



Cuyahoga County Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity

Monday, December 8th, 2025

1:00pm-3:00pm

I. Call to Order

Chair Habeebah Grimes called the meeting to order at 1:09pm

II. Roll Call

A quorum was present.

In attendance (in-person): Chair Habeebah Grimes, Ronnie Cannon, Dr. Reverend Kenneth Chalker, LaRaun Clayton, Dr. Heidi Gullet, Dr. Charles Modlin, Melaak Rashid, Glen Shumate, Eddie Taylor, Sheila Wright

Excused absences: Mayor Annette Blackwell, Colleen Cotter, Jenice Contreras, Councilwoman Yvonne Conwell, Yanela Sims

III. Public Comment

No public comment was submitted via email to equity@cuyahogacounty.us.

There were no requests for in-person public comment.

Clerk Byrd acknowledged Laura Black, County Council staff, in the audience.

IV. Moment of Silence/Reflection

Cuyahoga County Clerk of Courts Nailah K. Byrd led the CACE in a moment of silent reflection. Clerk Byrd reminisced on the Thanksgiving holiday- a time for counting our blessings and truly appreciating what we have. She reminded us however, just how privileged we are, because so many of our brothers and sisters are living in an alternate reality.

Member Melaak Rashid took a moment to recognize the Afghan and Somali citizens in Cuyahoga County and their positive contributions to our community.

V. Message from the Chief of Staff

Chair Grimes recognized Chief of Staff Erik Janas for opening comments. Chief Janas spoke on behalf of County Executive Ronayne who was unable to attend the meeting. On the equity front, Chief Janas did not have anything new to report on the subject of federal orders and the impact on the specific work of the Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity. However, he believes there will be more to discuss early next year as the county contemplates the path forward in a reasonable and lawful manner while still maintaining a commitment to solving inequities in our community.

Member Doctor Charles Modlin requested clarity from Chief Janas on what the administration considers "DEI" compared to health equity. Dr. Modlin explained, health equity is evidence-based medicine. Chief Janas clarified he was talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion as a whole in his earlier comments and deferred to Chief Health Equity Officer Laurel Domanski-Diaz. Mrs. Domanski-Diaz said the administration has not shifted their policies on health equity. She mentioned the continuous work of the Women's Health Commission as well as the Department of Health and Human Services' commitment to

keep residents insured. Mrs. Domanski-Diaz also said our relationships with local hospitals and behavioral health entities remain strong.

Senior Advisor Sabrina Roberts also made a few opening comments. Ms. Roberts said the word from Clerk Byrd's reflection that stuck with her was opportunity. As she's mentioned before, Ms. Roberts emphasized the administration's commitment to being "resident-centered" by reducing barriers and utilizing a broader approach for community outreach. Ms. Roberts highlighted the Great Estates Program and Office of Small Business.

Member Eddie Taylor asked Chief Janas which areas across the county's fiscal investments will take a "hit" or be lessened due to legislative, social, or policy changes. Chief Janas said during this financial crisis, the focus is shifting to core services provided by the county: safety, justice, and health and human services. The county is restructuring their work in a way that allows them to receive federal and state dollars so that they may continue to provide these essential services.

Member Glen Shumate mentioned a conversation(s) with Chair Grimes about inward sharing more positive news either in the community or state/nationwide. He offered his support to Ms. Roberts, Chief Janas, and the entire administration on their efforts to outward share positive news. Chief Janas said he will take up Glen on his offer because the County needs to do better at using CACE as a resource.

Chair Grimes asked the Chief of Staff to not lose sight of the existing disparities experienced by Cuyahoga County citizens. Throughout the community, there is a perceived "turning away" from their suffering by the County in order to maintain resources from federal and state government.

Reverend Chalker asked if pullbacks across equity issues were apparent in the community. Chief Janas said he knows as much as we

do regarding what decisions other organizations or companies in the private sector are making as it relates to eliminating or maintaining policies upholding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

VI. Update/Message from the CACE Chair

Chair Grimes offered opening comments by way of gratitude to Member Shumate for his commitment to the Community Survey. Thus far, we've brought together over 30 community members to participate in focus groups which will inform the Community Survey to be distributed by CSU next year. Chair Grimes also thanked Clerk Byrd, Member Ronnie Cannon, and Julia Garber for their coordination and support for the project as well.

Chair Grimes made a call to action for all CACE Members to do their part in highlighting positive equitable movements, commitments, and stories throughout the community. She also emphasized the CACE's support to Chief Janas and the administration for sharing good news with partners in the community.

