



## CUYAHOGA COUNTY CITIZENS' ADVISORY COUNCIL ON EQUITY

Monday, December 11, 2023

3 PM – 5 PM

### I. **Call to Order**

Chair Grimes called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone in attendance.

### II. **Roll Call**

A quorum was present.

In Attendance- Habeebah Grimes, Annette Blackwell, Rev. Kenneth Chalker, Jenice Contreras, Colleen Cotter, LeVine Ross, Eddie Taylor, Yanela Sims, and Sheila Wright.

Excused Absence- Stephen Caviness, Dr. Heidi Gullett, Marsha Mockabee, Dr. Charles Modlin, and Glen Shumate.

### III. **Moment of Silence and Reflection**

Clerk Byrd spoke briefly about the importance of taking time to reflect and embrace families and friends. She furthered how fortunate we are despite challenges faced personally, locally, and globally. She encouraged everyone to think about the courage necessary to overcome fears, doubts, and trauma many people face daily.

### IV. **Public Comment**

There were no public comments submitted via email to [equity@cuyahogacounty.us](mailto:equity@cuyahogacounty.us) since the August 2023 meeting.

Chair Grimes encouraged the submission of public comments as CACE is always eager and willing to hear from the community.



## **V. Attendee Introductions**

The new Cuyahoga County Chief of Staff Erik Janas introduced himself and shared he is the former Deputy County Administrator for Franklin County in Columbus, Ohio. He started his career in Cuyahoga County Children Services 26 years ago. Ms. Janas is happy to be back.

Each CACE member introduced his/herself and shared their profession.

## **VI. Update from Chair Grimes**

Chair Grimes thanked everyone in attendance and shared how proud she is to continue to serve alongside CACE members in her new role as CACE Chair.

Chair Grimes shared member Randell McShepard declined to seek reappointment to CACE. His departure from CACE leaves a leadership need for a Subcommittee Chair of the Equitable Quality of Life Subcommittee. Chair Grimes also shared Marsha Mockabee intends to resign from the CACE.

Clerk Byrd expressed her gratitude for former Chair Eddie Taylor, Jenice Contreras, and Dr. Heidi Gullett for their continued commitment to CACE through seeking reappointment to the CACE.

Chair Grimes shared she wants to engage in deep discussion regarding the direction of CACE subcommittees.

## **VII. Message from County Executive**

Executive Ronayne thanked everyone for attending and specifically thanked Chair Grimes and former Chair Taylor for their continued work. Executive Ronayne also thanked Clerk Byrd for staffing CACE efforts on behalf of the County. He expressed his desire for the CACE Chair transition to be seamless.



Executive Ronayne shared he is very interested in the direction of CACE in 2024. Looking ahead he would like to see CACE solidify their direction and confirm three (3) focus areas.

Executive Ronayne also shared he was encouraged by a visit to Hennepin County, Minnesota, and the work they are engaged in focusing on disparity reduction.

Member Cotter asked if we have the correct committees, or should the committees be staggered?

County Executive shared the County is focused on three big projects; the Board of Elections, Jail and Courthouses. He shared the County will probably spend well over \$1 million dollars on Jail and Courthouses. However, he shared we are not just building a jail. The Executive would like the County to build a better justice service system offering diversion services on the inbound and reentry services on the outbound. Executive Ronayne suggested these are areas the CACE may want to keep an eye on or invest in some initiatives including but not limited to the Bail Project and Unbail. He believes CACE should be involved in the process planning to prevent people from going to jail.

Member Blackwell stated 2024 is a reappraisal year. She shared her thoughts on the impact higher necessary costs have for her constituents. Member Blackwell said her city has a homeownership rate of 65%. She believes poverty must be addressed and programs must be created to fix some core issues.

Member Wright stated the quickest way to reduce crime, is a job or an opportunity. Member Wright asked where are the opportunities for all people (i.e., people with an education and people with related skills). Member Wright also shared there is \$118 million dollars in projects coming into northeast Ohio in 2024. She asked where are the jobs and opportunities that Cuyahoga County residents can acquire.

Executive Ronayne shared there is a program in the works called Health Core that provides education and mentorship. According to the Executive, the Health Core program provides programming for job outlooks for children in the community selected from 10 Cuyahoga County High Schools.



Rev. Chalker reminded everyone that CACE is created and guided by statute. He shared the purpose of this group is to make recommendations. However, he believes one of the things he has concerns about is that CACE does not receive feedback or updates regarding what happens to the recommendations.

Member Sims added one category people often forget to include in these discussions is access to affordable transportation. She also suggested the County take a deeper look into what jobs are already available and how we can make those job opportunities better. Member Sims also suggested CACE members speak to family members and/or community members who are experiencing issues and ask what will make their situation better.

Executive Ronayne shared how impressed he is with the current work plans of Workforce Development and suggested maybe Michelle or Laura can come speak before the CACE. In addition, he also shared some of the transit issues outlined today are tangible and can be discussed with Regional Transit Authority (RTA).

## **VII. New Business**

### **a. Approval of the Minutes**

The meeting minutes for the August 30, 2023 meeting were distributed on September 13, 2023 for review. A motion was made by Member Blackwell and seconded by Member Chalker to approve the previously distributed minutes.

There was no discussion. The motion carried without opposition and the minutes were approved.



**b. Presentation from the Department of Housing and Community Development**

Director Sara Parks Jackson of the Cuyahoga County Department of Housing and Community Development thanked the CACE for inviting her to present. The mission of the department is to increase affordable housing, enhance middle market neighborhoods and create a stronger quality of life for residents in Cuyahoga County.

