



OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

Final Meeting Minutes – April 30, 2020

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Task Force members present:

Benjamin Danielson (Co-Chair)
RaShelle Davis
Michelle Gonzalez
Mia Gregerson (for Manka Dhingra)
Toshiko Hasegawa
Karen A. Johnson
Laura Lindstrand (for Sharon Ortiz)

Jan Olmstead (Co-Chair)
Sharon Ortiz
Manny Santiago
Maria Siguenza
Allison Spector
Lisa van der Lugt

Task Force members absent:

Craig Bill
Jeremie Dufault
Elizabeth Gordon

Melanie Morgan
Ed Prince

Task Force staff present:

LinhPhung Huynh, Project Manager
Hannah Fernald, Administrative
Coordinator

Esmael López, Community
Engagement Coordinator

Guests and other participants:

Dulce Gutiérrez, WA State Labor Union, AFL-CIO
Melanie Hisaw, State Board of Health
Kitara Johnson, Minority and Justice Commission & Excelsior Wellness Center
Caitlin Lang-Perez, State Board of Health
David Ortiz, Communities of Color Coalition (C3)
Omar Santana, WA State LGBTQ Commission
Christine Stalie, Results Washington

Jan Olmstead, Task Force Co-chair, called the public meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. and read from a prepared statement.

LinhPhung Huynh, Task Force Project Manager, reviewed Zoom instructions and protocol. She said the Task Force's operating principles and bylaws, along with today's agenda and meeting materials, are posted online.

Task Force Members introduced themselves and shared something they are grateful for. The list of gratitude included:

- Frontline workers who are putting their lives at risk, including first responders and farmworkers;
- Home, food, employment;
- Health and wellbeing of family, friends, and colleagues;
- Technology and the ability to continue pushing through important work;
- Governor Inslee's efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of Washingtonians;
- Connection and closeness, even as we practice physical distancing;
- The opportunity to work with communities and constituents;
- Communities' resiliency and ability to come together to support each other.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: The Task Force approves the April 30, 2020 agenda.

Motion/Second: Johnson/Hasegawa. Approved unanimously.

2. ADOPTION OF FEBRUARY 21, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Huynh recapped some themes from the Task Force's discussions on February 21.

Motion: The Task Force adopts the February 21, 2020 meeting minutes.

Motion/Second: Gonzalez/Siguenza. Approved unanimously.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS, TASK FORCE BUSINESS & LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Ms. Huynh announced a staffing change and outlined the revised public meeting schedule through June (on file). She said staff conducted a focus group session on March 2, and the focus group report (on file) includes synthesized comments and recommendations from state agency staff. She highlighted some areas from the report and asked members to keep the themes and recommendations in mind as they move forward. She said there is the opportunity to adopt the glossary of DEI-related terms that an interagency workgroup created in 2019 in partnership with the Office of Financial Management and the Department of Enterprise Services.

Co-Chair Danielson shared gratitude for Ms. Huynh in light of her new job opportunity and opened the floor for other members to make comments. Co-Chair Olmstead asked if the Task Force would have the chance to review the DEI glossary and make recommendations on concepts that could be added. Ms. Huynh confirmed that she would send the glossary to Task Force members and incorporate this discussion topic on a future agenda.

RaShelle Davis, Task Force Member (Office of the Governor), gave an update on the Governor's funding decisions and the effect on legislation to create the WA State Office of Equity (E2SHB 1783). She said E2SHB 1783 passed the Legislature as the COVID-19 outbreak hit, which caused a worse budget outlook. In anticipation of the large budget shortfall, there was a partial veto to the bill, including section 6 (creating a community advisory board) and section 7 (agency responsibilities). Member Davis said the Governor still supports standing up an Office of Equity, and the Governor's Office is looking at options for implementation and staffing. Member Davis said she hopes the

Task Force can help prioritize the Office of Equity's deliverables under these new circumstances.

Esmael López, Community Engagement Coordinator for the Task Force, said community partners have asked why the state is not funding the Office of Equity if it is considered a high priority area. Member Davis said the Governor's Office struggled with the decision. She said the state cannot cut safety net programs and has been working on addressing certain equity gaps. Member Davis said the Governor released a memo on April 29 to ensure state agencies can provide vital COVID-19 information to individuals with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency. She said it is important to avoid repeating the same problems from past recessions.

The Task Force took a break from 10:53 a.m. and reconvened at 11:05 a.m.

4. REFLECTIONS: TASK FORCE MEMBERS & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Mr. López said it is important to remain committed to establishing an Office of Equity and discuss how we can move forward in this work. He said the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a 'highlighter' of inequities in our system, and he referenced discussions with community members to demonstrate some of these inequities. He said farmworkers are considered essential workers, but not enough is being done to protect them in these times. He has heard there is a lot of competition for relief funds, which perpetuates horizontal oppression so those in most need of resources are fighting amongst each other for the little resources available. He said wage garnishment is an issue that can determine whether a family eats or must struggle. Mr. López said an Office of Equity can help bring communities together to work side-by-side with agencies to provide a net for the community.

