



OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

Final Meeting Minutes – November 25, 2019

Capital Event Center, Thurston Room
6005 Tye Dr SW, Tumwater, WA 98512

Task Force members present:

Benjamin Danielson (Co-Chair)
RaShelle Davis
Manka Dhingra
Michelle Gonzalez
Elizabeth Gordon
Carrie Huie Pascua (for Toshiko
Hasegawa)
Karen A. Johnson

Melanie Morgan
Jan Olmstead (Co-Chair)
Ed Prince
Alec Regimbal (for Jeremie Dufault)
Maria Siguenza
Allison Spector
Lisa van der Lugt

Task Force members absent:

Craig Bill
Sharon Ortiz

Task Force staff present:

LinhPhung Huynh, Project Manager

Hannah Fernald, Administrative
Coordinator

Guests and other participants:

Aaron Barfield, Black Excellence in Cannabis
Aaron Bossett, BCC, Community Member
Javoen Byrd, Awodi Drumming
Ayanna Colman, Office of Financial Management - State Human Resources
Christy Curwick-Hoff, Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities
Idley Edey, Safe Streets
Logan Endres, WA State School Directors Association
Representative Mia Gregerson, WA State Legislature
Melanie Hisaw, State Board of Health
Joy Hollingsworth, Hollingsworth Cannabis
Alex Montano, State Board of Health
Marianne Ozmun-Wells, Department of Social and Health Services
Brian Reyes, Community Member
Anzhane Slaughter, Community Member
Christine Stalie, Results WA

Benjamin Danielson, Task Force Co-chair, called the public meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. and read from a prepared statement (on file).

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: The Task Force approves the November 25, 2019 agenda.

Motion/Second: Karen A. Johnson/Elizabeth Gordon. Approved unanimously.

2. ADOPTION OF OCTOBER 21, 2019 MEETING MINUTES

Motion: The Task Force adopts the October 21, 2019 meeting minutes.

Motion/Second: Elizabeth Gordon/Lisa van der Lugt. Approved unanimously.

3. REFLECTIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS & TASK FORCE BUSINESS

LinhPhung Huynh, Project Manager, said the preliminary report is due to the Governor and the Legislature by December 15, and the report must be submitted as soon as possible for review by staff at the Office of the Governor. Ms. Huynh said she attended the Commission on African American Affairs' (CAAA) public meeting on November 14 and summarized the input and feedback received from the Commission.

Chair Danielson encouraged members to share their reflections and thoughts. Karen A. Johnson, Task Force Member, said the public meeting in Yakima (Oct 21) reminded her of the significance of our work. She said community members told us first-hand how their lives are affected by current systems and practices. She said "now is the time, this is the place, and we are the ones" to make the Office of Equity a reality.

Alec Regimbal, Task Force member (for Jeremie Dufault), thanked staff for their time and asked the Task Force to keep Central Washington and the comments heard in Yakima in mind. Mia Gregerson, Task Force member (for Manka Dhingra), said this work is exhausting, but she is thankful for everybody putting in their all, knowing that our time for this project is limited. She encouraged members to include everyone in this process, "while not losing sight of those we have forgotten in the past." Melanie Morgan, Task Force member, said that although this work is hard, it is good work and she is committed to bringing up the Task Force's project in every conversation she has.

RaShelle Davis, Task Force member, thanked staff and the co-chairs for their work and advocacy. She said she believes now is the time for an Office of Equity. Elizabeth Gordon, Task Force member, said she feels humbled to be part of this work and that this group embodies the idea of 'stronger together.' Allison Spector, Task Force member, said she feels a sense of urgency to get this phase of the project through the finish line.

Carrie Huie Pascua, Task Force member (for Toshiko Hasegawa), reflected on her childhood in Ellensburg and how she was told to 'fly under the radar' and not be seen. She said the Task Force is "working on being seen and heard without fear of being seen and heard." Lisa van der Lugt, Task Force member, said she feels invigorated about the work ahead of us, and we are on the cusp of something great. She said we are going to change how Washington works, and it is important for people who look like us to be at the table when these rules are made. Maria Siguenza, Task Force member, said she

shares others' exhaustion, but she is hopeful for the coming legislative session. She said the Oct 21 public meeting in Yakima was a turning point for the Task Force, and she hopes legislation to create an Office of Equity will be successful.

Jan Olmstead, Task Force Co-chair, said she is blessed to be part of this work. She said this work is complex as we try to get to the roots of our experiences and the barriers that have existed for many of our people. She encouraged the Task Force to continue its work in a way that is thorough and that can raise the ability of future generations to live—quite simply—happy and healthy lives.

