

City of Worcester Human Rights Commission Minutes
VIRTUAL MEETING – Monday August 17, 2020, 6:00pm

Members Present: LaToya Lewis, Lauren De Oliveira, Deidre Padgett, Edward G. Robinson, Lilian Chukwurah, Elizabeth O’Callahan, Jacqueline Yang

Members Absent: Aaron Richman

Staff: Dr. Mattie Castiel, Domenica Perrone, Edgar Luna, Jayna Turchek

Guests: Matt Allen, Field Director of Central MA ACLU, Gordon T. Davis, Chair, Education Committee, Worcester Branch NAACP, Paul Matthews and Tom Quinn, Worcester Research Bureau, Cheryl Lapriore and Jane Shirshac, UMass Memorial COVID-19 Equity Task Force

1. Call to order and introductions

A quorum was established and Vice Chairperson Yang called the meeting to order at 6:21pm. Commissioners and those present introduced themselves. The Vice Chairperson welcomed members of the commission, and those present.

2. Approval of March 9, 2020 meeting minutes

Commissioner Robinson motioned to approve the minutes written. Commissioner Lewis seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

3. Public reading of Commission statement on racial injustice

On behalf of the Human Rights Commission, Vice-Chairperson Yang read, in full, the Commission Statement on racial injustice, issued on June 1st and written in response to the murder of George Floyd:

To our Worcester community,

Black lives matter. The City of Worcester Human Rights Commission condemns the violence that resulted in the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers on May 25th and all previous acts of racist violence. We stand in solidarity with those who are calling for a just response. We remember and mourn all the lives lost. The pandemic that we are currently living through has separated so many of us from regular physical contact. This forced isolation in no way relieves us from responsibility to denounce acts of racial violence. Racism in all its forms must be dismantled. We are called by this historic moment to shed our fear of the other, embrace one another, stand up, protect, and love one another. We join with others who are seeking systemic solutions to long-standing and deep-seated racism in our country. We commit to helping create opportunities for the voices of those who have long been silenced and oppressed to be heard. We are committed to supporting our city and nation to learn, change and heal.

4. Notice and Opportunity for Questions/Answers with Covid-19 Equity Taskforce

The COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force first convened on May 1, 2020 and has since engaged with over 56 stakeholders from over 22 community organizations throughout the City of Worcester. The COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force aims to deeply review the systemic racial barriers that exist in our healthcare system and are exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

- A presentation to city council on July 21st can be viewed here (presentation starts at: 2:05): <https://play.champds.com/worcesterma/event/374>
- The report submitted to city council on can be viewed here: <http://www6.worcesterma.gov/weblink/DocView.aspx?id=509373&searchid=18bc2fd3-be1d-4565-bc13-e9993b22a6f1&dbid=0>
- The bilingual (Spanish-English) presentation at the city council standing committee on public health and human services from August 5th can be viewed here: <https://play.champds.com/worcesterma/event/390>
- Additional information regarding the Covid-19 Equity Taskforce can be found here: <http://www.worcesterma.gov/hhs/health-equity-task-force>

Dr. Matilde Castiel outlined the history and rationale of the Covid-19 Equity Taskforce

- Inequities are social determinants of health (SDOH).
- “We will not be successful in addressing health inequities unless we address systemic racism, which are the policies and the practices that are entrenched in established institutions, which result in the exclusion of designated groups, along with implicit bias that exists when we have attitudes towards people or associate stereotypes without our conscious knowledge”
- All major institutions in our country stand on building blocks of racism, “the healthcare system is no exception.” Examples include:
 - Tuskegee Report - researchers watched black men suffering with degenerative symptoms of syphilis for years, withholding widely-available, life-saving treatments and ultimately leaving them to die, “just to see what would happen”
 - Dr. Marian Syn - gynecologic surgeon who developed tools and medical procedures through experiments on enslaved black women without consent or use of anesthesia
- Communities of color to this day are afraid of being involved in research, vaccines and medical treatment.
- With this history in mind, the taskforce is preparing to provide support to historically disenfranchised communities for the upcoming flu season, Covid testing, and for equitable and culturally competent distribution of a vaccine when it becomes available.
- The Covid-19 Equity Task force was created “because we know the legacy of racism has impacted our health and our communities. With our mission of health equity-centered solutions, with an anti-racist framework, our four working groups that emerged, our transparent data, outreach and education, testing and access”
- 4 groups will work together for community outreach

Overview of Covid-19 Equity Task Force:

- Four Working Groups: Access, Data, Testing, and Education & Outreach
- Together, working groups have helped to create a multi-faceted outreach model. PPE, resources and testing onsite in most affected communities
- 5 community testing events completed with support from Stop the Spread Initiative:
 - 2047 individuals tested, with a positivity rate of less than 1%
 - 2014 education kits were distributed
 - 200 flu shots administered
 - 53 households, 126 individuals registered to the census

