

Commonwealth Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Meeting Minutes

Patrick Henry Building

East Reading Room

1111 E. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219

October 10, 2017; 1pm – 4pm

Commission Members Present

Adeola Ogunkeyede; Beth O'Connor; Bishop Larry Campbell; Carlos Clanton; Chavis Harris; Chief Anne Richardson; Chief Tonya Campbell; Cynthia Hudson; Delegate Delores McQuinn; Delegate Luke Torian; Doron Ezickson; Dr. Janet Warren; Dr. Jenny Alexander; Dr. Ram Bhagat; Dr. Rosa Atkins; James Hawdon; Jonathan Zur; Kathy Spangler; Mona Siddiqui; Rabbi Dovid Asher; Rabbi Jack Moline; Robert Jamison; Robert Vinson; Sarah Gross; Sarah Ochs; Shirley Ginwright

Commission Members Absent

Delegate Jason Miyares; Dwight Jones; Hassan Ahmad; Lawrence Webb; Linda Thomas; Rabbi Amy Schwartzman; Senator Rosalyn Dance

Agenda

- Call to Order & Welcome
- Introductions
- Charge to Commission
- Remarks and Overview of Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation
- Small Group Discussions
- Report Out and Large Group Discussion
- Organizational Business and Next Steps
 - Organization of Work Groups
 - Commission Timeline

Call to Order and Welcome

- Rabbi Jack Moline and Cynthia Hudson, Co-Chairs of the Commission, called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM.
- The Co-Chairs began the meeting by discussing the Commission's purpose and outlining broad goals for its term. In opening remarks, Ms. Hudson stated that the work of the Commission should be guided by a consistent focus on the equal treatment of all citizens of the Commonwealth. Rabbi Moline agreed and remarked that the Commission should work to create a "third narrative" that begins to reconcile the two conflicting historical narratives that currently exist in Virginia.

- Jennie O’Holleran, Policy Director for Governor McAuliffe, introduced a video message from Governor McAuliffe that welcomed members of the Commission and thanked them for their participation.
- In his video remarks, Governor McAuliffe underscored the importance of the initiative and discussed his goals for the Commission. He directed members to diagnose existing tensions and, more importantly, to recommend strategies to promote greater unity. Governor McAuliffe encouraged the Commission to be results-driven and critical in its work, and to submit recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly that will move Virginia to the national forefront on issues of inclusion and equity.

Introductions

- Following their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs proceeded to introductions of Commission members.
- Jennie O’Holleran then introduced members of the Governor’s staff.

Charge to Commission

- Jennie O’Holleran outlined the Governor’s charge to the Commission in more detail. She stated that the formation of the Commission was a response to the white supremacist rally and violence in Charlottesville the weekend of August 12, which highlighted the fact that more work is required to confront existing hatred and bigotry.
- Ms. O’Holleran reiterated the three primary directives for the Commission, introduced in [Executive Order 69](#):
 - Identifying policy changes to promote diversity and inclusion
 - Creating partnerships with public and private sector entities that aim to strengthen Virginia’s commitment to diversity and inclusion
 - Identifying factors that lead individuals to join extremist groups and creating prevention strategies
- Finally, Ms. O’Holleran concluded by discussing the Commission’s timeline, which includes the following directives:
 - An interim report, due November 2017, which includes proposals for immediate policy changes to ensure that Virginia is inclusive and welcoming
 - A final report, due November 2018, that addresses broader issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion and identifies a long-term path forward

Remarks and Overview of Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation

- Dr. Gail Christopher, advisor to the Commission, reviewed the Commission’s charge and led a discussion on the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation program (TRHT). Dr. Christopher launched the program during her tenure as senior advisor and vice president at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

