



## **Cuyahoga County Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity**

**Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**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, Ronnie Cannon, Dr. Reverend Kenneth Chalker, Councilwoman Yvonne Conwell, Melaak Rashid, Glen Shumate (arrived late), Yanela Sims

Online attendees: Eddie Taylor

Excused absences: Mayor Annette Blackwell, LaRaun Clayton, Colleen Cotter, Jenice Contreras, Dr. Heidi Gullet, Dr. Modlin, 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.

Chair Grimes encouraged anyone who is interested in sharing their ideas to take advantage of this opportunity to speak at a public meeting.

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

Cuyahoga County Clerk of Courts Nailah K. Byrd led the CACE in a moment of silent reflection. She noted some of the unfortunate events happening globally and within our localities. A new event related to hatred, disease, transportation failures, and kidnapping seemingly happens every day without explanation or reason why. We are living in tumultuous times, and each day is a struggle to navigate the waters.

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

Chair Grimes recognized Chief of Staff Erik Janas for opening comments on behalf of Cuyahoga County Administration. Chief Janas did not have a specific update but informed the group the County continues to navigate how to operate business as usual given new federal guidelines. Chief Janas hopes he will have a definitive plan to share soon.

Member Reverend Chalker asked Chief Janas about the lawsuit between the Cuyahoga County Sheriff and the administration, and the impact, if any, it has on the welfare of our County. Chief Janas doesn't believe the lawsuit is bearing any negative impact on the County as a whole. He said the County Executive and Sheriff continue to meet regularly to discuss standing operational matters while the lawsuit runs its course.

Reverend Chalker also asked Chief Janas for a status update on the Central Services Campus to which he responded positive progress is being made toward a guaranteed maximum price (GMP). Council's Committee of the Whole heard a presentation from the design build developer that same day.

Senior Advisor Sabrina Roberts shared brief opening comments and announced the opening of the Financial Empowerment Center through the Cuyahoga County Treasurer's Office. The center will provide coordinated wrap around services to help families address financial

challenges and build stronger futures through individual financial counseling and other services.

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

CACE Chair Grimes thanked Clerk Byrd, Chief of Staff Janas, and Senior Advisor Roberts for their words. She opened her comments referencing the African proverb “How are the children?”. This phrase suggests the health and wellbeing of the children within a given community is an indicator of the strength of that community. Chair Grimes mentioned two significant and tragic occurrences emerging from her city of Collinwood, the assault of a young child and the death of two teenagers. Through her grief, Chair Grimes found gratitude in the service of grassroots organizations. She highlighted Project Ripple, LJM, New Era Cleveland, Re:Source Cleveland, Smart Development, and Towards Employment, to name a few. Recent events impacting children abroad and at home are deeply disturbing, yet Chair Grimes shared she keeps getting up and putting one foot in front of the other. She closed her comments with a call to action for everyone listening to show some appreciation toward grassroots agencies.

Member Rashid thanked the Chair for her comments and mentioned the loss of Khalid Samad, a longtime Cleveland activist committed to peace and violence prevention.

## **VII. New Business**

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

The minutes from the December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, meeting were distributed to the CACE on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025 for their review.

A quorum was not present and the meeting minutes from the December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 meeting were not voted on.

### **b. Presentation from We Are Many We Are One (WAMWAO).**

Members from the multifaith organization We Are Many We Are One, or WAMWAO, presented the means and methods by which they support migrant residents in our community.

The following individuals presented:

- Reverend Dr. TaNikka Sheppard (Cleveland Baptist Association)
- Reverend Charles Graves (Christ Episcopal Church)
- Reverend Dr. Kate Gilooly (Heights Christian Church)
- Patrick Kearns (Re: Source Cleveland)
- Reverend Keith Taylor (Church of the Master)

WAMWAO is a coalition of Christians, Muslims, and Jews forming deep connection over faith. Reverend Graves described WAMWAO as a “boots on the ground” organization, currently responding to the urgent harm of racist detention and deportation practices.

WAMWAO organizes their work through four A-Teams: Advocacy, Action, Accompaniment, and Aid.

The Advocacy Team builds relationships with elected officials at every level of government, specifically advocating for the protection of First Amendment Rights. Reverend Dr. Sheppard also noted stronger accountability for County leaders initiating policies is required.

The Action Team is committed to acting as “faithful doers of justice”. The Action Team creates spaces where community leaders and members are informed, activated, and mobilized. Earlier this month, WAMWAO organized an interfaith freedom rally to support migrant voices and proclaim a shared vision of freedom for all. WAMWAO has been hosting press conferences and trainings in collaboration with Cleveland Heights for Immigrant Rights and Americans Making Immigrants Safe.

The Accompaniment Team demonstrated significant importance in recent months with the number of check-ins, hearings, and appointments required by stricter immigration enforcement policies. Trained clergy members and partners accompany immigrants to offer presence and moral support while coordinating communication between newcomers and ICE Officers. The Accompaniment Team offers practical and visible ways to serve.

The final A-team, Aid, is tasked with meeting urgent needs with compassion and care. The Aid Team identifies urgent needs as key supports are reduced such as connecting newcomers to trusted legal, medical, and material resources. Reverend Dr. Sheppard shared a heartbreaking story of a pregnant mother who stopped seeking prenatal medical care out of fear, resulting in the loss of her unborn twins.

At the conclusion of WAMWAO’s presentation, Member Rashid emphasized the importance of this work and inquired about contact information for the coalition. Reverend Dr. Sheppard suggested all inquiries for WAMWAO be forwarded to Re:Source Cleveland.

Member Sims asked which newcomer population was most at risk. Patrick Kearns explained there are multiple newcomer groups facing danger. In Cuyahoga County, there are large populations of newcomers from Ukraine, Syria, the Republic of Congo, Sudan,

Somalia, and Afghanistan, however Afghans are likely most at risk due to their immigration status being challenged most recently.

**c. Approval to attend GARE Membership Meeting at the Facing Race Conference.**

A quorum was not present, and this item was tabled for a vote.

Councilwoman Conwell inquired further about this item to which Clerk Byrd provided a brief overview of the County's GARE membership and invitation to attend the biannual membership meetings. The last GARE Membership Meeting was held in 2024 in Saint Louis, Missouri. Former MSNBC Commentator Joy Ann Reid was the keynote speaker alongside other powerful breakout session leaders. This year's meeting will be held in Raleigh, North Carolina in November, and the total anticipated cost for Clerk Byrd and one staff member to attend is not to exceed \$6,500.

**d. Recommendations and Discussion on Frequency of CACE meetings, agenda creation, etc.**

Due to limited attendance, this item was tabled.

**e. Update on the Community Survey.**

Communications Subcommittee Chair Glen Shumate provided an update on the Community Survey. The research team from Cleveland State University provided a data-driven thematic summary from the focus groups held last fall.

Completion of the Community Survey is expected this spring with distribution occurring throughout the summer. Potential events the survey will be available at include the Asian Festival, Waterloo Festival, Taste of Tremont, Wade Oval Wednesdays, and more. Other events such as the County's biannual Vendor Fair, may be

too narrowly tailored to a specific group and not broad based enough for accurate survey results.

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

An update from Director Sarah Nemastil and the Department of Human Resources was distributed to the CACE via email on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

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

An update from Director Lenora Lockett and the Department of Equity and Inclusion was distributed to the CACE via email on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

### **X. Next Meeting**

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

### **XI. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 2:40pm.