



OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

Draft Meeting Minutes – May 27, 2020

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Task Force members present:

Benjamin Danielson (Co-Chair)
RaShelle Davis
Michelle Gonzalez
Elizabeth Gordon
Mia Gregerson (for Manka Dhingra)
Karen A. Johnson

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

Task Force members absent:

Craig Bill
Jeremie Dufault
Toshiko Hasegawa

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:

Daniya Baisubanova, WA State Women's Commission
Melanie Hisaw, State Board of Health
Kitara Johnson, Minority and Justice Commission/Excelsior Wellness Center
Caitlin Lang-Perez, State Board of Health
Omar Santana, WA State LGBTQ Commission
Christine Stalie, Results Washington
Karen Vargas, New Life CDA, ERACE, and other organizations in Kitsap County

Benjamin Danielson and Jan Olmstead, Task Force Co-chairs, called the public meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and read from a prepared statement. LinhPhung Huynh, Task Force Project Manager, reviewed Zoom instructions and said the Task Force's operating principles and bylaws, along with today's agenda and meeting materials, are posted online at www.healthequity.wa.gov.

Task Force members introduced themselves and shared stories of those who have had an impact on their lives. Co-Chair Danielson said this time is a wonderful, awful, and important moment for all of us. How we act now will be something we look back on many years from now. We will have to look at ourselves in the mirror and see how we showed up, who we stood up for, and how we made our actions most powerful. He said this group has invested a lot of time of time, thought, sweat equity, emotion and powerful words and powerful ideas. He looks up to each person to help make this a better state

and appreciates what other members have done to help him be a better person. He acknowledged those who are around us now and those who have been around us in the past—they have been an important influence in his life and the way he walks through this world.

Co-Chair Danielson shared some reflections. He said: “I’m thinking about how you can be targeted and criminalized for birdwatching at a park, appearing to be Asian and walking in Ballard. You can be killed for sitting in an SUV outside a store, shot on your front porch for calling the police. You can be the most at risk for the worst outcomes, amid a pandemic, for your primary language or the color of your skin or your socio-economic situation. This is the time when the truest forms of hatred and bias are all around us. There is no one who can walk through this world right now and not know what’s happening. There’s no one who could say they had no idea, that they didn’t realize. That is not possible today.”

Co-Chair Danielson continued: “The call is on us—with our eyes open, with our knowledge and awareness of what’s happening every day around the globe and in our backyards—to stand up...[and] bring a voice like we’ve never brought before. We have to be the people we envision ourselves being when we’re at our best. We have to be better than the terribleness around us. We have to be matching the beautiful actions we’re seeing around us right now. We can’t be in the middle; we can’t be mediocre; we can’t be one foot in; we can’t be ambivalent. We have to be certain and clear. Right now, I know more about what’s right than I’ve ever known in my life. Right now, I know more about what we need to be doing together than I did a year ago. If we don’t do our utmost to make this work meaningful, long-lasting, and transformative, then you better break every mirror in your house because you won’t want to look.”

Co-chair Jan Olmstead agreed and emphasized the importance of coming together, being present, and doing this work the right way. She reflected on historical policies and practices that prevented her ancestors from being safe, and said today’s unjust actions center around attitudes, systems, and structures. She shared that Billy Frank, Jr., a friend and mentor, said: “You just have to do the right thing, and you know what that is.” She said this is our opportunity to step up and be allies with each other in our work.

Mia Gregerson, Task Force Member (for Manka Dhingra) said she feels the weight of ensuring we are doing what we need to. She shared that her mom inspires her to do work boldly and move through the lens of love. She said you can go slow, but continue to move forward. Karen A. Johnson, Task Force Member, said desperate times call for desperate measures. She said she is ready for intentional action and would be ready to “go into the Governor’s Office with the data that we’ve been given showing the disparate impacts on the people of this state, and absolutely demand that they find money to fund [the Office of Equity] and do this work.”

