

Advisory Committee Members Present:

Flor Alarcon Avendana
Nathan Furukawa
Tutrecia Giles
Jonathan Green (phone)
Jacqueline Jones-Walsh (phone)
Diane Klontz, Chair

Marcia Meyers
Merritt Mount
Lua Pritchard
Babette Roberts

Staff:

Christy Hoff

Action Items:

- Christy will contact committee members who volunteered to assist during the interim with more specific requests, including a timeline.

1. Welcome and Introductions:

- Diane Klontz welcomed the group and facilitated committee member introductions.
- Diane reviewed the agenda and goals for the day's meeting.

2. Roundtable Discussion and Priorities for Action:

- Diane reminded members of the committee's charge to identify three or four recommendations to eliminate poverty by race/ethnicity and gender. She said the goal of this meeting was to choose a few areas to focus on. She referred committee members to the summary of potential areas of focus generated from the first meeting and asked for comments.
- Jonathan Green suggested focusing on what could be politically expedient. He stressed the importance of turning the recommendations into action.
- Diane said the Department of Commerce has an asset building program and is working with Bank On Washington to help people access low-cost checking and savings accounts.
- Lua Pritchard stressed the importance of early learning, K-12, and secondary education in helping families out of poverty. She said everything else is secondary.
- Nathan Furukawa referred committee members to a handout with information on the tax system in Washington State. He said the poor end up paying a larger proportion of their income on taxes because of Washington's primary reliance on sales tax. He said income tax is a progressive tax because people who are poor pay a smaller percentage of their income. He said Washington has the fourth highest sales tax in the nation and ranks No. 1 in terms of tax burden by income (the poorest 20 percent pay 17.3 percent of their income on taxes compared to 2.6 percent for the wealthiest 1 percent). He said Washington's regressive tax system perpetuates health disparities. Merritt Mount agreed, saying the data are convincing and suggested this would be a worthwhile area for the group to consider.

- Babette Roberts said education funding takes up a large percentage of the general fund state budget and in deficit years social services are cut in order to keep education funded.
- Tutrecia Giles said being poor dictates where you live, what you eat, etc. She said children raised in poverty have poor health outcomes and this affects their ability to learn. She said if we want to help these kids we need to help families earn and keep more of their money. She said Washington has the highest minimum wage, but it's still not a living wage. Recognizing that employers are also struggling, she suggested possibly setting a goal to increase minimum wage over time. Nathan agreed there would be resistance from industry to raise minimum wage and highlighted an effort by the state to contract with employers who provide livable wages. Babette said providing a living wage is important to help people become self-sufficient but suggested supporting people so they can move up a career pathway might be a better, more sustainable solution.
- Committee members discussed the connection between employment and education.
- Babette highlighted the need for basic education to help people find and keep jobs, e.g., job readiness, wage progression, support in transition, etc.
- Lua said early learning is key to alleviating poverty for future generations so our youth can graduate and get a good job or go on to obtain higher education. Nathan agreed, adding that research shows investments in early learning pay off significantly when you consider a variety of social outcomes. Tutrecia agreed and added that early learning programs provide an avenue for reaching parents with other services.
- Lua stressed the importance of community youth programs in providing services that schools cannot—these programs help youth to graduate and end the circle of poverty.
- Flor Alarcon Avendana discussed the education system and the need to help children transition from pre-school through kindergarten, elementary, middle, high school, and beyond. She said these transition periods are often where children become lost. She said government, schools, neighborhood centers, and others need to work collaboratively.
- Babette suggested the community college system could do a better job of transitioning students out of programs and into the workforce.
- Marcia Meyers said individual-level development programs are important but encouraged members to consider systems issues. She said the tax and transfer system could be a real strategy for reducing poverty.
- Flor suggested the group think about both what can be done immediately and what might be good long-term strategies.
- Jonathan discussed the importance of prevention and empowering communities to make healthy choices, adding that it's a social justice issue.
- Babette talked about the Food System Roundtable, which will convene soon. She said the committee should connect with the roundtable to identify areas of alignment.
- Tutrecia brought up food deserts and the need to ensure all communities have access to nutritious foods. Babette agreed, adding that grocery stores are a source of employment for low-income communities. Committee members also discussed the need for nutrition education. Lua shared information about a health event for the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities to provide nutrition and physical activity education.
- Nathan commented on how individual-level interventions put the responsibility on people to make changes. He said it's more effective to have interventions that are passive and automatic (e.g., elimination of trans fats). He said interventions to put grocery stores in