In light of sharing, Chair Grimes announced an opportunity to engage in a Community Conversation with the Youth Justice Collaborative (YJC) surrounding youth support and care. Amid recent catastrophic events involving youth in our community, the YJC will host a gathering on December 8th, at Neighborhood Connections. Chair Grimes also shared an event happening on December 9th, by LJM, a community organizer hosting a conversation in Collinwood.

VII. New Business

a. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the August 28th, 2025, meeting were distributed to the CACE on September 8th, 2025, for their review.

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Member Rashid and seconded by Member Glen Shumate. There was no discussion or opposition.

The motion carried and the minutes were accepted.

b. Approval of the Virtual Meeting Policy.

Enacted by House Bill 257 of the 135th Session of the Ohio General Assembly, which became effective April 9th, 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 required a vote. Members received a copy of the Virtual Meeting Policy via email on August 21st, 2025, August 27th, 2025, and December 3rd, 2025.

A motion to accept the Virtual Meeting Policy was made by Member Rashid and seconded by Member Cannon. There was no discussion or opposition.

The motion carried and the Virtual Meeting Policy was accepted.

Additionally, there were minor changes to the CACE Bylaws to include the Virtual Meeting Policy. CACE Members received these amendments to the Bylaws via email on August 27th, 2025, and December 3rd, 2025, for their review.

A motion to accept the changes to the CACE Bylaws was made by Member Reverend Kenneth Chalker and seconded by Member Rashid. There was no discussion or opposition.

The motion carried and the changes to the CACE Bylaws were accepted.

c. Biennial Budget Update

Walter Parfejewiec, the Director of the Office of Budget Management, presented a brief overview of the 2026/2027 biennial budget. Chief Janas prefaced the presentation by saying in his 28 years of service to local government, this is the most difficult and challenging budget process he's ever been through. Chief Janas thanked Council Leadership and Staff (including Laura Black, Joe Nanni, and Trevor MaCleer) for their hard work on the budget.

Director Parfejewiec said both the General Fund and Health and Human Services Levy were balanced budgets recommended for adoption by Cuyahoga County Council. By combining the two, the all-funds budget is roughly \$1.9 billion. Expenses from HHS account for roughly 50% of the all-funds budget, and the payroll for over 7,000 county employees represents a large portion of those dollars as well. The fully detailed and recommended budget is available online for public viewing.

Chief Janas mentioned additional updates regarding the Division of Children and Family Services. DCFS' funds hadn't been adjusted in many years and were not in line with inflation. Funding for DCFS was amplified in this budget and support for additional social workers was bolstered.

Additionally, Chief Janas green lighted the hiring of more staff in the Division of Job and Family Services due to wait times significantly increasing. Since hiring more staff, call wait times have dropped from 70 minutes down to 15 minutes.

The county-wide hiring freeze is still in place with the only exception being Corrections Officers. The freeze has saved the County millions of dollars and will likely extend into 2026. The Sheriff's Department Budget is close to 50% of the General Fund, however they are working closely with the Office of Innovation to reduce overtime and identify other efficiencies throughout the department.

Chief Janas also mentioned the Pay Equity Study performed by the Department of Human Resources. In 2026, not a single county employee will earn less than \$20/hour. Overall, the implementation of the hiring freeze has saved the County money while avoiding layoffs and furloughs.

Member Rashid asked about opportunities for small businesses or other county partners to restore funding that may have been eliminated or significantly reduced by the passage of this budget.

Chief Janas said cuts made to certain providers was not indicative of the value of their programs. Ms. Roberts said there have been two meetings so far with philanthropy.

d. Updates on the Central Services Campus

Nichole English, Planning and Program Administrator for Public Works, and Laurel Domanski-Diaz, Justice and Health Equity Officer, provided an update to the CACE on the progress of the Central Services Campus.

The county is currently in Phase 2 of the Conceptual Design Phase and is working toward securing a guaranteed maximum price (GMP). Additionally, the county team is working alongside the developer to finalize major pieces of the project such as what a housing unit will look like and where visitation will occur.

Ms. English and Ms. Domanski-Diaz provided an overview of the site plan, including floorplans and depictions of housing units as

well as the behavioral care center. They explained the themes brought forth by the developer, to include local natural resources in the conceptual design; water, forest, and meadow. Water represents our connection to one another and our environment, forest is our “place” either physically or mentally, and meadow implies constant movement like the shifts in our lives.