Sharon Ortiz, Task Force Member, said Phyllis Sanderson showed her how one person can make a difference through action, not just talk. Phyllis was her Spanish professor who started a women-led group in El Salvador in the 1970s to build houses and

promote education. Lisa van der Lugt, Task Force Member, said she has been most influenced by her mother and father. They were farmworkers into their mid-thirties, and had the calling of helping people by sharing resources, inviting them into their home, and helping change lives. She is more hopeful for change now that our Legislature is becoming more diverse. Elizabeth Gordon, Task Force Member, shared stories about her father. He was a World War II veteran and lived through the Great Depression. She said he had incredible grit, humor, and integrity, and she wished she could speak with him now about his experiences and the injustice she sees in the world. She added that she is deeply disturbed by the very blatant acts of inequity in the current health and economic crisis, and feels a call to action.

Allison Spector, Task Force Member, said she has been most influenced by her uncle. She said her reflections on his life encourage her to balance fear and hope in order to persevere. She is motivated to do work with impact and meaning. Omar Santana, LGBTQ Commission, said he has been struggling and feels a sort of rage from what he is seeing. He asked, "When you have people disproportionately dying right now, how can people justify this?" He said he is channeling his mom and her unconditional love today.

Kitara Johnson, Minority and Justice Commission & Excelsior Wellness Center, said her mother taught her how to be brave and strong, to have faith, and to never give up. She said she grew up in intercity Chicago and only 114 students in her high class of 620 ended up graduating. She said she owes it to her peers to provide a voice today and not just make a difference, but *be* the difference. Daniya Baisubanova, Women's Commission, said she grew up in Soviet Kurdistan and shared that her Korean grandfather, an immigrant and teacher, instilled in her high moral values.

Esmael López, Community Engagement Coordinator, said the pain of loss and tragedies are felt by our communities and the words of others are encouragement. He highlighted comments from the chat box from public participants. Vanessa Diaz, North Sound Accountable Community of Health, shared that their father taught them to be strong, that being Native American and Mexican American was never a negative thing, and to embrace the powerful traits and ancestors behind them. Ophelia Noble, The Noble Foundation, said family and community have had the most significant impact by providing them with shelter, peace, morals, values, integrity, and most importantly a sense of hope. Ruben Peralta, Greater Columbia Accountable Community of Health, said their parents were brave enough to bring nine children to the U.S. in the 1970s and have been their main influence. Cristina Roark, Kitsap Strong, shared that their mom left her homeland to provide opportunities for them and their siblings. Marianne Ozmun-Wells, DSHS Economic Services Administration, said her grandmother balanced science and spirituality, and challenged the things she was taught even though she was steeped in a culture of white supremacy.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: The Task Force approves the May 27, 2020 agenda.

Motion/Second: Member Gordon/Member Gregerson. Approved unanimously.

2. ADOPTION OF MAY 14, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Huynh said she received an email from Joana Ramos, WA State Coalition for Language Access, with requested changes to the summary of Ms. Ramos' public comment. The changes were incorporated.

Motion: The Task Force adopts the May 14, 2020 meeting minutes as amended.

Motion/Second: Member Gregerson/Member Spector. Approved unanimously.

3. REFLECTIONS & TASK FORCE BUSINESS

Ms. Huynh gave an overview of the Task Force's preliminary report. She hoped this could ground the group, and encouraged members to consider both how far we have come and the opportunity to update and add content for the final proposal.

Member Spector said the state will face significant budget issues and asked whether the Office of Equity should try to promote the world as it is now or how it should be. She said this is an issue of prioritization for the state. Member Johnson said another Black male has been killed in our country. Our actions need to be hinged on two things: the business case for an Office of Equity and the Task Force's operating principles (on file). When she thinks of those who have influenced her, not one of them waited until conditions were favorable—they took action in the face of adversity and oppression.

Member Gregerson shared seven guiding questions for policy options, which she received at a caucus briefing yesterday and are meant to guide considerations during a possible special legislative session:

- Will it cost money?
- Why is it necessary before January?
- Is this consistent with the values and priorities of the caucus?
- What is the positive message?
- Does this assist communities that have been disproportionately impacted?
- Does this start to save money immediately?
- Does this help with stated federal priorities and/or federal funding?
- Is this something that the federal government should be doing?
- Is this specifically related to COVID or economic recovery?
- Does this help other levels of government do their job?