Looking ahead:

- Events set to continue multiple times per week until mid-september
- Acquired funds will be used to continue accessible Covid-19 testing through fall and winter free of charge
- Replicate model of care where most affected people can access resources, PPE and testing
- Continue to partner with UMass and other health institutions to increase health insurance enrollment
- Connect community members with more long term care opportunities
- Continue to build trust in the black and latino communities
- Bring the vaccine to the community when it is available
- Develop model of care that is anti-racist by partnering to provide trainings to community organizations and by creating pipelines relationship with youth and their families through our healthcare institutions

What health justice looks like:

- COVID-19 is not an isolated occurrence; We have to look upstream and invest in:
 - Housing
 - Employment opportunities
 - Equitable funding for schools
 - Pipelines for young people in the community to see themselves in high-power and well-paid positions
 - Equitable healthcare for all
 - Appropriate and free public transportation
 - A public safety model that amplifies community voices, centers lived experience promotes mental health and well-being

Overview of Four Working Groups:

Education & Outreach Working Group Statement of Purpose: Identify, reduce and eliminate health disparities to effectively address COVID-19 prevention and treatment in the Worcester, Massachusetts community by providing materials, tools and resources to promote the adoption of preventative measures.

- Goals: Develop a robust network of "trusted messengers" to make information and resources truly accessible, Distribute educational communication, masks and FAQs, Distribute in-home quarantine FAQ, Distribute outside-home quarantine FAQ through outreach, Use data and CRP to drive distribution of materials and outreach, Provide prevention resources.

Access Working Group Statement of Purpose: Identify and assess barriers to access equitable health care; propose solutions and action steps that can mitigate these challenges to better support communities of color in Worcester with their healthcare.

- Goals: Identify barrier to access in equitable healthcare, Determine solutions to identified barriers, Recommend action steps to implement solutions and mitigate barriers.

Data Working Group Statement of Purpose: Identify, reduce and eliminate racial health inequities or disparities to effectively address COVID-19 prevention and treatment in the Worcester, Massachusetts community, specifically communities of color, by collecting and providing analysis using valid race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and social determinants of health data.

- Goals: Provide the COVID-19 Equity Task Force and its subgroups with up-to-date and accurate COVID-19 infection data, focused on information pertaining to social determinants of health and

disparate burden of disease on communities of color to highlight areas with greatest opportunity for intervention.

Testing Working Group Statement of Purpose: Evaluate and revise current testing criteria and strategy based on demographic and geographic data to develop equitable testing strategy for Black and Latino communities, who have the highest impact, including who gets tested when, where, how and by whom; Stabilize supply chain to match testing strategy.

- Goals: Acquire funding for testing, Determine equitable testing strategy based on demographic and geographic data provided by Data Working Group, Test impacted communities, Recommend policy and practices that increase access to testing.

Updates of Activities from each working group in the taskforce:

Education and Outreach group: Partnering with UMass and the Latino Education Coalition to bring resources to most impacted communities through the UMass CareMobile.

- Five youth have been hired to go door-to-door to these communities
- So far distributed 3,500 education and prevention outreach kits in 8 different languages in Worcester, Leominster, Fitchburg, Marlboro, Hudson, with about an equal number of masks being distributed in these communities since April

Testing Group: Applied for and acquired a grant from community testing through Worcester Together. Funds to be used with Worcester Together to provide Covid testing free of charge, eventually antibody testing and vaccine

Access Group: Identified areas to healthcare and identified solutions listed for future recommendations including

- Support for Anti racism cultural sensitivity training for health workers, office staff and leadership of Worcester's healthcare providers
- Coordinate and disseminate information in available community and clinical services
- Add mobile health service expansion
- Testing and vaccination access
- Culturally-appropriate communication and signage
- Expand MassHealth enrollment
- Expand community healthwork expansion
- Expand Telehealth and technology use

Jeanne Shirshac provided updates from the Data Working Group:

Data shows people of color are testing positive than rates their proportion of their share of the population in Worcester; over 50%:

- 32% positive cases were hispanic
- 19% were black

4 week change shows an increase in these disproportionate numbers; 245 positive cases:

- 45% were hispanic
- 11% were black

People of color who test positive are younger than those who are white

- People of color are disproportionately 30-49 years old, versus whites, who are disproportionately positive in the 80+ age range

Last 4 weeks - all race groups are younger

- 20-29 year olds had the largest share of positive cases in last 4 weeks, followed by 0-19 age group and 30-39 age group; very few- especially whites- over 40 are testing positive

Highest concentration of positive cases showing up in areas Main South, Webster Square, Union Hill, Pleasant Street, Bell Hill, Tanner Ave

- Last 4 weeks, there has been an uptick in Pleasant Street, Park Ave, Franklin Street, Plantation Street and Beverly Road

Discussion:

Why are the numbers so disproportionately high in communities of color?