- Dr. Christopher stated that the TRHT program was started to promote the well-being of children, particularly those with inadequate access to opportunity.
- Dr. Christopher’s first objective when designing the TRHT program was to move away from simply opposing racism and instead support a positive objective. She encouraged the Commission to adopt a similar mindset.
- The primary goal of TRHT is to replace of an existing belief system premised on a hierarchy of human value with a new belief in collective humanity.
- To date, TRHT programs have been implemented by over 170 groups, reaching 200 million people.
- The Kellogg Foundation launched a ten-year program called “America Healing,” which has supported communities’ efforts to promote racial healing and move towards racial equity.
- The Association of American Colleges and Universities partnered with other foundations to award grants to 10 TRHT programs in colleges and universities.
- TRHT resources, including recommendations and implementation guide, will be available for the Commission.
- Dr. Christopher suggested that Commission members read the following materials:
 - J.Q. Whitman. *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*. Discusses how the Nazi regime used United States law as a basis for the Nuremburg Laws that were the first step towards the Holocaust.
 - Brian Resnick. [“Psychologists Surveyed Hundreds of Alt-Right Supporters. The Results are Unsettling.”](#) Assesses how self-identified members of the “Alt-Right” evaluate and devalue the identities of other groups.
- Dr. Christopher offered the following observations and recommendations to the Commission:
 - Recent polling in the United States shows a new consensus that believes in a need to address unresolved racial conflicts.
 - Now is an urgent moment in U.S. politics; need to reach agreement about common humanity and transform the country by fixing what is broken.
 - The scope of diversity, equity, and inclusion is broader than race, and it is crucial to give everyone an opportunity to make their voices heard.
 - Start by envisioning a different future, one that is better for new generations.
 - There is a distinction between “healing” and “reconciliation,” as the latter presumes that groups were originally not in conflict.
- Dr. Christopher then provided a detailed overview of the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation framework:
 - **Narrative Change:** requires communities to address dominant narratives based on hierarchical beliefs and replace them with new narratives that emphasize collective humanity
 - **Racial Healing:** involves building relationships and “optimizing our hearts”
 - Three structural factors explain the persistence of a hierarchy of human value
 - **Separation:** without interaction, beliefs in other groups remain unchallenged
 - **Law:** provide the legal justification for maintaining inequality
 - **Economy:** serves as a vehicle for perpetuating inequality

Questions and Discussion

- Kathy Spangler asked if Dr. Christopher could provide insight into the current state of communities that have participated in TRHT programming. Dr. Christopher shared two case studies of communities that faced different challenges. One community created tensions by failing to engage Native American citizens in its efforts, while the other prioritized restorative justice and lost its focus on racial healing. Dr. Christopher used these cases to illustrate the importance of self-correction when implementing TRHT programs.
- Doron Ezickson asked how the TRHT project addresses the “why,” or the reasons for inequality and hierarchical views of human value. He mentioned the changing role of media as one specific factor that can contribute to these issues. Dr. Christopher stated that the narrative change component of the TRHT framework is relevant to this question.
- Chief Anne Richardson emphasized the fact that Virginia was on the forefront of designing the legal basis for the institutions that have perpetuated inequality.
- Chavis Harris noted that it may be a challenge for the Commission to have an impact on the younger generation, which is more separated from the Civil Rights Movement.
- Rosa Atkins expressed her concerns about the present narrative to which young students, particularly African American students, are exposed. She recommended that the Commission explore the psychological impact of these narratives on students.
- Delegate Torian expressed his belief that the narrative of white supremacy is intentional and exists at the national level in the United States.
- James Hawdon remarked that the dominant narrative of white supremacy in the United States did not begin recently. Chief Anne Richardson agreed with this point.
- Mona Siddiqui stated that in a democracy, institutions reflect the will of the people, indicating that many Americans likely share concerning beliefs promoted by national institutions of government.
- Chavis Harris suggested that other factors, including foreign interference and misleading media, may be responsible for undermining democracy recently.
- Rabbi Dovid Asher remarked that, due to the unique effects of slavery, the United States has a narrative that is distinct from other countries in the world.
- Traci DeShazor, Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth, emphasized the fact that the dominant narrative is institutionalized and has been experienced by young Americans as well.
- Robert Vinson noted that democracy in the United States was initially exclusionary, with the franchise limited to white males who owned property. He remarked that American

democracy remains very fragile, as this exclusion continually characterized the American political system until the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

- Mike Wenger, an advisor to the Commission, spoke briefly about his professional experience in race relations. He also shared more information about the 10 TRHT campus centers that currently exist, which work with students, faculty, administrators, and college communities to promote racial healing and unity.

Small Group Discussion and Report Out

Commission members organized into groups of three to discuss goals and intended outcomes for the Commission. After a 15-minute break-out session, the full Commission reconvened to discuss.