The current total development budget for this project is \$890,266,460. Throughout planning, design, and construction, Ms. English and Ms. Domanski-Diaz assured the CACE of the county’s commitment to meet or exceed the following goals set with the design builder: for SBEs 7%, MBEs 17%, and WBEs 6%. Additionally, the jail team has attended four vendor fairs throughout the project design process.

Member Cannon asked about the protocol and process for pregnant inmates at the jail. He also inquired about consolidating the current Diversion Center on East 55th with the proposed Behavioral Care Center in the new jail.

Ms. Domanski-Diaz said we currently have a national model for pregnancy care in our jail. Our program is funded by First Year Cleveland, who provide the necessary prenatal care and any other follow up appointments required. The Cuyahoga County Corrections Center also has a partnership with Birthing Beautiful Communities to provide doula support during birth and post-partum. Ms. Domanski-Diaz also said there is a dedicated team in the court advocating for pregnant inmates and getting them out of jail before they give birth.

As for the Diversion Center, Ms. Domanski-Diaz explained the Behavioral Care Center was modeled after a facility where charges may be dropped after successful completion of the treatment plan. However, for the purposes of our facility, this will not be an option. The intention is to replicate diversionary services at the new Behavioral Crisis Center by The Centers.

Having a diversion center-like facility off campus from the jail is ideal.

Member Modlin asked about the structural design and capabilities for expansion from a medical standpoint. Ms. Domanski-Diaz said the formulary is very comprehensive in the current jail and will be in the new campus as well. Member Modlin also asked if EMS will be located on site to which Ms. Domanski-Diaz responded it's not yet determined. Ms. English added that while the current layout is organized for 1,800 beds, the core functions of the facility are capable to service 2,400 occupied beds (kitchen, laundry, medical).

e. Update on the Community Survey

Member Shumate provided an update on the progress of the Community Survey thus far, including common themes identified from each focus group through Cleveland State's analysis. Dr. Valerie Wright (CSU Research Team Lead) mentioned the following four themes: resource scarcity, adverse environmental conditions, structural barriers to opportunity, and systematic racism.

As for next steps, the CSU team will compile ideas and themes and formulate the survey questions. CACE members must determine where/how to disseminate the survey to receive the greatest number of responses possible.

VIII. Update from the Department of Human Resources

Sarah Nemastil, Director of the Department of Human Resources, provided an update. The County Executive's approved budget for 2026/2027 continues funding for the employee tuition reimbursement plan. Participating universities include Baldwin Wallace, Cleveland State University, and Cuyahoga County Community College (Tri-C).

The Department of Human Resources is continuing to update salaries in accordance with the pay equity study performed last year. Over the summer, HR consulted with True HR to conduct an employee survey focused on compensation, work/life balance, time off, etc. About 1,318 classified non-bargaining employees were invited and 984 participated. Director Nemastil's team is awaiting the detailed analysis from the consultant.

The Department of Human Resources has also been heavily focused on performance management this year. The launch of the performance management process for non-bargaining employees included informal goal setting and regular check-ins. Over 1,800 SMART goals were updated to the County's internal employee portal during this initiative. Chief Janas thanked Director Nemastil for prioritizing performance management evaluations.

Finally, Member Shumate asked Director Nemastil if there is a base level salary for all employees. The Director said the department, in conjunction with the administration, has worked diligently to implement a \$20/hourly wage floor. In 2026, that goal will be actualized.

IX. Update from the Department of Equity and Inclusion

Director Lenora Lockett, of the Department of Equity and Inclusion provided an update. Throughout the department, and during implementation of programs to promote inclusivity, Director Lockett and her team are focused on increasing awareness, access, and opportunities. For example, if events and/or resources are exclusively advertised digitally, citizens experiencing a digital divide will continuously be left out. Director Lockett emphasized the importance of maintaining this mindset throughout contract procurement.

This year, DEI partnered with HR on the Mid-Year Equity Summit. Over 200 Supervisors attended and learned about inclusive hiring practices as well as employee development and promotion.

The “What’s Next?” program will continue into 2026. The most attended topic this year covered microaggressions in the workplace.

DEI continues to pursue supplier diversity through Vendor Fairs. Held multiple times a year, the Vendor Fair exposes potential vendors to goods and services the county is planning to purchase. Over 60 businesses attended this year.

Director Lockett closed by opening her inbox to CACE members with ideas and/or feedback on vendor engagement or broader ideas for communicating county opportunities.

X. GARE Update

Julia provided an update via email on December 18th, 2025.

XI. Next Meeting

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

XII. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:09pm.