in. I'll continue to ask about partnering with the HRC.

Also, The Department of State houses the New Jersey Hellenic Heritage Commission. We attended their meeting last month and they were interested in the possibility of hosting or partnering in a civil rights conference in conjunction with their OXI Day Celebration in October (and gear programming to youth). It's sort of an independence day for the Greek Community. We'll have a meeting with their committee members this week to check to avoid recreating a wheel and potentially partnering with someone.

Ashton: I spoke to a young man from the mentorship who was coming home from incarceration on the need for better programming. Ashton asked if the HRC could help with training. Steve Landfield spent a year Rikers Island in NYC doing vocational training for Hostos Community College, City University. Support. Steve would definitely be in support of programs. Ashton will ask them make a report.

David Leonardis: briefing in part on BIAS statistics: 2020 incidents nearly tripled from 2018. The first five weeks of 2021 far exceed those of 2020. We are still on a climb concerning bias incidents. Division of mental health partners, considering the pandemic, think the numbers of incidents will not turn around that fast. Numbers partly rise because of the encouragement to report. But numbers continue to rise across the board: e.g. Black community; LGBTQ. Ashton asked about crimes. These statistics are bias incidents that have not risen to crime. Mostly they are a form of harassment, verbal abuse on a daily basis mostly based on ethnicity and religion.

Speaker: Weldon Powel, Chief Detective – NJ Division of Criminal Justice. Whenever one talks about bias incidents and crime in New Jersey, there has to be a blueprint on how to handle it. Cannot talk enough about the system we have in place. It is important to get word out about the system. These incidents can be addressed with the Bias Investigation Standards, a guideline from Attorney General's office on how we approach bias incidents and investigation of bias crime. It allows a uniform approach statewide. It also gives us a comprehensive reporting system. David Leonardis had the vision of uniformly reporting bias incidents so that State could look at them, State Police could look at them, Homeland Security could look at them and all the county prosecutors. Reporting enables the incidents to be addressed where they occur. Harassment is the number 1 incident followed by vandalism. We want to leave hate where it is. We don't want it to escalate. Nothing hurts or kills like hate. If there is a major incident, make sure it is looked at. Statistics: In 2018 there were 569 incidents; in 2019, 994; In 2020, 1441. Some were related to COVID; were some related to George Floyd; some were related to events with police. Some if it is related to better reporting. The bottom line is to make sure people in your social circle report them. In some cases, the incidents can be related to broader patterns. It serves as a radar system as to where focus the resources.

Question: how much is due to reporting? **Answer:** Small number is attributed to reporting but significant numbers are because people can sit at a computer; they can call someone a name and not have to see them face to face.

Dr. Ronald Owens **question:** how is the coordination between various county prosecutor offices? Short **answer** is yes. Reporting goes to all county prosecutors. Put out messages to the county prosecutors. Connecting clerk and office and homeland security as well.

Question: Are there resources that can be used at local or State level. **Answer:** report! Computer haters get a knock on the door. Let them know they are out there. If it escalates we will escalate. Were you directing a threat to this person? Make sure person on the radar system has not been there before.

Ronald Owens **Question:** How can we as a commission educate people and empower communities in the State to prevent some of these bias actions.

Answer: Continuing to do what you are doing. Get the word out.

Reisa Sweet **Comment:** Hate groups targeting college students; Jewish students not feeling safe. **Answer:** Hate groups targeting young people. We are monitoring for heat maps. Education programs; awareness programs. Seek to find whether this is an organized hate group.

Denalerie Johnson-Faniel, DCR Community Relations update: DCR is hosting the second virtual listening sessions on Wednesday 7/14/21 at 6:30pm on white supremacy and youth extremism to hear from youth, educators, parents and all other members of the public. The listening session objectives are:

1. Active listening and engaging with the community around white supremacy, youth extremism, and hate group linked experiences.
2. Awareness of white supremacy, youth extremist tactics, and hate group related youth recruitment tactics.
3. Overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the traumatic impact on people harmed by white supremacy.
4. Understanding of the overall effects of white supremacy on communities and resources available to protect yourself and others.

For those who cannot attend, please submit written comments about what is happening in schools and neighborhoods to help enact change. To Share a Lived Experience: <https://www.jotform.com/form/211433456338151>

Terry Cannon – Bergen Co. HRC is holding a virtual conference on June 24 1:30-3:30. Courageous Conversations: Building a Safer and More Inclusive Bergen County. Panelists are David d’Amico, Chief Investigator, Middlesex County, Department of Corrections; Dr. Esmilda Abreu, Acting VP and Dean of Manhattan College; and Rev. Sanetta Ponton, Pastor of Justice, Advocacy and Compassion, Metro Community Church in Englewood; Moderation is Rev. Dr. Willard W.C. Ashley, Sr. HRC Vice Chairman.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:03.