- Reality of why numbers are higher in communities of color: members of these communities are more likely to have a job, or live in a neighborhood or home situation that increases risk of exposure to the virus.

Training for culturally-responsive care:

- Part of this is ensuring “We have physicians who look like us;” some outreach revolves around recruiting healthcare workers of color who volunteer as some of the earliest members of the community to receive the vaccine
- Access group is partnering with trainers who are people of color who will be doing the training, and looking for opportunities to partner with Coalition against Bias and Hate and other agencies; Ensuring funding and buy-in, looking at curriculums that are implemented across the city.
- DPH, Worcester interfaith is also putting some of the trainings together
- Monica Lowell: Coalition for Healthy Greater Worcester has secured funding for training programs for other institutions to participate

What is UMass doing to recruit more clinicians of color?

- Each of healthcare organizations and agencies, we have an obligation to do culturally competent training; are working today in gathering information on how to better support that. In a department by department basis, starting in OBG-YN, UMass is starting to look at how to do this training. UMass has an internal health equity task force looking at all working doing with caregivers, community and patients
- National Search for new diversity and inclusion officer, who will be responsible for workforce acquisition, development and retention, to reflect community of large to ensure that the workforce is more representative of community being served
- Aligned between hospital and school in understanding that a better pipeline for youth: There is a gap of people of color coming in, and people of color graduating from school
- Building Brightened Future for Youth: Annually 50-60 students brought from WPS into organization to learn the work of healthcare, to be mentored by supervisors at UMass.
- A number of WPS students have gone on to take careers in nursing and medical school

Is there accountability when someone is failing to follow through and hold people accountable after training is provided?

- For UMass within the organization, there is an expected accountability
- Mechanisms of accountability absent or underdeveloped across industries and much more work is needed in this area

How can the Human Rights Commission Support the efforts of the Covid-19 Equity Taskforce and move this work forward?

- Housing is an important piece - State has a requirement of 10% of housing stock as affordable housing, Worcester 14%; Denmark, by comparison, has 40%
- Advocate for more anchoring institutions; Anchoring institutions - community getting together as large non-profits to invest locally - colleges, businesses, etc.
- UMass has 4 categories as an anchoring institution:
 - Investment: UMass 4 million investment into community in poorest and most vulnerable populations POC to invest in affordable housing in partnership with Health Foundation; Investing in Main South Area in Creative Health Projects
 - Hiring from zip codes according to social determinants of health to put people in those jobs that need to be built into fabric of organization
 - Maximizing purchasing from local companies - women, POC, that they can start purchasing from; infrastructure makes it small for smaller businesses to get access to UMass; initiative in to streamline access to local businesses
 - Volunteering- 14,000 caregivers across 45 zip codes; 1 million patients a year
 - Transportation - free transportation for all

COVID Data is limited by UMass Memorial data set; It is being added to state system

- The task force is hoping to take the template that the city and UMass worked together on and build capacity for Worcester Dep. of Public Health, then work with other agencies in a manner where those groups can get their data into the city.
- The city has the capacity and resources to be able to assimilate data and make it available in a usable fashion. It is difficult to do that in powerpoint presentation, but it is helpful for people who know how to use the data tools
- This infrastructure could be used for other categories over time; not just covid, but hypertension, for example

Additional Outreach:

- Worcester Together is currently providing meals to entire family for 2 weeks of quarantine for every positive person

5. Update on 2020 Census (Edgar Luna, City of Worcester Economic Development)

Dominica Perrone and Edgar Luna provided an update on the 2020 Census

The Census committee was created to assist US Census Bureau

- Started in 2018; more formally started census campaign in 2019
- Census is coming to end on September 30th (Being ended early in 2020)
- 3 different strategies used:
 - Self Response
 - Mobile questionnaire assistance - census takers going to different locations; merged with COVID 19 tested; over 100 in number of people would not have responded through partnership
 - Non-response followup - last stage of census in which census takers visit homes of everyone who hasn't responded, knocking on doors getting information
- Non-response followup: Worcester was one of the cities reselected because of low number of COVID 19 cases - so they are already visiting homes

- Self response rates as of August 12th:
 - 12 National 63.5%; MA is 65.7%
 - Worcester County 67.3%
 - Boston 54%, Worcester 53.4, Providence 48.1%, Hartford 45.5%
- Group Quarters: colleges, universities, nursing homes, group homes, prisons
 - 33,000 students at colleges
 - Staff person assigned to census didn't do what was needed, causing delays
 - 8 out of 9 colleges have already submitted information
- Outreach efforts: A grant from the state was used to buy advertising spaces in telemundo, latino radio station, services from one call now, ad campaign with MassLive

