

# Meeting of New Jersey Human Relations Council

February 19, 2020

The meeting of the New Jersey Human Relations Council was held on February 19, 2020 at the Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex, 25 Market Street, Fifth Floor, West Wing, Trenton, New Jersey, 08628.

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

Reading of Public Meeting Act.

Introductions:

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

**Those serving on the Council and guests in attendance were as follows:** Binyanin Newmark, Bryn Whittle, Claudia Demitro, Dawn Rhinefort, Donald Beetham, Heather Hadley, Jennie Lamon, Jennifer Stonerod, John Wenz, Michelle Perez, Louisa L. Soto, Reisa Sweet, Stephen Hobson, Steve Perez and, Tisha Leonardo Santiago.

The Minutes of the September 19, 2019 meeting were read and approved.

**Chair's Report:** Ashton stated that he wants the Council to be more interactive this year. He asked everyone to report on what is going on and how the Council can be of support to county and local groups. Flyers or events can be shared or the respective local groups can just bounce ideas off the Council.

**Advisory Board Report:** Reisa Sweet of the Ocean County Human Relation Commission reported on a program sponsored by the OCHRC along with the Attorney General Grewal on Youth Bias. There were a number of sessions where stories were shared. Four communities have formed two committees: Lakewood-Jackson and Tom's River-Bricktown. One of the largest yeshivas in the world is located in Lakewood. Lakewood is known as the "Harvard of Jewish Studies". People come from all over the world. There has been a big increase in the Orthodox population. Meetings and facilitators have organized to hear concerns and make a plan. In the last session three projects were announced; Making a video on micro-aggression, not overt but subtle; action: programs in schools on grade levels; interaction with parents, children and teachers. What are the concerns at the dinner table? The third project is getting people to just say hello, just greeting people, and just making an effort to get to know people.

The NJ Department of Education Holocaust group offers anti-bias training.

While the closeness of the community provides nurturing and security, the yeshiva has a program to help children learn to interact with people from outside that community. This teaching takes place in fourth and fifth grades.

Bryn Whittle reported on the "AD 2021" project stressing community engagement and listening sessions. There will be another round of bias training in the Spring. An HRC in the community or in a county can partner with the State Prosecutor Office for support of anti-bias programs. This is a great opportunity to work with the prosecutor's office. Bryn Whittle or Dave Leonardis can help with planning. If known far enough in advance, the Attorney General or the Director can come speak.

The United Mercer County Interfaith Organization (UMIO) is having a program at the Trenton First Presbyterian Church about bias. It will be 1:30-2:00 pm on February 20.

The Highland Park Human Relations Commission has been trying to coordinate with the Mayor and Council on an anti-Semitism resolution. There were a variety of proposals with sharp differences on whether to address Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS). There have been discussion groups to build community unity with various discussion groups coming together to break down barriers. There was a program on the international definition of anti-Semitism at one of the local Orthodox synagogues. The HRC has been intimately involved in discussions.

Union County has a new prosecutor, Lyndsay V. Ruotolo, who is putting great emphasis on community outreach. Her father, Andrew K. Ruotolo Jr., helped found the Union County HRC when he was prosecutor. The Union County HRC and the prosecutor are working together. There is an eight year old program called "Pass the Message On" Program. It was piloted at Linden High School as a conversation with youth; the seniors work on a program in which HS students talk to younger students. Those who listened to conversations while in Middle School are now the seniors facilitating the conversation.

Elderly abuse is another topic getting attention.

This is the 19<sup>th</sup> year of unity achievement awards in Union County. The awards honor individuals and organizations across the board including nonprofit, faith based, commercial, media, and public service. There are special achievement awards for other extraordinary service.

Paula Rodrigues-Rust has retired and moved to California. She worked on the Linden High School program on history and social aspects of bias. There were workshops on diversity education, bullying prevention and bias reduction. In the high school, students would do creative writing assignments. The HRC worked closely with one teacher. The students got together in groups and gave presentations to each other. Work previously done could be shared in the workshops. The small groups then shared their work with the larger group. One goal was to try to show how biases are expressed. This is an

exercise in self discovery. The younger children are going to listen to the students more than the adults.

Donald Beetham reported on his presentation sponsored by the Highland Park Human Relations Commission entitled "Lynching Through the Eyes of Artists" from 1870 to present day. Some of the works were created for, or shown at, two art exhibits in 1935. The talk was given April 2019 but the mayor requested it be given again for Black History month in February 2020. Beginning with the Constitutional Amendment granting Black men the right to vote there has been a systematic attempt to suppress the vote by terrorizing the African-American communities. Artists attempted to humanize the victims and focus attention on the perpetrators and their sadistic suppression of the Black communities. The talk concluded with the National Lynching Memorial and how it is a shrine for some while an introduction to the widespread history of lynching for others.

**Old Business:** Nominations for the secretary position have been tabled awaiting appointment of new members to the Council.

**Conference Summary:** Approximately 100 people attended the November conference. It is considered very successful. The speakers were uniformly excellent and there was good participation. A wide range of people attended. A good number of younger people attended. The theme was Bias crimes and criminal justice reform in general. An unusual consensus for this type of gathering was that lunch was delicious.

**New Business** – There is a need to reach out for a venue for November 2020. The space would need to be provided free of charge.

Jersey City College was proposed. There are four high schools in the vicinity. The campus has been revamped and there is more parking. The campus is served by the light rail line.

The date will be Wednesday, November 18, 2020. With lunch the program would run approximately 9-3; without lunch 8-1. Do they restrict vendors; if not can they recommend some?

The topic will be court reform but if necessary there can be a second look at bias in a more specific way. There is still much to explore. New Jersey is on the cutting edge of court reform. Before bail reform, about 70% of prisoners were pre-trial detention. People should be ready to suggest speakers for the November 2020 conference at the next meeting.

Reactivation of HRCs is a goal of the Council. Anyone knowing of a group, active or not, should submit the information to Ashton so a list can be compiled.

Jennifer Stonerod reported that Valerie has retired. Claudia Dimitro will be the new point person. She will work internally with staffing. Her number is 609-376-2325 and her email

address is [DemitroC@njdcj.org](mailto:DemitroC@njdcj.org). Claudia and Jennifer each work on the criminal justice reform team..

John Wenz noted the web page needs updating especially on the membership of the Council.

Ashton wants at least three goals for the year 2020. The next Council meeting will be March 18, 2020.

Yumiko brought up the importance of the United States census. There is a "Complete Count Committee" of State county and local entities. This will be the first time census data will be collected online. People who are not connected to the internet are already under counted; this includes Blacks, and Latinos. The census determines a large amount of funding to the States and communities and also determines the number of U.S. Representatives. All kinds of statistical information is released to the public. Corporations use this data in their decision making. For the first time prisoners in New Jersey will be counted at their place of residence rather than at the prison. This will affect State redistricting.

Another under-counted group is that of children under five years old. This is true for all socio-economic groups.

Native Americans have a stigma about the census. Many throw out their forms and are not counted. They need to be encouraged to be take part. The census data can not be shared with any other department by law.

The census guide is available in 59 different languages; the census can be taken in 14 different languages. The census postcards with directions should arrive on March 15; the big counting day will be April 1.

Political groups are trying to discover political affiliations by sending out look-alike census forms to 2010 forms. Census will never ask for political information.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:09 pm.