

Commonwealth Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Meeting Minutes

Science Museum of Virginia

Discovery Room

2500 W. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23220

November 15, 2017; 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Commission Members Present

Hassan Ahmad, Jenny Alexander, Rabbi Dovid Asher, Dr. Rosa Atkins, Dr. Ram Bhagat, Bishop Lawrence Campbell, Chief Tonya Chapman, Senator Rosalyn Dance, Doron Ezickson, Shirley Ginwright, Chavis Harris, James Hawdon, Cynthia Hudson, Robert Jamison, Delegate Jason Miyares, Rabbi Jack Moline, Sarah Ochs, Beth O'Connor, Adeola Ogunkeyede, Chief Anne Richardson, Rabbi Amy Schwartzman, Mona Siddiqui, Kathy Spangler, Delegate Luke Torian, Janet Warren, Jonathan Zur

Commission Members Calling In: Doron Ezickson

Commission Members Absent

Carlos Clanton, Sarah Gross, Dwight Jones, Delegate Delores McQuinn, Linda Thomas, Robert Vinson, Lawrence Webb

Agenda

- Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions
- Summary of Progress to Date and Look Ahead
- Subcommittee Work
- Large Group Report Back
- Subcommittee Work
- Large Group Report Back, Discussion, and Conclusions
- Wrap Up and Next Steps

Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

- Cynthia Hudson and Rabbi Jack Moline, Co-Chairs of the Commission, called the meeting to order at 10:10 am.
- Ms. Hudson began by discussing the outcome of the 2017 gubernatorial election in Virginia and its likely effect on the Commission's work. She noted that Governor-Elect Ralph Northam clearly prioritized efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in his recent public remarks, which suggests that the new administration will provide continued support for the Commission.

- Rabbi Moline thanked members for their participation and reminded them to recommend additional individuals who can offer perspectives currently underrepresented on the Commission. He then called members' attention to a map of Virginia that displayed county-level returns from the gubernatorial election, highlighting the urban/rural divide. Rabbi Moline discussed the need to extend the Commission's reach into the more rural, Republican-leaning regions of the Commonwealth that may not be fully represented in the group currently. He also shared information about the priorities that Governor-Elect Northam outlined in his first press conference, one of which was combatting discrimination. Like Ms. Hudson, Rabbi Moline noted that this indicates that the Commission's work will likely remain a priority for the incoming administration.
- Commission members then introduced themselves and briefly discussed their professional affiliations and the organizations they represent.

Summary of Progress to Date and Look Ahead

- Dr. Gail Christopher, advisor to the Commission, reviewed the topics discussed at the Commission's first meeting on October 10, 2017, including the Commission's charge and the framework of the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) model, which the Commission is using to help structure its efforts.
- Dr. Christopher reminded members of their objective to identify systemic, institutional, and structural barriers to recognizing the equal worth of all people. She discussed a book titled *Hitler's American Model*, introduced at the previous meeting, which highlights the importance of rejecting a hierarchy of human value and embracing the equal value of humanity.
- Additionally, Dr. Christopher encouraged the Commission to create a safe space for full engagement, to listen attentively to each other, and to express issues openly.
- Finally, Dr. Christopher outlined the process by which the Commission will address issues related to the economy, the one component of the TRHT model not currently assigned to a subcommittee. She explained that the Commission will collectively work on economic topics later in its term. Rabbi Dovid Asher expressed his support for this plan, commenting that economic issues will be relevant to each of the four subcommittees' work.

Subcommittee Work

- The Commission's four subcommittees met individually from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm. Subcommittees discussed the following questions:
 1. What are examples of progress you have seen in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Commonwealth in the past decade? What are your expectations for the Commission's work?

2. Visioning exercise: What are two characteristics of a Welcoming Virginia that are vital to ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion?
 3. Who else needs to be included in this discussion? How do we include them? List specific individuals and strategies.
- Following the subcommittee sessions, the Commission recessed for lunch at 12:00 pm.

Large Group Report Back

- When the full Commission reconvened, each subcommittee shared a summary of its discussion during the morning session.

Narrative Subcommittee and Racial Healing Subcommittee (joint session)

- Acknowledge and tolerate differences, acknowledge personal limitations, and recognize the dignity of all people.
- Promote historical honesty, defy the lie of white supremacy, and promote uplifting self-determination.
- Action items: desegregated schooling, active modeling by leaders, support from faith leaders to break down racial barriers, expanded and representative civic engagement, mandatory service, emotional emancipation circles, opportunities for shared experiences across differences, reforms to public education (see below).
 - Education reforms: updated curriculum and required reading, more diverse teacher workforce.

Separation Subcommittee

- Undo gerrymandering and ensure that elected officials interact with all Virginians.
- School reforms: teacher qualifications and training, equity in the allocation of school funding.
- Community-level reforms: improved transportation, more public forums.
- Improve transition resources for immigrants.
- Develop a public relations/marketing strategy to welcome all people.
- Take executive action on restorative justice in schools.
- Seek out common ground with groups that have different perspectives.