Co-chair Danielson said we are at a critical point in this journey, and this is an opportunity to name and claim our power. He said, "This is a transformational moment and a chance for us to get both to the roots of justice and opportunity and to the future that we hold dear for our children and generations to come." He said we have created a sense of 'us' as a group, which is a bank of trust. Co-chair Danielson continued, "Today, we dip into...that bank of trust and we challenge ourselves and we speak truth to each other. And we work hard together, because we've invested so much in this already." He said we have created a different sense of identity and purpose than we had at our first meeting.

4. GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATES

Ms. Huynh said that Esmael Lopez, the Task Force's Community Engagement Coordinator, is unable to attend this meeting and will not be giving an update on community outreach.

Co-chair Olmstead said that due to unfortunate circumstances, the Task Force could not hold its November meeting in Skagit Valley. She said she and Ms. Huynh attended the Centennial Accord Meeting to share information about the Task Force's project. She said the Task Force must explicitly call out tribal sovereignty and treaty rights in its report. She encouraged the Task Force to engage tribes through formal government-to-government processes, which includes requesting consultation through the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs (GOIA). Members showed 'thumbs up' to including clear language on tribal sovereignty and government-to-government relations in the preliminary report.

Member Davis requested that another online survey be distributed to the public for feedback on the Task Force's preliminary report. Ms. Huynh said she can work on this, and feedback can inform the Task Force's work in 2020 and be included in its final report.

5. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE & DRAFT LEGISLATION

Member Davis said the Task Force has strong support from the Governor's Office for an Office of Equity, and the Governor's proposed budget will be released mid-December.

Member Gregerson said she and other legislators have been working on the draft language for House Bill 1783 (on file) and they would like this group's input. Ms. Huynh

walked the group through the draft legislation. Members asked for clarification on certain language, including ‘people of color,’ and suggested revisions throughout.

Member Davis asked the Task Force to work on further recommendations related to: the Office of Equity’s community advisory board; and the Office of Equity’s oversight and compliance functions, considering Initiative 1000 can no longer be implemented.

Members also discussed:

- How to balance the use of inclusive language with the boldness of naming specific communities that have been most impacted by inequities;
- The importance of ensuring the Office of Equity and agencies receive adequate financial support to accomplish intended outcomes;
- Including clear and strong language around accountability; and
- Ensuring the Office of Equity and agencies center community voice in their work.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

Co-chair Olmstead read from a prepared statement (on file). Joana Ramos, WA State Coalition for Language Access, submitted written comments (on file), which Ms. Huynh read aloud. Ms. Ramos’ comments affirmed the importance of language access and she suggested adding the position of Language Access Manager to the Office of Equity’s organizational chart. She wrote that language access is a distinct specialty area that requires a high level of knowledge. Regarding draft legislation (HB 1783 – on file), she suggested adding language access to all mentions of objectives and strategies for eliminating disparities, and including “national origin” in descriptors of “inequities based on race, ethnicity, and gender.”

Brian Reyes, community member, gave his perspective as a software designer of user experience. He said he has experience working in social justice as a designer and technical advisor. He offered the concept of ‘design thinking,’ and said social technology can unleash people’s creativity and improve processes. He said design thinking employs empathy and listening skills, necessitates diverse teams, and gets around human biases. Mr. Reyes said processes in the technology sector could be adopted in government, and he is interested in starting the conversation about what that might look like.

Aaron Barfield, Black Excellence in Cannabis, said there is significant inequity in the state’s newly legalized cannabis industry. He said African Americans were arrested at a disproportionate rate, and now they are excluded from new economic opportunities. He said they need to be included in this legal industry, and he proposed that a community review board monitor the WA State Liquor and Cannabis Board’s enforcement activities. He added that many African American applicants have to jump through additional hoops and, for a variety of reasons, have not been allowed to sell cannabis. He said the state has a duty to repair this process; we should be leading the way in diversity and we are falling short. His primary recommendation was for there to be measurable language for the Office of Equity to make a difference.

Marianne Ozmun-Wells, DEI Manager for the WA Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration, said she struggles with the Task Force's model of leading with race and fears that resistance to this work will be greater in the future. She said draft legislation (HB 1783 – on file) defines people of color as 'non-white' and by seeking parity with white populations, we are still centering whiteness. She said the WA Law Against Discrimination does not include sexual orientation and gender identity. She said she would like the Task Force to call out other groups—age, disability, religious orientation, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, indigenous status, national origin, and gender identify and expression. She said she thinks this work is so important and we have an opportunity to get it right.