Commission members shared the following recommendations:

- **Goals for the Commission**
 - Adopt an optimistic approach
 - Recognize a shared vision
 - Broaden the discussion to include people of all groups and opinions
 - Challenge existing behaviors
 - Consider future generations
 - Address the fear of loss
 - Identify legislative priorities and provide specific deliverables

- **Intended Outcomes**
 - Drive structured, transformative, sustainable change
 - Create a template for progress
 - Position Virginia as a national model for diversity, equity and inclusion
 - Identify and propose strategies for changing the dominant narrative on diversity
 - Develop strategies for recognizing the personhood of all individuals
 - Create spaces for students to have a voice
 - Give people space to heal
 - Improve economic situations
 - Promote standardized laws and policies
 - Highlight civic values

Following the first small group discussion and subsequent debrief, the Commission took a 10-minute recess.

Next, the Commission organized into five new small groups, each of which was assigned one of the five major components of the TRHT framework: racial narrative; racial healing; separation; the law; and the economy. After the 10-minute discussion on how the Commission could

incorporate the TRHT framework into its efforts, the small groups reported their conclusions to the entire Commission. The following list includes the key recommendations and observations of each group:

- **Group 1: Racial Narrative**
 - Address the dominant narrative in Virginia. This should include efforts to address Southern heritage
 - Tell the story of the community of Virginia, potentially using the “Virginia is For Lovers” campaign
 - Dr. Christopher noted that auditing media sources can also serve as an effective tool for changing the dominant narrative.

- **Group 2: Racial Healing**
 - A hierarchy of human value has a negative impact on all people, including those at the “top”
 - Evaluate how institutions are structured, since institutions provide the basis of hierarchy

- **Group 3: Separation**
 - Develop strategies for moving away from separation as the societal norm. Noted that those in power determine what the norm is
 - Consider creating and promoting curriculum on diversity, equity and inclusion in Virginia’s public schools
 - Study existing models in communities that effectively promote understanding of diversity

- **Group 4: The Law**
 - Consider the legal concept of personhood and the recognition of personhood in the legal system
 - Work to insulate the legal system from political and economic forces; allow the law to be dynamic and reflective of present society
 - Chief Anne Richardson noted that the law first needs to recognize all peoples, including Native Americans

- **Group 5: The Economy**
 - Noted the transformation from a traditional, agricultural economy in Virginia to a modern, high-tech economic environment
 - Focus on strengthening vocational education
 - Recognize the fact that technology is driving change
 - Corporations won’t enter a state that fails to provide social and educational protections to all groups of citizens

Organizational Business and Next Steps

Dr. Gail Christopher introduced the framework for subgroups, which will be organized following the conclusion of the meeting. There will be five subgroups: one that focuses on narrative change, one devoted to racial healing, and three that focus on topics to be determined by Commission members through an online survey

Kelly Thomasson, Secretary of the Commonwealth, noted that there are other current and former commissions and groups that have studied similar topics. She suggested that the Commission collaborate with other groups where appropriate and incorporate other ongoing work into the current study.

Doron Ezickson asked if demographic data is available for study, as well as data on hate crimes. Dr. Christopher confirmed that this data can be made available through a common website for Commission members.

Dr. Janet Warren noted that her current research pertains to the connections between social media and extremism and may be of interest to the Commission.

James Hawdon expressed his support for aligning the subgroup topics with the three remaining “buckets” of the TRHT framework: Separation, Law and Economy. He also discussed the need to address the complexity of narrative in a society influenced by social media.

Delegate McQuinn agreed with Professor Hawdon and particularly supported including a subgroup on the law. Rosa Atkins and Delegate Torian shared this sentiment.

Robert Vinson requested that Commission staff provide access to copies of reports issued by state and local commissions that have focused on similar issues.

Ram Bhagat suggested expanding the concept of “separation” to “culture” and assigning it as a topic for a subgroup.

Chief Anne Richardson proposed education as a potential subgroup topic.

The Co-Chairs concluded the meeting with final remarks. Rabbi Moline requested that members share the names of people the Commission should speak to who represent groups not currently represented on the Commission. He thanked the staff in the Office of the Governor for their support and thanked Gail Christopher for her commitment to the Commission.

Cynthia Hudson reiterated Rabbi Moline’s suggestion that the Commission solicit input and assistance from additional communities, and she specifically mentioned reformed white supremacists as one possible perspective that could enhance understanding.

The Co-Chairs adjourned the meeting at 4:00 PM.

Upcoming Meetings:

Wednesday, November 15, 2017 (Full-day meeting). Time/Location TBD

Wednesday, December 13, 2017 (Full-day retreat). Time/Location TBD