food deserts assume they will thrive when evidence suggests they actually struggle to survive. Marcia agreed, saying it's important to structure the environment so the healthy choice is the default.

- Committee members discussed the importance of stable housing for employment, education, and health. Marcia said there are federal programs that subsidize homeowners, but we lack programs to assist renters in accumulating the resources to purchase a home. Merritt agreed, adding that if you don't have housing sorted out it's hard to address anything else. He discussed the need for emergency housing and programs to help families transition to stable housing. He also discussed the need for safe and healthy housing. In addition to housing, Merritt suggested other key areas for the group to focus on were education (all levels of education) and access to services (such as food assistance) in rural areas. He said there are inconsistencies across the state in how families can access needed services.
- Committee members discussed health care, and the importance of health reform and ensuring people take advantage of the new benefits. In addition, members discussed the need for critical care in rural communities, access to dental care, and access to health homes and preventative care.
- Tutrecia said a lot of people in poverty will never go on to higher education or find ways to move up the career ladder. She suggested the group think about ways to support them. Marcia agreed, saying there are a lot of low wage workers and society depends on them for their work but they don't earn enough to access decent health care and housing. She said we can't just hope they all get on a track for a better career.

3. Continue Discussion and Define Scope of Work:

- Diane asked committee members to prioritize their top three areas of focus. She asked each member to take three sticky dots, including one red dot. She asked members to place their red dot on their No. 1 priority and the other two dots on secondary priorities.
- After the exercise, members discussed the clusters of dots around the tax and redistribution system, components of the education system (particularly early learning), empowering communities to make healthy choices, and access to services.
- Members discussed what they meant by empowering communities and access to services. Flor explained that many social services already exist but families are not aware of them or do not know how to access them. She stressed the need to help families in poverty access those already existing services. Merritt said empowering communities to make healthy choices needs to extend beyond the areas of nutrition and physical activity. The group decided to combine those two topics into a single topic about empowering communities in poverty to make healthy choices and to access available services.
- Committee members also discussed the education system and whether it was better to consider the entire system or to have a focus on early learning. Members commented on the strong research evidence around early learning and the desire to add value and not duplicate past Council work around education. While some committee members still thought a focus on the entire system was needed, they agreed a focus on early learning would also be valuable.

- In the end, the committee agreed to a focus on the following three areas: (1) the tax and redistribution system, (2) early learning, and (3) empowering communities to make healthy choices and to access existing services.

4. Identify Future Needs:

- Diane facilitated a discussion about what the group needs to identify, assess, and arrive at recommendations.
- Christy suggested working with volunteer committee members before the next meeting to compile resources and information on each of the focus areas and to provide briefings at the next meeting.
- For early learning, the group suggested recruiting Jonathan and Liz Mueller to assist – Flor also agreed to participate. Nathan, Marcia, and Babs agreed to assist with the tax and redistribution piece system. Lua, Flor, Tutrecia, and Merritt volunteered to assist with the piece on empowering communities.
- Tutrecia said it would be helpful to have a list of policy options (recommendations from other groups, states, etc.) for each focus area to discuss at the next meeting.
- Members suggested the Office of Financial Management and the Economic Opportunities Institute may have resources on the tax and redistribution system.

5. Meeting Summary and Wrap Up:

- Christy will contact committee members who volunteered to assist during the interim with more specific requests, including a timeline.
- The next meeting is Aug. 9 from 1 to 4pm at the Department of Commerce in Olympia.