David Ortiz, Communities of Color Coalition (C3), said C3 is assessing the impact of the pandemic on various communities. He said the virus compounds hardships and creates a confluence, exacerbating food insecurity and health care disparities and impacting communities already under distress. He mentioned the 'hidden populations,' which includes farmworkers and essential workers bringing desperately needed food into distribution. He said response efforts have not been prioritized in much-needed areas like Yakima, Wenatchee, the Skagit Valley, and Burlington. Mr. Ortiz said there has not been enough attention, including in the provision of food and health care, to detainees at the Tacoma Detention Center. He said food banks are struggling because they are not receiving enough food for distribution and there is little statewide coordination to get food to food banks. He said C3 uses the Washington Tracking Network and referrals from commissioners to determine where funding and support should go. He added that smaller, impoverished communities are asking for assistance to afford funeral costs for those lost to COVID-19, and he hoped the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) can step in to help cover these costs.

Dulce Gutiérrez, WA State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, said the pandemic has brought to light inequities for our most vulnerable populations. She said Yakima, being a middle-size city, faces big-city issues without having the same funding and resources as larger cities. She said undocumented people in the community are not receiving stimulus checks, and their spouses are also having trouble accessing these checks. She said these barriers will likely worsen poverty rates, increase the likelihood of homelessness,

and put a greater strain on the health care infrastructure. She added that people are reluctant to report rights violations, such as demands for timely rent and labor violations, and instead compensate in other ways like limiting the amount of food they buy for the family. Ms. Gutiérrez said there is a huge power disparity between farmworkers and the agricultural industry; farmworkers have little political pull on state government, including the Governor, and no lobbying or union bargaining power. She said there needs to be more mechanisms in place to consider vulnerable labor forces, because the more we investigate the more violations we will discover. She said certain factors, such as poverty level and pollution, should inform the state's funding and resource allocation. She said Yakima would benefit from the Office of Equity's work.

Mr. López recounted conversations he had in Yakima and areas of Eastern Washington, in which people said they lack the opportunity to participate in conversations that have statewide impact.

Kitara Johnson, Minority and Justice Commission & Excelsior Wellness Center, said Eastern Washington communities may be more disconnected and fragmented, but they are there. She said she reached out to local leaders to ensure her update is reflective of communities' struggles. She said communities of color are not being offered opportunities for COVID-19 testing because individuals can exhibit symptoms that are not listed on the Center for Disease Control's website, which can contribute to the spread of disease. She said those most affected by the virus are those with preexisting medical conditions, which is disproportionately manifested in African American communities that also do not have access to many health centers. Centers in the community are providing child care for essential workers and food; Excelsior created a memorandum of understanding to deliver food to and translate materials for these centers. It has also provided tablets to a community center, so people can access information and e-services. Ms. Johnson said all Washingtonians must have access to the Internet so they can access services such as telemedicine, counseling, and support, but Internet access is often the first sacrifice families make when they experience financial hardship.

Mr. López said people are stepping up to expand services and advocate on behalf of their communities. He invited Task Force members to share their own observations.

Michelle Gonzalez, Task Force Member, said the Women's Commission is concerned about the increases in domestic violence during the Stay Home, Stay Healthy order. Ms. Johnson shared that in Spokane, domestic violence and the associated trauma have been priorities even before the pandemic. The YWCA and other advocates are working to create spaces for people to seek help and information. Ms. Gutiérrez said there is an increase in domestic violence calls in Yakima as families experience more stressors, and community organizations are trying to meet this need.

Co-Chair Danielson noted the rise in domestic violence is also a concern in Central and South King County, and it is challenging to measure exactly how widespread the issue is. Current guidance to stay home has trapped people in a house 24/7 with the person threatening them, making it difficult to report violence or access a website for information. He said the added stress from the pandemic increases risk for a lot of people, and this manifests in violence in the home, postpartum depression, and

violence against women. He said social and mental health outreach work needs to be focused on keeping organizations open and functioning so they are available to families in distress.

Co-Chair Danielson said information access has become a privilege, creating a hierarchy of information sharing. He noted there are non-numerative costs to deaths in the community, such as the inability to be present for the death and funeral of a family member or community leader. He said traditions and cultural norms around death have been disrupted and not considered by strict isolation guidelines. He said without applying an equity lens, especially to testing, there will be greater risk of infection to certain communities.

Mr. Ortiz asked what the state plans to do in the winter if the seasonal flu and COVID-19 are both circulating. Justin Chan, Department of Social and Health Services, said DSHS is putting resources toward helping community members access affordable Internet and phone services. Co-Chair Danielson said there needs to be a stronger recognition of socioeconomic and environmental contexts in future guidance from the state. He added that the ability to limit exposure to the virus by staying home and other guidelines seem steeped in privilege, and almost verbalizes the value given to some lives over others. He said he would like to see advice that is actionable across communities, rather than advice that can exacerbate inequities the Task Force is trying to address.