Logan Endres, WA State School Directors Association, shared the equity statement that WSSDA members recently adopted: "Equity is foundational to the work of WSSDA. Educational equity can only exist when a student's level of opportunity and achievement cannot be predicted based on race, characteristics, or circumstances. Therefore, we must identify and eliminate any discriminatory practices and prejudices within our state's public education system."

Javoen Byrd, Awodi Drumming, said we often hear about equity and inclusion initiatives, but there has been little progress in the economic and social mobility of marginalized groups. He said race plays a huge role in the opportunities we are afforded, and we must approach disparities from an understanding of historical cultural trauma. He said this requires working with community-based organizations and businesses to find creative solutions and equipping them with the economic and social resources needed to combat disparities. He said he hopes the Office of Equity serves as the much-needed bridge to facilitate initiatives between government, diverse community-based organizations, and businesses.

Anzhane Slaughter, community member, said she likes the Task Force's draft definition of equity and it is a good start. She said African Americans experience the largest disparities in all sectors, including criminal justice, school discipline, and economic opportunity. She said the Office of Equity needs people who represent communities to implement its programs, and suggested that funds be allocated to community groups. She said the language in the draft legislation is passive and hopes that the Task Force ensures equity is implemented at every agency. She said she wants to see strong language about agency accountability and enforcement of measures.

Joy Hollingsworth, Hollingsworth Cannabis Company, told a story about her grandmother and her family farm. She said her grandmother was born on a farm in South Carolina where her ancestors had lived as slaves, and she later moved to Seattle to become one of the city's first black teachers. Ms. Hollingsworth said her family started a farm in Washington in 2013, and they thought this would be a new beginning to build generational wealth and give back to their community. She said, over time, black business owners have gone out of business. She said social equity in Washington should include restorative justice to give ownership opportunity to black and brown folks who have been disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. She concluded that Washington is in a position to put forward a social equity plan that is vibrant and sustainable and that serves as a model for other states.

7. REPORT OVERVIEW & COST MODEL

Ms. Huynh showed a presentation (on file) and reminded members of the requirement to submit a preliminary report by December 15. She said the Task Force decided at its September 16 public meeting to include recommendations in this report on the Office of Equity's main roles and functions, its general organizational structure, and its operating budget. She said the draft report was posted last week and was also sent to Task Force members for review. She gave an overview of the sections contained in the draft report, and asked members to ensure the content and language in the report accurately reflect the Task Force's intentions. She outlined the process staff took to create an estimated operating budget and the proposed operations plan for 2020-2022. Based on this proposed plan, she described first-year costs for the Office of Equity as approximately \$2.25 million and the ongoing annual budget as approximately \$3.9 million.

LUNCH: The Council recessed for lunch at 12:00 p.m. and reconvened at 12:45 p.m.

8. DISCUSSION & REPORT REVISIONS

Ms. Huynh read feedback submitted by Representative Jeremie Dufault (Task Force member) and Matias Valenzuela (Director of the King County Office of Equity and Social Justice).

Co-chair Olmstead walked Task Force through the draft report (on file), section by section. Members suggested revisions in the following areas:

- Use the term 'racial and ethnic commissions' and/or list them out individually throughout the report.
- Include hyperlinks wherever possible to provide additional information.
- Add clarifying information as footnotes.
- Include language that reflects tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, and recognition of tribal political status in the Government-to-Government Relations section.
- Quantify the number of online survey responses and public comments received.
- Add content that highlights the Community Engagement Coordinator's work in building relationships and a continued presence in communities.
- Add a note that the LGBTQ Commission was recently created and there will be additional information in the final proposal.
- Under the Model Equity Initiatives section, note that there are no other statewide offices to look to, but the Task Force did look at the work of local jurisdictions.

Task Force members then reviewed the Recommendations section of the report. They made the following revisions:

- Add language about the non-duplicative nature of the Office of Equity's work.
- Roles and Functions section:
 - Add language in Recommendation 2 about the Office of Equity's value added and its unique role.
 - Under Recommendation 5 (Ensure accountability and enforcement), include language about: conducting audits, supporting improvement processes, publishing performance, celebrating progress, and enacting consequences and taking corrective action when needed.

- Include a diagram that shows where the proposed Office of Equity would be housed in state government.
- Add clarifying language to emphasize that agencies would be responsible for engaging communities and centering community voice in decision-making.