Director Parks Jackson was joined in her presentation by Member Wright.

Member Wright stated anyone can be a successful developer if they have enough money. However, even with access to money, being an African American female developer is not easy. She shared some details regarding a few of her current projects.

Member Wright shared Real Estate Development is a tough space to be in. She asked if the CACE wants to bring attention to the need for developers in this space. It is not just important to get the participation and involvement of African American Developers, but it is also important to know what they plan to do in the space if awarded. The only way to see success and longevity is to create the opportunity for others to “stack hands” and support the effort.

Member Sims congratulated Member Wright for her work in the area of Development. She asked Member Wright to consider things like security and janitorial staff while working to complete the project.

Member Cotter asked Director Parks Jackson what tools she uses in pursuit of equity and what tools does she wish she had access to create more equity through programming, funding and partnership building.

Director Parks Jackson shared federal funding received often comes with the requirement of filling equity components, such as serving a specific demographic with low to moderate income rates. In general, black and brown people fit those criteria. Director Parks Jackson shared there is a need for contractors to do the housing work. If she had access to additional funding, she



would help provide training and education to youth to build skills that benefit the housing area.

Member Blackwell shared the City of Maple Heights is working to rebuild homes following the foreclosure issues. Focusing on rebuilding homes 1 at a time allows the city to keep a watchful eye on every stage of development. Member Blackwell proudly stated the last home built recently sold for \$249,000.

Director Parks Jackson thanked CACE members again for inviting her to present.

**c. Presentation from Department of Equity and Inclusion**

Director Lenora Lockett shared the Department of Equity and Inclusion is working to increase awareness and opportunities through partnership and collaboration with Cuyahoga Community College. The project team which includes Director Lockett, Clerk of Courts Nailah K. Byrd and Human Resources Director Sarah Nemastil continues to meet weekly. To date the project team has confirmed makeup sessions for employees who previously missed the Town Hall training, makeup sessions for the Management training sessions, and completed the first County Executive Leadership team training.

Director Lockett thanked the County Executive and Chief of Staff for their leadership and support.

Director Lockett shared more than 900 County employees participated in one of five (5) internal training sessions on microaggressions and mental health. Additionally, the Department of Equity and Inclusion participated in several internal training courses focused on improving the County fiscal process to include applicable equity components.

The Semi-Annual update to the Contracting and Purchasing Forecast will be updated and posted within the next week.



Each County Department is currently working to submit the final version of their Annual Equity Report to outline the equity work completed in 2023 and to provide an overview for 2024.

Member Contreras asked Director Lockett how she confirms there is an equitable share of vendor participation.

Director Lockett confirmed she is looking to increase collaboration with external organizations to expand outreach and awareness throughout the community.

Member Contreras also shared she is looking forward to collaborating and working closely with Director Lockett in the coming year.

Member Wright asked if the County and the City have similar requirements for vendor participation.

Director Lockett confirmed there are some similarities, but the requirements are not the same.

**d. Update from the Department of Human Resources**

Cuyahoga County Human Resources Director Sarah Nemastil introduced herself and thanked the CACE for inviting her to the meeting.

Director Nemastil shared the Executive's 2024-2025 biennial budget included funds for the text analyzer software which can be used to review job postings and descriptions to have inclusive, unbiased, and gender-neutral language. The software will be utilized by the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Equity and Inclusion, and the Personnel Review Commission.

Director Nemastil shared the Department of Human Resources Department also received funds for HR consulting. A portion of those funds will be used to conduct a pay equity study and ensure wage compensation is fair and equitable.



The Department of Human Resources also introduced legislation to expand the eligibility criteria for paid parental leave benefit.

Director Nemastil and Human Resources Talent and Acquisition team member Julie McNulty, Health and Human Services (HHS) Director David Merriman, and HHS Re-Entry Director Simeon Best met with representatives from the Center for Employment Opportunities to identify potential training and employment partnership with individuals involved with justice. Additionally, they also working with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction regarding re-entry opportunities for women released from the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, OH.

The Human Resources internal DEI committee attended a DEI Conference by Engage Cleveland, in October 2023. Also, in November, the committee hosted its third panel discussion in the “Can We Talk” series where they discussed food insecurity in Cuyahoga County.

In 2024, the Human Resource Department is looking forward to continued collaboration with the Department of Equity and Inclusion, the possibility of adding equity initiatives to the County Wellness program, the implementation of employee resource groups and reviewing a wage floor (i.e., County minimum wage).

County Executive Ronayne added County Council have been great partners in passing budgetary items that will have positive impact on County programming and opportunities.

Member Wright asked Executive Ronayne about the status of County employment and the availability of open positions.

Executive Ronayne said Director Nemastil may be best to respond to the question. He then shared thoughts on his focus to broaden benefits and the importance of giving employees earlier access to benefits. Executive Ronayne explained the County has to be comparable with the private sector economy to remain a competitive employer.





Member Cotter stated we have seen salaries decrease in industries with increased numbers of females and people of color, exemplifying the perceived decreased value. She stated this is racism. Member Cotter shared the work the county is doing from a Human Resources and DEI perspective changes that perception.

**e. Closing Comments**

Chair Grimes shared she would like to reignite conversation to determine if there is a need to change the CACE subcommittee framework.

Chair Grimes proudly stated the CACE RFP was approved by the Board of Control and awarded to Cleveland State University, College of Public Affairs and Education. The University will help CACE craft, design a survey, and engage the community.

**f. Updates from Clerk Byrd**

Due to time constraints the updates for GARE and the Ohio Bills were distributed to the CACE members.

**g. Adjournment**

The CACE meeting adjourned at 5 pm.