Co-Chair Danielson said, in the case of standing up the Office of Equity, the more appropriate question is 'What will it cost if we do *not* do it?'

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Co-Chair Olmstead read from a prepared statement (on file) to introduce the public comment period.

Karen Vargas, New Life CDA, ERACE, and other organizations in Kitsap County, said the Office of Equity is vital and of the utmost importance, especially during this pandemic. She said racism and oppression are running rampant as people are in crisis. Even if the government will not provide funding for the Office of Equity, this

does not release the government from being accountable. She asked how the state and communities can move forward in a cohesive partnership. Community organizations in Kitsap County are organizing and doing outreach, and she would like to see organizations throughout the state come together to undo racism and loudly voice the inequities they are seeing and experiencing. She said Kitsap County has a dominant white supremacist influence, and local organizations have a heavy lift and need all the help they can get. She is inspired by the Office of Equity, and said she is disheartened that the government will not support it with all the resources needed. She said when one door closes, we need to open another door. We need to move forward amidst all the challenges and be creative, because we will not stop even if they say 'no.' We need to say 'no' to the 'no' and work in a unified, collective way.

Ms. Huynh read written public comment submitted by Jeannie Murphy Ouellette (on file).

The Task Force took a break from 10:31 a.m. and reconvened at 10:40 a.m.

5. GENERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Ms. Huynh reminded members of the resources they have for this conversation: the memo of proposed action from the Chairs (on file); the focus group report (on file); and a document with proposed recommendations (on file) that serves as a synthesis of recent conversations. She noted the Task Force will have one more public meeting, most likely in July, to do a final review of the proposal before it is submitted to the Governor and Legislature.

Co-Chair Danielson asked for the group's thoughts on using the term 'disruption.' Vanessa Diaz said they work in Skagit County to provide access to basic needs like running water. They are overwhelmed by the constant inequities they see, and encouraged the group to say 'no' to and disrupt inhumane norms. Member Gordon said equity needs to be woven into the way the state conducts business, not treated as an afterthought. This group agreed to take bold action, so she thinks now is the time to do so.

Marianne Ozmun-Wells suggested including expectations for state agencies to consistently consider and include communities and other impacted groups in decision making. Members expanded Ms. Ozmun-Wells' suggestions and added that content to the proposed recommendations document. Member Spector said existing mechanisms of communication are only effective in reaching the most well positioned in society. Co-Chair Olmstead said consistency across government is needed, including in culturally competent messaging that can reach all the communities we need to reach.

Member van der Lugt said the state needs to be innovative and creative in how we reach folks in a meaningful way, ensuring communities are heard and language access is emphasized. She said the state also needs to put information learned from

communities into action, and connect communities with the resources they need. Member Gordon wondered what the impact on communities will be if they are not at the table in the first place, and emphasized that there needs to be opportunities for broad community engagement and participation if government is to understand these communities.

Co-Chair Danielson asked members for their thoughts on intersectional work, and whether personal experiences and journeys have been elevated enough in contrast to the focus on data. Co-Chair Olmstead said stories are important in reaching out to communities and in truly understanding communities in a deeper way beyond numbers. She said stories are important in understanding communities' assets. Member Spector said experiences cannot be quantified, and as an example, she pointed to a problem transgender individuals face related to 'passing privilege' that does not show up in data.

Mr. López said there are challenges related to implementation and to the current culture within state agencies. Government needs to focus on workforce diversity by bringing in more people with diverse experiences and listening to communities. He said the biggest takeaway is: when it comes to making decisions around how money is spent and how power is shared, communities feel very left out and left behind. Member Gregerson spoke about digital equity and the need to weave an equity lens into conversations, outreach, and decision making. She said, in terms of civics, people want to participate in government decisions every day, not just when there is widespread pain and suffering.

Member Siguenza said equity and engagement considerations must also apply to budgetary decisions. Agencies need an equity toolkit to apply to everything they do, including in how they spend funds. Member Gregerson said it would be helpful to have a shared space in government, facilitated by the Office of Equity, for conversations as agencies prepare their budgets. Members discussed additional updates to the document with proposed recommendations (on file) and Ms. Huynh incorporated their suggestions. Member Siguenza said the group's progress today in updating the language of recommendations more accurately reflects how she envisions the Office of Equity. In particular, she appreciates the language related to working in partnership with the state commissions. Member van der Lugt said she hopes this can be a real partnership in which commissions can provide feedback to the Office of Equity as well.

