

Meeting of New Jersey Human Relations Council

June 15, 2022

The online meeting of the New Jersey Human Relations Council was held on June 15, 2022 using Microsoft Teams Meeting software.

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: The meeting was called to order by Ashton Burrell at 10:10. The start of the meeting had been delayed 10 minutes to allow deployment of the substitute meeting software.

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

Those in attendance were as follows (alphabetical order): **Samer Abboud**, *Bias Crimes Unit*; **Hanifa Barnes**; **Lisa Burke**, *New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts, Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement Program Coordinator*; **Patrick Ciccarino**; **Edmund DeVeaux**, *Burton Trent Public Affairs LLC/President, NJ CannaBusiness Association*; **Claudia Demitro**, *Division of Criminal Justice, NJ Attorney General's Office*; **Aura Dunn**; **Darlene Hicks**; **Tonya Hopson**, *Judiciary*; **Ed Kerr**; **Carol Lamparello**; **David Leonardis**, *Division of Criminal Justice*; **Tisha Leonardo-Santiago**, *A.G.'s Office Division on Civil Rights*; **Kierren Robinson**, *Bias Crimes Unit*; **Joe Santagata**, *NJ HRC*; **Peter C. Thambidurai**, *DOC*; **Joe Walsh**; **John Wenz**, *Advisory Board*; **Bryn Whittle**, *Deputy Attorney General & Director of Community Engagement NJ Office*; **Patricia D. Williamson**, *DCR-CRU*; **Don Beetham**, *Editing the Minutes, Highland Park Historical Commission*.

The chair read from the New Jersey open public meetings act. The upcoming meetings are scheduled as follows:

Wednesday September 21st 2022

Wednesday, November 16th 2022

The annual conference will be Wednesday. December 7th 2022.

Chairs report: Ashton Burrell thanked everybody who has given their energy and answering the call to do more.

Minutes from April 2022 Meeting were Read and Approved

New Business – Dave Leonardis Community Outreach Update. Dave first introduced Detective Samer Abboud from the Bias crimes Unit who works with Dave on preparedness and the Office of Homeland Security.

Every police officer in the state has to go through a resiliency program, a two-day training program to help deal with stressors or trauma experienced on the job and stressors at home, to be able to handle it all so that they can serve the public better. There are over 1000 Resiliency Officers throughout the State, one in every department, to identify officers under a lot of stress. The Resiliency Officer will sit down with the officer and see if they need professional counseling. The end goal is to help reduce suicides. The program started in 2020-21 and the number of suicides has gone down. Still eight active and retired officers were lost in the two months of April and May 2022. Psychologists have found that the end of the pandemic is when you have to be

most concerned because that's when people are most vulnerable. Obviously, officers are under a lot of stress when you think about the last two years of Covid, trying not to bring covid home to the families while doing their job. Any help or support that the HRC can give when it comes to bringing law enforcement and the community together is very helpful.

Attorney General Platkin in the last week sent out a letter to every police officer to address concern about the alarming number of officer suicides to try to stop the slide from continuing

Training is being done quarterly. One quarterly session addressed how to identify the signals of somebody leaning towards taking their life. The last training session was on addiction and recovery. There are many officers that self-medicate when things are starting to go bad. They may drink heavy or get addicted to painkillers.

The chiefs have their own program. Some chiefs are in need of mental health assistance as well; it affects everybody; we're all human.

A confidentiality clause is one of the reasons this program is working. The resiliency officers signed an oath that says that they won't pass on any information shared with them unless the officer tells you he or she was involved in a crime, or if they may be a threat to themselves or somebody else.

Detective **Samer Abboud** then spoke about Bias crime. There are rising numbers in all categories. In 2020 there were 1452 incidents. In 2021 there were 1881 incidents. 876 of the incidents were against the black community. The second largest number, 346, was against the Jewish community; this also is the greatest number against a religious group. That is followed by the LGBT community, it seems like their numbers are starting to go up a little bit more each year as well. The numbers are rising for the first five months of 2022. Law enforcement out there doing a really good job of trying to connect with the community and encouraging them to report.

On July, 19 10:00 AM an event "United against Hate" will be held at the Seton Hall Law School in Newark. It will focus on the rising anti-Asian sentiment. Detective Samer Abboud will be one of the panelists. There was a "United against hate" program at Kean University in April.

Dave Leonardis recommended that a member of the Human Relation Council sit on the community outreach liaison group that includes the outreach folks from every county prosecutor's office and the outreach folks from state and federal agencies. The group meets quarterly. Anyone interested should contact Ashton or Claudia. Once Ashton names someone, they will be put on the roster.

Conference: The subcommittee for the New Jersey HRC conference (Claudia, Tisha and Karen) met twice and narrowed the topic to decriminalization of marijuana with a focus on economic development, access to business, wraparound services. How does one report complaints of discrimination? What other services are applicable? A post event survey, to make sure that we, all milestones have been met, is being considered. We've also discussed creating a tool kit for them to take away from the conference and having the event live on RHRC website. This may be a hybrid conference with some individuals participating in person, and others attending online. The proposed date is December 7. If anyone wants to join the subcommittee, please let Ashton know. The next meeting of the subcommittee will be June 24 from 12:30 to 1:30 pm.

