



## Cuyahoga County Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity

Thursday, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025

1:00pm-3:00pm

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

Chair Habeebah Grimes called the meeting to order at 1:10pm

### **II. Roll Call**

A quorum was not present.

In attendance (in-person): Chair Habeebah Grimes, Mayor Annette Blackwell, Ronnie Cannon, Dr. Reverend Kenneth Chalker, Jenice Contreras, LaRaun Clayton, Dr. Heidi Gullet, Melaak Rashid

Excused absences: Colleen Cotter, Dr. Charles Modlin, LeVine Ross, Glen Shumate, Yanela Sims, Eddie Taylor, Sheila Wright

### **III. Public Comment**

No public comment was submitted via email to [equity@cuyahogacounty.us](mailto:equity@cuyahogacounty.us).

There were no requests for in-person public comment.

Agatha Hickerson, Cleveland Foundation Public Service Fellow, introduced herself to the CACE. Ms. Hickerson is working with Chris Alvarado in regional collaboration and Laurel Domanski-Diaz in Justice and Health Equity.

#### **IV. Moment of Silence/Reflection**

Cuyahoga County Clerk of Courts Nailah K. Byrd led the CACE in a moment of private reflection. Clerk Byrd compared the change in seasons from summer to fall to the preparation for the future work of this body.

#### **V. Message from the Chief of Staff**

Chief of Staff Erik Janas spoke on behalf of County Executive Ronayne who was unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Janas indicated the County is continuing to analyze federal policy changes emerging from D.C. to ensure Cuyahoga County's compliance with the law. He acknowledged Law Director Rick Manoloff, and the entire law department for their tedious work and assured the CACE they would remain updated on significant changes.

Senior Policy Advisor Sabrina Roberts also attended the meeting. Ms. Roberts shared her thoughts on the County Executive's commitment to people. Ms. Roberts believes by recognizing individual strengths and efforts we create stronger more efficient teams that launch a healthier Cuyahoga. Initiatives such as the Child Wellness Campus and Livable Cuyahoga for our older citizens are just two examples of this Administration's commitment to people, Ms. Roberts said.

Clerk Byrd reminded the CACE about two senior level positions that were recently filled. Chief of Staff Janas shared the following updates regarding these positions: CACE member and Senior Advisor to Council, LeVine Ross was promoted to Director of the Office of Homeless Services, Anthony Scott was named the new Director of Housing, and Myesha Watkins now leads the brand-new Office of Violence Prevention. Mr. Janas said the administration was especially thoughtful and thorough when selecting individuals to fill these roles.

Member Dr. Reverend Kenneth Chalker asked Chief of Staff Janas if he could provide information regarding the recent accident involving the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department in a high-speed chase, as well as the progress of the new jail build, and the development of the new Browns stadium. Regarding the accident, Mr. Janas couldn't share any details as the incident is under investigation. However, he assured the CACE he has been briefed on every detail and is working diligently with the Sheriff's Department to review pursuit policies. The jail design plan will be complete by the end of the year, which should also provide a somewhat final cost. Finally, the Chief of Staff said the County Executive's position on the Browns has not changed, he (the Executive) believes the team should remain downtown.

Given recent national news, Member Chalker asked Mr. Janas how members of the CACE could be helpful in the event our city is targeted by the federal government. Reverend Chalker also inquired about the exposure brought to the administration and subsequent monetary consequences by CACE meeting in a public forum. Mr. Janas responded the most important thing is to continue doing what we believe is legally permissible, in both the DEI space and federal grant/funding space. He reminded members CACE is an advisory body and as such, members are free to speak their minds.

Related to Member Chalker's concerns, Melaak Rashid asked about contingency plans should something occur in our community similar to what we've seen across the country. Member Rashid emphasized the necessity of this body to find a way to dispel fears in the community. Mr. Janas said if such occurred, conversations will be had, and CACE will be involved.

To further address Member Chalker's question, Chair Grimes made a comment regarding the Central Services Campus; Laurel Domanski-Diaz was invited to present updates today; however, she was unavailable. Clerk Byrd and Council Chief of Staff Joseph Nanni said there will be a presentation before Council's Public Safety and Justice

Affairs Committee meeting on Tuesday, September 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:00pm. Julia will distribute the meeting link beforehand so members can watch the livestream. Laurel and team are invited to the next CACE meeting to provide a jail update.

## **VI. Update/Message from the CACE Chair**

Chair Habeebah Grimes shared her heart is heavy in these continued times of uncertainty. Chair Grimes thanked the administrative team and CACE members for coexisting in this space, acknowledging this work does not exist without risk, death threats, doxing, and psychological unsafety. Chair Grimes said oftentimes we gloss over our pain to avoid feeling it so immensely, but we need to allow ourselves to mourn in order to return to the work. Chair Grimes also mentioned the work of Dr. Shawn Ginwright. She said his work surrounding trauma informed care and healing centered engagement brings her hope. Currently, Dr. Ginwright is writing a book on the power of uncertainty which will be available on Substack later this year. Chair Grimes closed her comments by bringing the harsh realities of our world into the space. Since January, 300,000 black women lost their jobs in this country, and people continue to be taken off the streets by masked individuals, separated from their families, and detained in unknown places. On a global level, conditions are deteriorating in Gaza, Sudan, and Congo, with mass murders and never-ending death tolls. Chair Grimes promised the CACE she won't back down no matter what is to come.

## **VII. New Business**

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

The minutes from the May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025, meeting were distributed to the CACE on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025, for their review.

There was no quorum so the minutes could not be voted on.

## **b. Approval of the Virtual Meeting Policy.**

Enacted by House Bill 257 of the 135<sup>th</sup> Session of the Ohio General Assembly, which became effective April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Ohio Revised Code Section 121.221 permits members of public bodies to attend meetings or hearings virtually when the public body has adopted certain policies, including methods by which members of the public may observe and attend meetings and hearings.