Lisa van der Lugt, Task Force Member, said the Governor's Office, Department of Health, and the Legislature will drive these decisions. The Task Force can direct individuals to sources of information. Member Davis said workgroups have been created to solicit feedback on a draft plan to ensure the state's reopening is equitable.

Co-Chair Olmstead shared that she had the opportunity to interview Marilyn Scott, elder and Tribal Councilmember of the Upper Skagit Tribe. She said Councilmember Scott emphasized the important relationship between youth and their grandparents/elders, and decisions about who would and would not receive treatment in the crisis alarmed tribal communities. She said it is a large hardship when tribal members are unable to support families and communities through tradition as people cross over. She added that values need to be considered, and mainstream thinking and structures have not allowed for this. She said it is also important to think about data collection and how the data collection process has historically been used to harm certain groups. She commended Governor Inslee's leadership during the crisis, and said the relationship the Governor and the Department of Health have with tribes is special.

The Task Force took a break from 12:03 p.m. and reconvened at 12:15 p.m.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Maria Batayola, Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, said it is important to communities that the Task Force is documenting inequities and various efforts. She said there is a need to redirect funds and resources to impacted communities of color. She said people are experiencing access issues, and access must be equally available to all. She said the state must ensure there is adequate funding for programs, facilities, and resources. She urged the Task Force to recommend that Governor Inslee empower the state's racial

and ethnic commissions to act as advocates for communities. She added that the commissions know state agencies, they have a good relationship with the Governor, and they have ears on the ground in communities.

Kristi Cruz, Northwest Justice Project & WA State Coalition for Language Access, thanked the Task Force for its continued support around language access. She said she was glad to see Governor Inslee's language access plan and understands materials from the Department of Health and local jurisdictions are being released in different languages. She said barriers still exist, including in telemedicine where interpretation is not accessible across the board. She added that there are individuals discharged after testing positive for COVID-19 without adequate information. She noted that language access is multi-sector, requiring us to talk about health care, education, law, unemployment, etc. She said there needs to be a central way to coordinate barriers, issues, and services across sectors and across the state.

Samuel Cooke, Aging and Long-term Support Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, said he is working on a project to revise the Home Care Aid training program and sees this work as an opportunity to advance equity. He said his main goal is to engage a panel of stakeholders and get as much input as possible from a range of communities. He asked members and participants to contact him if they are interested in participating.

Huma Zarif, Northwest Health Law Advocates, said some people are getting conflicting messages and unclear advice on how to access testing and health care, especially among limited English proficient populations. She said there are long phone trees to go through before someone can get to an interpreter and, when they are connected, they receive unclear information on testing although they are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. She said the Governor's Office should consider putting measures in place to limit collections, particularly around medical bills, as people are experiencing economic impacts.

6. DISCUSSION: REVISED WORK PLAN

Ms. Huynh recapped themes and preferences gathered from her conversations with Task Force members during the interim. She presented a proposed work plan (on file) covering the remaining phase of the project. She said the final proposal is an opportunity to share the Task Force's collective voice and vision for the Office of Equity's work and for the future of Washington. She noted this work plan relies on members engaging with content between meetings, including reviewing a draft proposal in a short period of time.

Ms. Huynh asked for members' thoughts on the proposed plan. Allison Spector, Task Force Member, said she likes the plan and thought it was appropriate for the time allotted. Member van der Lugt agreed and asked that we maintain flexibility and creativity as we do not know what will happen with the pandemic. Co-Chair Olmstead expressed concern around the lack of opportunity the task force has had to consult and engage tribes. She requested reaching out to Task Force member Craig Bill, Director of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, before finalizing the proposal.

Karen A. Johnson, Task Force Member, highlighted the balance between urgent and foundational needs, and noted the importance of intentionally laying out the business case for the Office of Equity in the final report. She said an equity lens is foundational to every aspect of the state’s work, especially during this crisis.

7. COMMENTS, UPDATES & REFLECTIONS

Co-Chair Danielson said the lessons we are learning through the pandemic are very important for providing context and perspective in the final proposal. It is important to name the crisis environment, forbearing against reversional behaviors across society. He said there will continue to be crises and emergencies, and integrating equity in an intentional way serves as a buffer from future inequities.

Ms. Huynh said members have the opportunity to submit individual statements for the final proposal. Co-Chair Olmstead said these statements could potentially include both overarching vision/aspirational goals and specific efforts that should be addressed in the immediate future.

ADJOURNMENT

Benjamin Danielson, Task Force Co-chair, adjourned the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

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

To request this document in an alternate format or a different language, please contact Kellie Kahler, Washington State Board of Health Communication Manager, at 360-236-4102 or by email at kellie.kahler@sboh.wa.gov TTY users can dial 711.

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