

Human Rights Commission Forum on Racial Disparities
February 4, 2015
Prescott Neighborhood Resource Center

Commissioners Present: Nikkole Nutter, Susan Stone, Ashley Melchert, Fred Davis, Anthony Allen, Miquel Jackson, Tom LoGuidice

Subcommittee Members Present: Evelyn Nadeau, R.R.S. Stewart, Devlin Harris, Kischel Staples Harris

Staff Present: Kelly Larson, Nikola Pavelic

HRC Chair Allen called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. He explained for several years the HRC has been conducting annual forums in the community and this year the focus is on racial disparities. He reviewed the HRC rules for public participation. Subcommittee co-chair R.R.S. Stewart explained that the panel members consisted of both Human Rights Commissioners and subcommittee members with the NAACP.

Chair Allen explained that the information gathered tonight will be shared with the Dubuque branch of the NAACP and with Inclusive Dubuque. Upon invitation, Jessica Rose gave a brief overview of the equity profile process through Inclusive Dubuque, including the opportunities to participate in upcoming dialogue sessions and a community survey.

The Commission proceeded to solicit public thoughts on disparities in Dubuque. A summary of comments is attached. As much of the commentary related to education, Eric Dregne with Inclusive Dubuque invited participants to attend the public dialogue sessions in April that will be held in conjunction with the equity profile process and will have a specific focus on education needs in the community.

Chair Allen thanked everyone for participating and emphasized the importance of effective communication around these difficult topics.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Migration – language, culture, communication:

Concerns:

- Limited participation of people of color/individuals who are most affected in efforts to express and/or address concerns

Recommendations:

- Provide funding for Spanish and Marshallese translation and interpretation services
- Hire bilingual staff and engage bilingual volunteers
- Engage and learn from resident experiences so that it is a two-way exchange
- Include indigenous populations in the work of Cultural Voices
- Start with youth in our educational efforts around race and culture
- Find ways to ensure that each person feels relevant when they participate in meetings or approach the Human Rights Commission.

Existing Efforts:

- Cultural Voices is one example of an approach to bridging the understanding and treatment gap between police officers and immigrant populations

Education:

Concerns:

- There is over identification of youth of color for special education and behavioral needs
- There is under representation of youth of color in gifted and talented programs
 - Counselors not doing enough to identify and encourage black student participation
- There is over representation of youth of color in disciplinary actions
- Those who advocate for their children are either ignored or treated poorly
- The public does not know what, if anything, the school district is doing to undo racism in the system and in educators
- Training of staff will have limited success because staff, too, were educated in a system that failed to address systemic racism and the history of race relations in this country.
- When and how we teach African American history matters and may impact how those who are African American look at themselves and choose to participate in community and child's education.

Recommendations:

- Attend DCSD School Board meetings and express concerns
- Develop a multicultural curriculum in the schools

- Develop curriculum to acknowledge black, Latino, Asian, and other “history” months
- Human Rights Commission bring a formal complaint of discrimination and conduct an investigation of the school district
- Educators should help parents find their voice to express their concerns
- Parent advocacy for hiring of people with an understanding of race, systems of oppression and multicultural education.
- Support student learning about their heritage and identity
- Use videos being created by Cultural Voices in the schools
- Human Rights Commission support the efforts of For the People to engage parents around student success
- Provide teachers with cultural competency training, training on engaging and teaching diverse students
- Focus on hiring teachers with the necessary skills; encourage schools to require some kind of cultural competency endorsement for teachers being hired
- Video tape real people telling their personal stories
- Approach Legal Aid for legal representation when a parent has a problem with the school district

Existing Efforts:

- For the People, Inc. is working with DCSD to engage parents and could use additional support for those efforts.
- University of Dubuque (Angela Brandel) has a J-term course for education majors where students travel to primarily black schools in Chicago for experiential learning.
- My Brother's Keeper network is striving to support youth of color in our community from cradle to career

Community leadership

Concerns:

- There are few people of color in Dubuque who are in careers such as teaching, medicine, law, politics and this affects the perceptions of youth of color regarding what is possible for them.

Community involvement

Concerns:

- Limited numbers of African Americans are showing up to these meetings
- Some do not participate in because they do not feel relevant.

Recommendations:

- Residents of Dubuque need to be re-energized to vote in school district, city council, state and federal elections

- Human Rights Commission think of ways to help every person who approaches the HRC and the City government feel/be relevant
- Human Rights Commission needs to raise public awareness and understanding of the process to file a complaint.

Criminal Justice:

Recommendations:

- Human Rights Commission help educate prosecutors on the importance of using prosecutorial discretion with youth
- Human Rights Commission work with the court system, as the Chief Justice has made it a priority to address disparities in the system.

State/National Concerns:

- There is a need for full employment
- There is a need for a guaranteed basic income
- There is a need to eliminate the wealth gap between races