

## Meeting of New Jersey Human Relations Council

September 15, 2021

The virtual meeting of the New Jersey Human Relations Council was held on September 15, 2021 using Goto Meeting Conferencing software.

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance:** The meeting was called to order by Ashton Burrell at 10:04.

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 (alphabetical order):** **Reginald Bledsoe**, NJ Department of Community Affairs on behalf of Kim Holmes Chief of Staff; **Lisa Burke**, *New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts, Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement Program Coordinator*; **Terry Cannon**, *Bergen County, Human Commission Relations*; **Edmund DeVeaux**, *Burton Trent Public Affairs LLC/President, NJ CannaBusiness Association*; **Claudia Demitro**, *Division of Criminal Justice, NJ Attorney General's Office*; **Vincent Funelas**, *Governor's Office of Volunteerism, proxy for Rowena Madden*; **Brittany S. Hale**, NJHRC Executive Committee; **Tonya Hopson**, *Judiciary*; **Ed Kerr**; **Libby Klein**, *Community Relations Specialist with the Division on Civil Rights*; **Francis A. Koch**, *Sussex County Prosecutor*; **Jennie Lamon**, *NJ Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA)*; **David Leonardis**, *Division of Criminal Justice*; **Tisha Leonardo-Santiago**, *A.G.'s Office Division on Civil Rights*; **Joe Santagata**, *NJ HRC*; **Reisa Sweet**, *Ocean County HRC*; **John Wenz**, *Advisory Board*; **Bryn Whittle**, *Deputy Attorney General & Director of Community Engagement NJ Office*; **Patricia Williamson**, *Division on Civil Rights, Community Relations Unit*; **Don Beetham**, *Recorder of Minutes, Highland Park Historical Commission*.

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

The **Minutes** of the June 16, 2021 meeting were read and approved.

**Chair's Report:** Ashton Burrell continues to be excited hearing from local HRCs throughout the State. He noted the effect that Covid has had on the youth, especially due to the scarcity of teaching. It would be useful if the members of the Council could offer their experience to young people. It was suggested that a committee be formed to make sure this is a long-term initiative. The experiences would be available virtually and thus easily accessed.

**Welcome to New Member:** Brittany Hale was appointed to the Council by the governor. Hale is Attorney and CEO of a consulting Co. Also, she is president of the Rahway Board of Education and executive director of the Rahway Social Justice Commission.

**Conference:** This year the conference will be virtual. There will be two tentative dates: November 10 or November 17. It will be held at the same time as our meeting but will be an hour and a half long.

Claudia Demitro: The theme of the conference will be access to the courts in 2021. The goal is to educate the public. What is it like to deal with the courts in 2021? There should be a bail reform component. Trials have been postponed for a long time because of Covid. Reached out to judiciary, members of the ACLU and the Office of Public defender. There will be a panel. Ms. Demitro probably will join with perspective of the Attorney General's office.

Tonya Hopson has been working hard to get criminal justice reform on the agenda. What does the court system look like post-Covid?

Lisa Burke observed that as part of community engagement there already is a 90-minute program with brief updates and access to courts. Starts with criminal justice and then includes other courts. Jury programs. Wellness and safety at court facilities.

Who would be best people to join the panel? Need solidified agenda as first step before recommending individuals. It was suggested the Council focus on just one theme because 90 minutes will go fast.

One suggestion would be a shortened version of the existing 90-minute program to get court's perspective and then have a panel discussion. There are many existing shorter versions. There could be an overview of the changes and then get the other perspectives.

Ashton Burrell thought it would be useful to include the municipal courts. Lisa Burke added that this could be done by an expert in that area, possibly a county prosecutor.

Francis Koch remarked that there was a meeting of the county prosecutors on November 17<sup>th</sup>. Dave Leonardis commented that there will be a training session for resiliency officers on the November 17<sup>th</sup> date.

Lisa Burke questioned whether there could be flexibility about the dates because November is a short month. Tonya thought the first step is to figure out the program and determine who is attending before setting date.

Francis Koch noted that time will be of the essence but should include how court system has changed, landlord tenant law and small claims court and what they are allowed to handle. At least there should be website to go to about these topics. Karen Positan observed that since this is such an important subject that maybe the Council should be doing a series rather than a single conference.

### **New Business:**

MLK Youth Conference website from event in January 2021:

<https://www.nj.gov/state/mlk-2021-virtual-youth-conference.shtml>

Ocean County “Say Hello” Project that includes wearing “say hello” hats. Victoria Ford wrote it up. Reisa Sweet says it has been an amazing thing. It goes beyond people’s religions. It changes the people who are saying hello and the recipients. It goes beyond boundaries. One person said no one had previously spoken to them the whole day

Building up the Human Relations Council. John Wenz suggested a possible affiliation with county college system. We need to improve our outreach to all various groups in State. Might be possible to harness their energy. Let’s say hello to all counties. Claudia asked if John would be willing to volunteer to reach out to groups.

Tonya Hopson thinks that things like landlord/tenant topic should not wait for a conference. Need to get information from court system. Ms. Hopson will reach out to leadership that there is a call for more information. The courts have reached out to the executive branch and the impact of the moratorium.

There have been webinars on landlord/tenant relations – one last week and one next week

Yumiko Mishima suggested that previously the Council has had conferences in May so maybe the conference could be divided into two parts with part 2 in May. Tonya Hopson thinks the landlord/tenant topic might be more urgent to get the information out.

Tisha Leonardo-Santiago reported that on Saturday September 18 at 12 o’clock at Artworks in Trenton’s Visual Center Student Art Exhibition Reveal, there will be 16 or so racial justice linked pieces shown. The exhibition will run September 18 to October 9. <https://artworkstrenton.org/youth-bias-task-force-student-art-exhibit/>

The meeting was adjourned at 11:07.

*Note: the HRC virtual conference on Criminal Justice Reform was held December 1, 2021 from 10 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. The distinguished speakers included the Acting Administrative Director of the New Jersey Courts, Glenn A.*

*Grant, J.A.D.; the Director of the Division of Criminal Justice of the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, Lyndsay V. Ruotolo; Office of the Public Defender Director of Training and Communications, Jennifer Sellitti; and Senior Supervising Attorney and Director of Supreme Court Advocacy at the ACLU-NJ, Alexander Shalom.*