Members discussed roles and membership of the proposed community advisory board. They agreed on the following content:

- Ensure membership includes diversity in geographic representation and opinions.
- Include tribal representation, such as one representative from Eastern WA and one from Western WA.
- Include mechanisms to facilitate barrier-free participation for community board members, including providing a stipend and per diem allowances.
- Give the advisory board the responsibility of reviewing audits and corrective action plans and providing feedback to the Office of Equity.

The Task Force took a short break.

9. REPORT REVISIONS & STATEMENTS (Equity Definition, Equity Statement, Mission Statement, Vision Statement)

Ms. Huynh outlined the purposes of a mission statement and vision statement, and provided some examples (on file). She said staff are proposing a mission and vision statement for Task Force consideration (on file). She pulled the mission statement from the Office of Equity purpose statement, which is in the proviso that created the Task Force (ESHB 1109). She said the draft equity definition and equity statement were based on community input and the Task Force's operating principles. She summarized ways agencies can operationalize the equity definition, and said the last sentence of the equity statement can be used as the Office of Equity's vision statement.

Members discussed the proposed definition and statements. Member Morgan suggested the Task Force discuss the definition of 'equity' to address potentially divisive language, which some participants at the Oct 21 public meeting in Yakima drew attention to. Co-chair Danielson said community members at other meetings, including another community forum, strongly endorsed using specific terms. He reminded members that they had committed to bold action and agreed to embrace discomfort.

Members eliminated the words 'disrupt' and 'dismantle' from the equity definition and discussed further changes. They came to the definition of: "Equity is a community-centered approach that enables individuals to thrive. It requires sharing of power and enough resources to change and redesign deeply entrenched systems of inequality and oppression. Equity allows the fullest expression of dignity, honor, and respect that we all deserve."

Motion: The Task Force adopts all four statements (definition of 'equity,' equity statement, vision statement, and mission statement) with the amendment of removing "all sectors" from the mission statement.

Motion/Second: Allison Spector/Elizabeth Gordon. The motion passed with 11 votes in favor, 1 vote against, and no abstentions.

Member Johnson explained her vote against adopting all four statements. She said she understands the need to appease the oppressor, but does not want to pass a definition of 'equity' that excludes mention of racial and ethnic disparities since it could exacerbate negative outcomes for the communities we need to serve. Members said they are willing to continue this important conversation, and that they have to stand up and be bold.

Motion: The Task Force rescinds the adoption of the definition of 'equity' while keeping the other statements (equity statement, vision statement, and mission statement as amended). The Task Force commits to continuing to work on a definition and including the definition in the final report.

Motion/Second: Elizabeth Gordon/RaShelle Davis. The motion passed with 9 votes in favor and 3 abstentions.

Member Spector said she was concerned about not having a definition of 'equity' in the preliminary report. Co-chair Danielson said he abstained, because he feels we have drifted away from the definition of 'equity' the community wants to hear. He said he does not want to subjugate values to appease the oppressor, and he feels the group has gone one step too far. Member Davis said it is important for the Task Force to speak collectively. Member Gregerson suggested returning to the original draft definition of 'equity' (on file) since the group could agree on that. She said the House chamber will respond more favorably to legislation that includes a definition of 'equity.' Member Dhingra said it will be difficult to get votes in the Legislature if we cannot get to consensus in this group.

Members discussed the possibility of meeting in December to work on the preliminary report, including the definition of 'equity' and recommendations for accountability mechanisms.

Motion: The Task Force approves a December public meeting.

Motion/Second: Maria Siguenza/Lisa van der Lugt. Approved unanimously.

Motion: The Task Force directs staff to request an extension for the preliminary report, which is due December 15.

Motion/Second: Elizabeth Gordon/Allison Spector. Approved unanimously.

10. APPROVE STATEMENTS & REPORT

See the notes for agenda item #9 (Report Revisions & Statements).

11. 2020 MEETING DATES & FUTURE WORK PLAN

Due to time, the Task Force did not discuss this agenda item.

12. COMMENTS, UPDATES & REFLECTIONS

Due to time, the Task Force did not discuss this agenda item.

ADJOURNMENT

Jan Olmstead, Task Force Co-chair adjourned the meeting at approximately 6:15 p.m.

OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

Jan Olmstead, Task Force Co-chair
Benjamin Danielson, Task Force Co-chair

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PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington • 98504-7990
360-236-4110 • wsboh@sboh.wa.gov • sboh.wa.gov