Speaker: Tisha Leonardo Santiago presented an overview of the Division of Civil Rights (DCR). She is the bilingual community relations specialist on the civil rights community relations unit (CRU). Her primary focus is strategic planning and programming initiatives around breast feeding, pregnancy, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, national origin, nationality and ancestry. She also serves as a unit subject matter expert on youth in higher ed, prisons and policing, LGBTQ, plus Muslim immigrant communities as well as the Latino community and also serves as the New Jersey bias investigation access system community liaison.

The DCR is a state agency housed under the Office of the Attorney General within the department of law and public safety. It is tasked with enforcing the New Jersey law against discrimination (LED), one of the first civil rights statues in the country and still one of the most progressive to this date. The LED protects all constituents in the state of New Jersey, regardless of immigration status, from discrimination, bias and harassment, in the areas of employment, housing, and places to public accommodation. A place of public accommodation is anything that is open to the public including a medical facility, doctor's office, hospital, public schools, supermarket, and movie theater. The protected categories under the law against discrimination, apply to disability race, creed, color and national origin. Nationality, ancestry, sex, pregnancy, breastfeeding, sexual orientation, gender identity, expression of familial status, marital status, domestic partnership, civil union, liability for military services. and in some cases, atypical hereditary cellular blood traits.

The Division on Civil Rights also enforces the New Jersey Family Leave Act. The Act is separate from the New Jersey family leave insurance. and the fair chance of Housing Act as of January 1 2022.

All constituents who believe that they have been subjected to discrimination or they face harassment, may file a complaint on the New Jersey bias investigation access system at <https://bias.njcivilrights.gov/en-US/>. Once they submit a form, they select the date and time to speak to an intake investigator who will review the matter with them. The complaint must be filed within 180 days of the last incident.

The DCR's jurisdiction is limited to anything that is State, meaning that if your employer is Federal, the DCR would not have jurisdiction. The fact sheets are in 11 different languages; please let the DCR know if there are other languages should be included.

The DCR offers trainings, through our education and training unit. These are interactive trainings that are offered multiple times throughout the month and you can find those trainings at <https://www.njoag.gov/about/divisions-and-offices/division-on-civil-rights-home/>

The Community Relations Unit's sole purpose is to proactively prevent acts of discrimination and harassment through educating and empowering community to community engagement. The unit currently is comprised of Jonathan Green, who is lead mediator, and covers all of New Jersey when it comes to crisis response but he's primarily responsible for the Southern counties; Patricia Williamson was a community relations specialist and covers Central Jersey counties, and Tisha Leonardo Santiago covers all the Northern Jersey.

CRU gives short presentations, under 60 minutes, tables events, and helps plan conferences, co-sponsoring with other organizations. The CRU develops programming targeted to specific communities and different stakeholder needs. It shares resources with organizations and

members of the public. Through executive order 188, the Company Relations Unit also serves as a Crisis Response Unit, tasked with responding to the community after a civil rights incident occurs. The CRU is able to assist in collaborative partnerships and public education, working directly with the impacted community, engaging through community mediation, de-escalation, trauma-informed practices, startup justice practices, and community dialogue. All of these efforts are led by Jonathan Green.

Tisha invited the HRC to contact her at 609-775-3682 or at Tisha.Leonardo@njcivilrights.gov to arrange for a presentation or simply learn more.

In response to a question, Tisha noted that the agency handles only bias **incidents**; the agency cannot press charges, cannot arrest anybody; the jurisdiction is for discrimination. The DCR investigates complaints and then seeks to negotiate a settlement.

A main goal is to get individuals to report in order to find patterns so that resources can be reallocated to combat systemic issues. In five years, there will be a better understanding of the number of incidents.

The discussion moved on from bias incidents to bias crimes and Detective **Kierren Robinson** spoke first. She is assigned to the bias Crimes Unit and works alongside Samer Abboud. The bias crimes unit receives many bias reports of incidents throughout the day and refers the incidents that are not crimes to DCR. Most reports are incidents, much of it comes out of schools. The bias crime unit gets a copy of the police report and may follow up by calling the victim. The unit might contact the local police department for more information. The first step is the police report. Many people do not even know that they can submit a bias incident report.

The bias instant report is a separate report from the police report so it's a supplemental report. The police departments are very good with following up but a lot of times there is nothing that they can do. It may just be a neighbor dispute like someone mowing the lawn at five o'clock in the morning on Saturday.

Dave Leonardi reported that the Federal Department of Justice tells us that NJ has the most vibrant reporting system in the country. When the officer responds to a racial or religious slur, there is a special report, a bias incident defense report, that they fill out just for bias. That has to go into the electronic Uniform Crime reporting system within 24 hours. These are the reports the Bias Crimes Unit gets every day. At the end of the day, those bias incidents, no matter where they occur, get pushed out to every bias crime liaison and the system prosecutors throughout the state, so that they can see what's happening throughout the state as well. It puts us all on the same page. This is part of the increase in the numbers of incidents and crimes every year as well.

Samer Abboud noted that the unit does a lot of community outreach and this is how we spread the word about reporting incidents. There is a 24-hour hotline that people can call and an online portal where they can go online and submit a complaint.

John Wenz thanked the group for the progress they have made. Brynn Whittle noted the difficult work over the past few years on bias issues and that the HRC has on the ground level with the conferences that we've held, the virtual programs that we've done.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:57.