

Champaign County Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF)
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 26, 2017
6:30 pm

I. Call to Order

Sam Byndom called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

II. Roll Call

Members Present: M. Ar-Raheem, S. Balgoyen, L. Branham, S. Byndom, E. Dee, A. Felty, D. Harber, R. Hughes, A. James, S. Lerner, E. Patt, C. Randolph, H. Ross, S. Silver, D. Turner.

Members Absent:

A. Evans, A. Shelton, G. Walter.

Kevin Schneider has resigned from the task force.

III. Approval of Agenda

Esther Patt moved to approve agenda. Artice James seconded. The motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Esther moved to approve the minutes with the approval of the year for the date of the meeting. Artice seconded the motion. The motion carried.

V. Public Participation

There were no public comments at this time.

VI. Presentations

There were no formal presentations.

Carolyn updated the group on the status of the U of I Urban Planning student who is working with the data portal as a class project. Carolyn recommended that Yuyan come to the next RJTF meeting to present her questions about the data to the group. Carolyn listed the three goals that Yuyan has to work on the data and also noted that the Circuit Clerk's daily reports are no longer available on the website. Esther explained the issue of misleading percentages without narratives around the data. Carolyn talked about the disparities that exist in how individuals in the criminal justice system are treated/handled and the importance of looking at those disparities in addition to the disparity between the jail population and the general population.

Henry Ross commented on the issue of discrimination in employment in Champaign County. He said that there is no help for individuals who are discriminated against in the County. He will present recommendations regarding the need for resources in the community.

Artice introduced a concern about having the subcommittee meetings before Member Comments and New Business discussions. Esther moved to reconsider approval of the agenda to move these items before the subcommittee meetings. Maryam seconded the motion. The motion to reconsider the agenda approved by vocal vote.

Esther moved to amend the agenda. Sara seconded the motion. The motion approved by vocal vote.

The Subcommittee Meetings agenda item was moved to before Adjournment.

VII. New Business

Engagement of Public Officials

Lynn introduced the topic of engaging the officials who are involved with the criminal justice system. She posed the question of whether or not we should reach out to officials. The follow up questions would be who to contact and how to contact them. Carolyn noted that the meetings of the RJTF are public and that officials have the opportunity to come to the meeting. Esther stated that it needs to be clear specifically what information we are looking to get or understand, if we decide to ask anyone. Maryam noted that the task force is looking specifically at the data that shows the presence of racial disparities and said that she is unsure of what the engagement would look like or what the purpose of it would be. David said that he agrees with Carolyn; there were four invitations already: 1) to join the RJTF 2) to attend the Community Events held in the summer 3) to attend public RJTF meetings 4) to respond to our requests for data. He also said that it could be valuable to send surveys to the officials asking what issues with racial disparities they see and what suggestions they have to address. Susan stated that data is only useful to prove the issue exists but that it cannot be the solution. Sara said we could ask City Councils or the County Board for new members. She also suggested an anonymous survey.

Artice said to be careful with what we ask the officials because the officials make have recommendations that are completely opposite of what we may recommend, and this could lose support rather than gain support. Esther suggested asking “What can be done in the entire criminal justice system to improve the racial disparity?” Sara recommended reaching out to criminal justice officials in other communities who could make recommendations. Demario recommended retired criminal justice officials as well. Lynn reaffirmed her support for reaching out to criminal justice officials. Sara suggested that we also reach out to individuals who are directly impacted by the criminal justice system. Scott introduced the issue of police and how they will do whatever is allowed of them, and those policies have been weakened significantly in past decades. He also suggested focusing on sentencing because of the significant racial disparities in sentencing. Lynn discussed the challenge of outcome measures for police departments.

Carolyn brought an issue regarding asking public officials vs. criminal justice officials. Carolyn introduced a friendly amendment to include public officials not directly working in the criminal justice system. Maryam suggested that someone craft a request to those individuals before we vote on it. Lynn introduced the three questions from the Community Events about what can be done to reduce racial disparities in the CJ system. David, Carolyn, and Maryam suggested

removing the second and third question. Sara suggested preparing the racial disparities data before asking questions but it was agreed that the officials who respond would only argue the data. There was discussion regarding who to send these questions to.

Lynn moved to send “a letter sent on behalf of RJTF to: the chief judge and all other judges, the public defender, the State’s Attorney, the head of probation office, the co-directors of First Followers, and criminal defense attorneys through local bar association soliciting feedback:

‘In your opinion, are there steps that can be taken within our justice system in Champaign County to reduce the racial disparity in it? If so, what?’”

Esther seconded the motion. Maryam offered a friendly amendment to create and draft the letter and then present it to the task force at the next meeting for approval. Lynn and Esther accepted the amendment. The motion carried by vocal vote.

VIII. Task Force Member Comments

Maryam believes that the RJTF needs to address the County Board and its lack of support for the task force as evidenced by the recent kicking out of the task force from the Brookens Admin building. Maryam suggested ways to do this. Sara stated that she believes being in community spaces in Urbana and Champaign on alternating weeks is positive. Maryam noted that we are no longer videoed and archived. Demario asked for a clarification of how the County Board took the room away from the task force. Sam and Sara explained the meeting with the County Board Chair. Artice, Sam, Carolyn, and Demario expressed their frustration with the way the County Board has treated the Task Force. Esther moved that Sam ask the County Board Chair to have the Task Force be placed on the next County Board meeting as an update and to have Maryam draft a statement to address the issue to the County Board which is to be reviewed at the next RJTF meeting. Artice seconded the motion. Lynn asked the group if we should request support services for the task force. Lynn said that someone should cull together a list of recommendations which have already been made. The motion carried by vocal vote.

Old Business on Feb. 9th – discuss budget or support services request.

IX. Subcommittee Meetings

Sam tabled this item.

X. Adjournment

Artice moved to adjourn.