Contact information:

Edgar Luna
 508-799-1400 ext 31420
 508-340-6938 Cell

Matt Allen, Field Director of ACLU underscored the importance of accurate census data:

- \$2,300 a year lost per person not counted
- Many companies make decisions about expanding and companies re more interested when they hear 2nd largest city in New England

6. Updates/Notice relative to voting options for the 2020 election season

(Nikolin Vangieli, City Clerk) <http://www.worcesterma.gov/elections/your-vote-counts>

- Early Voting In-Person for State Primary Election- August 22-August 28
- Early Voting By Mail Application Deadline for State Primary Election- August 26
- State Primary Election- September 1
- Last day to register to vote and to change party enrollment for the State Primary Election- August 22
- Last day and time for Early Voting by Mail or Absentee Ballet application deadline- August 26 at 5pm

Additional Updates:

All polling stations will be open in Worcester on election day. Vote by mail and early voting will also be available for both the primary and general elections

Mail-In Voting:

- 17,000 postcards were sent back by voters requesting mail-in ballots
- Receiving an average of 500-1,000 postcards back each day
- As of this afternoon, 5,000 ballots were already returned
- If voters are not comfortable putting it in the mail, there is a drop off box at city hall. A meeting will be held wednesday - to discuss adding drop off boxes outside of early voting places

Early Voting:

- *Social distancing will be in effect*
- Schedule is available on city website
- Sites will be Circling around City Council districts
 - Sunday - Blackstone Visitor Center
 - Monday and Tuesday- Lincoln Street at 1st Ward Church
 - Wednesday - YMCA on Main Street

- Thursday and Friday - Worcester State University

Election day Voting:

- Polls open 7am-8pm
- All 50 polling places will be operational

Voter Registration

- Building will be outside to fill out registration
- Online registration option
- Registertovotema.com
- 150-200 Requests per day through online portal

The General election will follow a similar process:

- Early Voting - Starting October 17th - Have not yet set locations
- Secondary portal. By then, maybe online requests for mail in ballot will be available
- Voters can again request vote by mail

General Election Deadlines:

- October 28th To vote by mail in general election
- October 24th deadline to change party affiliation

Tracking Mail-In Ballots:

- Massachusetts Secretary of State has an online portal
- Track my ballot - tracks when ballot has sent out and when it is received back

Election Commission Phone Contact: 508-799-1134

7. Review and discussion of Absent Voters Report

(Paul Matthews and Tom Quinn, Worcester Research Bureau)

<http://www.wrrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/WRRB-Absent-Voters-Report.pdf>

Absent Voters: Who is Voting and Not Voting (Yet) in Worcester Municipal Elections (Report)

Paul Matthews and Tom Quinn of the Worcester Research Bureau reviewed recent findings outlined in a report studying election turnout.

- Worcester voters are disproportionately older, white, single family homes
- The report also points out the census data is critical in its effect on decisions regarding the locations of polling places in future elections

Cross referenced voters with

<http://www.wrrb.org/reports/2020/03/absent-voters/>

**8. Commission preparation for annual meeting with Worcester Police Department
Clarification/updates to requests for information**

Commissioners agreed to attempt to coordinate a second meeting in August or early September to discuss this item in further detail

9. Petition by Gordon Davis on behalf of the NAACP regarding item on the Board of Health agenda regarding 12 Points for Police Accountability

Mr. Davis spoke on behalf of the NAACP on police accountability.

- It is unclear in current publicly-available BOPS reporting whether officers have multiple complaints against them
- Mr. Davis urged the commission to support a ban on chokeholds and asked the commission to adopt the 12 point Board of Health Recommendations.
- He also reiterated that the Board of Health is meeting on August 24th to discuss the 12 recommendations with Chief Sargent
- Commissioner DeOliveira provided Legal context for the conversation, and clarified that Governor Baker recently adopted legislation banning chokeholds

The 12 Recommendations from the Board of Health were outlined during the Worcester Board of Health Meeting held on June 25th, 2020 and recorded in the June Board of Health Meeting Minutes:

<http://www.worcesterma.gov/agendas-minutes/boards-commissions/board-of-health/2020/20200625.pdf>

Motion: Vice Chairperson Yang motioned to support the 12 point [Board of Health “Recommendations to the WPD to Eliminate Racism and to Mitigate the Potential for Police Brutality”] and to discuss it at our next meeting with the Chief of Police. Commissioner Lewis seconded. Motion passed with all in favor

10. Public Comment [no public comment]

Adjournment at 9:02

Upcoming Human Rights Commission meeting: **Monday September 14, 2020, 6pm, annual meeting with the Worcester Police Department**