Members discussed including a recommendation for rulemaking authority for the Office of Equity. Member Gordon said the Office needs rulemaking authority to ensure its intended work can actually happen. Mr. Santana said the accountability piece is most important, and centering the Office's work around that piece would benefit all commissions doing related work. Member Siguenza said we need to recommend rulemaking authority in addition to accountability.

The Task Force discussed endorsing the glossary of terms related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that an interagency workgroup created in 2019 (on file). Members added three additional terms (indigenous, tribal affiliation, tribal sovereignty). Co-Chair Danielson said the glossary must be considered a living repository, which allows for different ways of understanding intersectionality and uniqueness.

Motion: The Task Force adopts the glossary of equity-related terms (as amended) and directs staff to incorporate this glossary in the proposal. Furthermore, the Task Force adopts the recommendation that the Office of Equity treat the glossary as a living repository.

Motion/Second: Member Johnson/ Member Gregerson. Approved unanimously.

The Task Force took a break from 12:40 p.m. and reconvened at 12:47 p.m.

Members continued to review and make revisions to the document of proposed recommendations (on file). Member Spector said she often sees the practice in government of funding a certain program by cutting funding to another program that is also needed. Co-Chair Danielson suggested including language in the proposal about naming inequities in order to make smarter investments across government.

Member Johnson wondered if courageous leaders of the past would be having a dialogue like this if they were faced with the current circumstances. She said the real message is, "Put your money where your mouth is." She said she lives near individuals who rely on wheelchairs and are unable to get out and about right now. Others are having to make the decision of whether to eat or buy medication. Confirmed cases of COVID-19 infections and related deaths are still going up, and there is information about the disproportionate impact on certain groups, including certain racial and ethnic groups. She said she could only imagine the experiences that those with language barriers and those with limited sight or hearing are dealing with.

Member Johnson added that if the Office of Equity's work is to serve as the foundation for all the work done by state government, resources would have been gathered to fund the Office to ensure the response to the pandemic and the state's reopening are done through a lens of equity and access. She said we need to bring the community together and put the pressure on government to create the Office of Equity. She does not want history to show that she was on this Task Force and remained silent in this moment.

Mr. Santana said Member Johnson put words to his feelings. He said we need to get rid of the political correctness in the document of proposed recommendations and, instead, use language that reflects the intensity of our demands. Co-Chair Olmstead agreed and said we need to convey action in the here and now. She added that each Task Force member has the opportunity to write a direct statement, to be included in the final proposal, to speak their mind and express their passion.

Ms. Huynh said she will incorporate these recommendations in a draft proposal, which she will send to members for independent review and feedback. Then the Task Force will meet in July to review the proposal together and ensure it says exactly what this group means.

Motion: The Task Force approves the document of proposed recommendations as amended throughout today's conversation, and directs staff to incorporate the recommendations in the Task Force's proposal.

Motion/Second: Member Gordon/Member Johnson. Approved unanimously.

6. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) GLOSSARY

This conversation was pulled into the discussion above (see agenda item #5 – Generative Engagement).

7. COMMENTS, UPDATES & REFLECTIONS

Members discussed the prompt for individual statements and agreed on: "How will the Office of Equity's work impact the communities we serve?" Co-Chair Olmstead said these statements are a way for members to share the importance of our work and of the communities we are representing here. Ms. Huynh noted she will be available between meetings to provide support as members draft their statements.

Co-Chair Danielson said he does not want this to be the end of our call and our conscious embrace of the provocative phrases and thoughts shared at today's meeting. He expects future talks in which 'saying no to the no' is a permanent feature. He asked members not to let go of the energy, spirit, and willingness to stand tall in a blizzard of challenges. He said, "This is us being present in this moment and not backing down."

ADJOURNMENT

Jan Olmstead, Task Force Co-chair, adjourned the meeting at 1:39 p.m.

OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

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

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