Law Subcommittee

- Develop ways to solve disparities (e.g. in arrests), and create systems for monitoring and addressing these disparities.
 - Identify and stop “vicious cycles” by taking corrective action.
 - Policy areas: felony threshold, debtors’ prison, criminal justice, education, health care, immigration.
- Following the subcommittee reports, members discussed the proper starting point for the Commission’s work; specifically, whether it should begin by seeking a collective understanding of the equal value of all persons. Members also discussed the meaning of

“racial blindness,” and debated whether it is a concept the group should avoid. The conversation yielded a conclusion that people internalize the idea of racial blindness in different ways. Members also identified the significance of history and the importance of including the historical perspectives of multiple groups, particularly those groups that have experienced suffering.

Subcommittee Work

- The Commission’s four subcommittees met for a second session from 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm. During these meetings, subcommittees discussed the following two questions:
 1. What are the key issues in your subcommittee’s area that need to be addressed?
 2. What are potential short-term and long-term recommendations for addressing these key issues?

Large Group Report Back, Discussion, and Conclusions

- When the full Commission reconvened, Dr. Christopher asked a representative from each subcommittee to present a summary of the topics discussed during the afternoon subcommittee session. These reports, summarized below, focused on action items, including potential short-term recommendations for the Commonwealth.

Narrative Subcommittee

- Develop and implement an effective messaging strategy.
 - Messaging channels: need to have a good sense of all subcommittees’ priorities in order to develop a narrative.
 - Focus on benefits rather than labels.
- Leverage the work of the 2019 Commemoration: Kathy Spangler will share relevant information and materials.
- Create an ambassador program in communities and develop a community exchange programs to help people gain an understanding of other perspectives.
- Dr. Christopher remarked that developing this understanding and exchanging experiences must precede the presentation of a new narrative for Virginia.

Racial Healing Subcommittee

- Mandatory training on racial healing for state elected officials and agency heads: officials need baseline knowledge so that they can interact with constituents.
- Opportunities for equity impact scores for legislation and other government policies.
- Leadership from the Governor to promote these efforts at the statewide level.
- Consider a joint resolution calling on members of General Assembly to join effort.
- Explore implications of restorative justice practices in schools.
- Audit racial healing efforts across Virginia, identifying best practices and gap.
- Secure resources for emancipation circles.
- Increase diversity in representation by providing training and information on how to get involved in positions of leadership.

Law Subcommittee

- Short-term recommendations
 - Legislation to decriminalize marijuana possession.
 - Legislation eliminating suspension of driver's license for failure to pay court costs and fines.
 - Legislation to increase the felony larceny threshold.
 - Legislation allowing school nurses and officials to possess and administer opioid antidote.
 - Legislation to expand drug courts.
 - Legislation or policy and procedure to require centralized information on crimes that qualify for U-Visa application and list of law enforcement officials throughout the state that are trained to certify these offenses that is required for the application.
 - Executive proclamation for equality in medical treatment.
 - Mandated training on diversity and inclusion as a requirement for teacher licensure, and include a four-year sunset provision to capture licensed teachers; review mandated programs for expansion to include diversity and inclusion.
- Long-term recommendations
 - Collect and study data to assess whether the offer of option to enter drug court is equitable.
 - Review hate crimes statute and consider expanding protected class.
 - Review ways to increase access to healthcare.

Separation Subcommittee

- Address lack of awareness and intolerance of different cultures through action items such as public forums, diversity organizations in schools, and a PR campaign.
- Improve broadband access.
- Address disparities in access to health care through Medicaid expansion.
- Improve recognition of tribal issues for Virginia Indians by providing resources to promote tribal history and heritage.
- Grow job market through economic development. Increase access to jobs in low-income communities by improving transportation options.
- Address the lack of quality low and middle income housing.
- Support returning citizens through increased "ban the box" practices and strengthened trade skills training programs.
- Reform the prison labor system by enabling inmates to earn minimum wage, maintain personal financial accounts.
- Plan community forums to improve relations between law enforcement and the public.
- Reforms to public education:
 - Address School to prison pipeline.
 - Review teacher and administrator qualifications, address discrimination in hiring and retaining minority teachers: review best practices and create standards, review of hiring practice data.
 - Consider additional SOL reforms.

- Study the allocation of school funding and recommend strategies for more equitable distribution.
- Following the subcommittee reports, Dr. Christopher emphasized the need for the subcommittees to review and present data to support its recommendations in order to make a compelling argument.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

- Dr. Christopher said that the Commission's next meeting on December 13, 2017, will focus on racial healing. She provided a final opportunity for members to ask questions or share comments.
- Shirley Ginwright expressed her concern about the differences in the nation's response to the opioid/heroin crisis and the cocaine crisis three decades ago. She remarked that this disparity in responses is likely related to the different groups that the drugs generally affect and encouraged the Commission to study this issue. Dr. Christopher agreed with Ms. Ginwright and suggested that the Law Subcommittee could potentially consider it.
- Chavis Harris shared his view that the Commission should also consider the impact of early childhood development, and the factors that influence this development, on Virginians who are involved in the criminal justice system. Mr. Harris also emphasized the importance of social justice, with a particular focus on future generations.
- Rabbi Moline and Mrs. Hudson concluded the meeting by reminding members that the Commission was directed to submit short-term policy recommendations prior to the end of the McAuliffe administration, so that the recommendations can receive consideration for the upcoming budget. Rabbi Moline said that Commission staff will provide a list of potential short-term proposals, based on the discussions during this meeting. These suggested recommendations will be sent to members for feedback and approval in the near future.
- The Co-Chairs adjourned the meeting at 3:35 pm.