



Cuyahoga County Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity

Wednesday, July 8th, 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 present.

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

Online attendees: Dr. Heidi Gullet

Excused absences: Councilwoman Yvonne Conwell, Colleen Cotter,
Yanela Sims Eddie Taylor Jenice Contreras, Dr. Charles Modlin, Sheila
Wright

III. Public Comment

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

There were no requests for in-person public comment.

IV. Moment of Silence/Reflection

Cuyahoga County Clerk of Courts Nailah K. Byrd led the CACE in a moment of silent reflection. She reflected on the significance of America's 250th anniversary, acknowledging both the nation's founding ideals of equality, liberty, and opportunity and the ongoing work to ensure those promises are realized for everyone. While recognizing the historical and present-day challenges facing marginalized communities, she emphasized her enduring belief in America as "the place to start again".

Clerk Byrd encouraged CACE members to remain steadfast in their commitment to advancing equity, protecting fundamental rights, and serving as a voice for the Cuyahoga County community. She concluded by urging members to honor America's promise by continuing to work toward a future where equality and opportunity are accessible to all.

V. Message from the Chief of Staff

Chair Grimes recognized Chief of Staff Erik Janas for comments. Chief Janas discussed proposed legislation before County Council to place a \$2.5 million Health and Human Services Levy on the November ballot. He explained that rising service costs, increased provider expenses, and reductions in federal and state funding have created significant budget challenges for the County.

He highlighted increased costs for child placement services, reduced federal reimbursement for SNAP administration, limited state funding to offset those losses, and continued uncertainty surrounding Medicaid-related expenses. Chief Janas stated that the proposed levy is intended to help sustain essential Health and Human Services programs and emphasized the importance of educating the public about the County's financial challenges and the need to preserve

critical safety-net services. He noted that the proposed levy is still under County Council's consideration.

Member Melaak Rashid acknowledged that both the Chief of Staff and the County Executive recognize that multiple priorities are occurring simultaneously. She expressed appreciation for the Chief of Staff's commitment to revisit, in the fall, strategies for presenting information to the broader community. She noted that when SNAP policy changes were implemented from October through February, the County held community meetings and educational outreach, including assistance with obtaining Ohio identification, to help ensure residents were informed and supported. She emphasized the importance of continuing targeted outreach and education, particularly for newcomer communities, as they navigate changing requirements and access to services.

Member Glen Shumate asked about the current levy and the proposed increase. Chief of Staff Erik Janas explained the County has two staggered eight-year levies. He also offered to provide CACE members with fact sheets and talking points and to return for future discussion.

Member Shumate also asked about RTA's plans. Chief of Staff, Janas declined commenting other than to state that RTA has expressed interest in pursuing a levy to support transit services, although no final decision has been made.

Member Blackwell noted that although the recent property tax initiative will not appear on the November ballot, organizers intend to continue gathering signatures for a future ballot initiative. She also stated that changes to the Homestead Exemption are anticipated and emphasized the growing public demand for property tax relief.

Member Blackwell further noted that additional funding requests, including a potential RTA levy in 2027 and future investments in regional sports facilities, will likely add to voter considerations. She stressed the importance of recognizing the cumulative financial

pressures facing residents and encouraged the committee to acknowledge those concerns in its work and communications, emphasizing the need for government to demonstrate responsiveness and support for improving residents' quality of life.

Member Chalker asked Chief of Staff Janas whether he believes the media, particularly *The Plain Dealer*, has accurately conveyed the Administration's position regarding the County's fiscal challenges and the need for potential levies.

Chief of Staff Janas declined to speculate on media coverage but acknowledged Rev. Chalker's point, emphasizing the importance of clearly communicating why the proposed funding is necessary and why action is needed at this time. He stated that, while it will be a significant undertaking, the Administration is committed to making its case and explaining the need to the community.

Senior Advisor Sabrina Roberts acknowledged the County's fiscal challenges, citing rising costs, inflation, and recent federal policy changes. She emphasized the County's responsibility to maintain essential safety net services while meeting legal and regulatory obligations despite budget constraints.

Senior Advisor Roberts also stressed the need for innovative, long-term strategies to address systemic issues affecting residents. She highlighted regional collaborative efforts as examples of the cross-sector partnerships needed to expand economic opportunity, improve quality of life, and sustain the County's core services.

Member Blackwell acknowledged the fiscal challenges facing local governments, citing reductions in local government funding, potential property tax policy changes, and evolving federal priorities. She emphasized the need to address both immediate needs and long-term issues, including the wealth gap, housing affordability, and livable wages. Member Blackwell also encouraged broader community

engagement to ensure policy discussions reflect diverse perspectives and residents' evolving needs.

Chair Grimes too stated that it would be wonderful to be at the ideation table. She further emphasized the importance of involving diverse stakeholders earlier in the policymaking process, before proposals reach the legislative or executive level. She noted that participating in the ideation stage would provide greater opportunities to develop innovative, forward-thinking solutions and encourage broader collaboration in addressing complex community challenges.

County Executive Ronayne joined the meeting. He expanded on Chief of Staff Janas' comments and reiterated that significant reductions in federal and state funding, coupled with rising service demands and increasing operational costs, have created substantial budget challenges for the County.

Executive Ronayne noted that without additional revenue, essential services supporting seniors, children, individuals experiencing homelessness, and families receiving food and health assistance could face significant reductions. He furthered that the proposed levy is intended to help sustain these critical services and asked members to thoughtfully consider the issue as it moves forward for County Council's consideration and potential placement on the November ballot.

VI. Update/Message from the CACE Chair

CACE Chair Grimes recognized Member Eddie Taylor for his dedicated service to CACE over the past six years and noted that he has respectfully declined reappointment. Chair Grimes expressed her appreciation for Member Taylor's leadership, commitment, and contributions to the committee, thanking him for his service and recognizing the lasting impact of his leadership.

Chair Grimes announced that the funding previously allocated for community survey incentives is no longer available. She stated the need to identify alternative funding sources to support the incentive program previously approved by the CACE.

VII. New Business

a. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the December 8th, 2025 and the March 24th, 2026 meetings were approved in separate motions.

b. Update on the Community Survey.

Dr. Valerie Wright of Cleveland State University provided an update on the Community Survey.

Dr. Wright noted that Cleveland State University remains open to additional feedback before the survey is finalized and converted into electronic format. She encouraged members to submit any final comments for consideration.

Chair Grimes continued the discussion on the Community Survey, inviting members to share additional feedback and suggestions on the revised draft.

Member Shumate encouraged any members interested in providing further input to attend the Communications Subcommittee meeting on Tuesday, July 21.

c. County Disparity Study

Chair Grimes noted that the County Executive had previously shared the outcomes of the County Disparity Study with the full CACE membership. The purpose of the discussion was to provide members an opportunity to ask questions and share feedback regarding the findings and resulting decisions.

Member Shumate stated that per the Cuyahoga County Code, CACE is to be involved in the recommendations/outcomes from the Study. Clerk Byrd assured him this Administration would follow what is contained in the County Code.

Director of Equity and Inclusion, Lenora Lockett explained that the Administration is evaluating the independent study's recommendations and collaborating across County departments to develop legally sound, data-driven policies that comply with applicable requirements. She noted that the County is reviewing national best practices, ensuring proposed race- and gender-conscious initiatives are narrowly tailored to the study's findings, and considering both race- and gender-neutral approaches where appropriate.

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 July 9th, 2026.

IX. Next Meeting

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

X. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:08pm.