In conjunction with the County Law Department, the CACE Communications Subcommittee approved a Virtual Meeting Policy, which is ready to be brought before the CACE for a vote. Members received a copy of the Virtual Meeting Policy via email on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, and again on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

There was no quorum so the Virtual Meeting Policy could not be voted on.

## **c. Recap of the First Community Survey Focus Group**

Chair Grimes, Clerk Byrd and Member Ronnie Cannon provided a recap of the “Equity in Criminal Justice in Cuyahoga County” focus group held earlier this month. The Chair thanked Member Cannon and Towards Employment for their support and for offering space for the focus group to convene. Member Cannon said Towards Employment and President and CEO Jill Rizika, were happy to host the CACE and community members for this important event. Participants of the focus group included two women involved with CASA at the Juvenile Court, two individuals with lived experience in the criminal justice system, team members of Project LIFT Services, and representation from the Cuyahoga County Public Defender’s office. Discussion topics included, but were not limited to, policing practices across neighborhoods, perceptions of equity within the court system, pathways to reentry and

reintegration, and community support. In an effort to protect the privacy of the participants, specific details were not discussed, however CACE members present at the event shared sentiments over the power and vulnerability that emerged from the gathering. The CACE will continue to collaborate with Dr. Valerie Wright from Cleveland State University as they coordinate the remaining focus groups and all future events related to the Community Survey.

## **VIII. Update from the Department of Human Resources**

Kimberely Coleman, Human Resources Manager, provided an update to the CACE. Ms. Coleman shared a new initiative emerging this year, the Performance Management System for non-bargaining Managers and Supervisors. This program started in 2025, and aims to retain current employees through personal development, building and sustaining a healthy corporate culture, and helping existing leaders succeed. Ms. Coleman indicated the Office of Employee Development (OED) supervises this training program. Topics within the Performance Management System include developing SMART goals, conducting check-in meetings, and providing coaching and effective feedback.

Ms. Coleman reminded the CACE of Cuyahoga County's Tuition Reimbursement Program. Employees working for the County for at least one year are eligible for tuition reimbursement at Baldwin Wallace, Cleveland State University, and Cuyahoga County Community College. According to Ms. Coleman, in 2025, 77 applications for the program were accepted. The Department of Human Resources hopes to increase enrollment and knowledge about this opportunity. Ms. Coleman also informed the CACE of a recent name change within the department. The Human Resources DEI Committee has been rebranded to the Human Resources Inclusion Committee. Ms. Coleman assured the

CACE the committee remains dedicated to creating positive impact in the equity space within employee groups.

CACE Member Melaak Rashid asked Ms. Coleman about opportunities for support for county staff who have difficulty navigating digital literacy. Ms. Coleman said both County IT and the Office of Employee Development are available to provide technical support. Similarly, Member Rashid asked about community notifications regarding the recent move of the County Board of Elections headquarters. Ms. Coleman is aware of numerous mailers and online flyers distributed, as well as a segment on the local news. Chief of Staff Janas added there will be a large sign at the front of the old building directing voters to the new location on election day. Mr. Janas emphasized the move was structured around not disrupting elections.

Chair Grimes asked Ms. Coleman to remind the CACE about mentorship programs available within the county. Ms. Coleman reminded the CACE about College Now and True 2 You. College Now provides the opportunity for county employees to mentor a current college student, and True 2 You connects employees to middle school and high school students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Both programs encourage monthly meetings or activities between mentors and mentees, either in-person or virtually, and provide meaningful relationships and connections throughout the community.

Chair Grimes also mentioned a recent report published by McKinsey & Company examining the experiences of women, and black women especially, in the corporate workplace. Chair Grimes inquired about modules relative to that topic. Kim said yes, there is a training about civility in the workplace required for all county employees.

Member Cannon asked Ms. Coleman about the impacts of the recently implemented hiring freeze. Chief Janas said it's too early to observe significant impacts on the organization. Ms. Coleman added once the hiring freeze ends, HR will analyze which departments need additional staffing and support.

## **IX. Update from the Department of Equity and Inclusion**

Jennifer Wilson, Senior Contract Compliance Officer with the Department of Equity and Inclusion provided the CACE an update on recent and upcoming activities. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, the Mid-Year Equity Summit brought together 200 county leaders virtually. A month later, on July 17<sup>th</sup>, the County Vendor Fair took place. Ms. Wilson explained the Vendor Fair is an opportunity for local vendors to meet in-person with representatives from the County. County departments present at the fair included Human Resources, Health and Human Services, Office of Purchasing, Medical Examiners, Office of Small Business, and Public Works. Ms. Wilson said the next fair will take place on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Ms. Wilson shared details from the Equity Meet and Greet held on August 7<sup>th</sup>. The event intended to bring together equity teams within county departments, to share ideas on initiatives, big or small, aimed at furthering the County's commitment to inclusivity. Similar to the Department of Human Resources, The Department of Equity and Inclusion offers video trainings called "What's Next?". Ms. Wilson confirmed September's topic will cover microaggressions. Finally, Ms. Wilson provided an update on the County's Disparity Study. Once complete there will be an internal presentation to county leadership and the Executive's team, followed by County Council, and finally the Disparity Study Stakeholder Group.

Member Mayor Annette Blackwell asked Ms. Wilson how the Department measures the outcomes of the mentioned trainings. Ms. Wilson says reviews are currently performed at the beginning of the year; however, DEI intends to increase reviews to biannually.



## **X. Next Meeting**

A date for the next CACE meeting has not yet been determined.

## **XI. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 2:27pm.