

Champaign County Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF)
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, July 27, 2017
6:30 pm

I. Call to Order

Sam Byndom called the meeting to order at 6:36 pm.

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, S. Silver, D. Turner, G. Walter.

Members Absent: A. Evans, H. Ross, A. Shelton.

III. Approval of Agenda

Maryam Ar-Raheem moved to approve the agenda for the meeting. Gerry Walter seconded the motion. The motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Gerry moved to approve the agenda. David Harber seconded the motion. The motion carried.

V. Public Participation

James Kilgore

James made suggestions for additions about fines and fees. He mentioned that Katie Blakeman made a statement this past weekend that the revenue for the Circuit Clerk comes from fees and fines, and he noted this as a problem. He believed that providing relief for those who are burdened by fees and fines should be added (amnesty for debt, a service to pay off debt, scheduling payment plans, changing the status of probation when payment has not been made). He also made comments on the Structural section. He feels that it is inadequate and does not reflect the fundamental understanding of the term structural racism. He said that if the structural report makes it into the final report of the task force, then he will not be supportive of the RJTF final report. He also emphasized that the task force should write about its process and the racial dynamics in the group.

David said thank you for James' review of the reports. David asked James if changing the name of the section to remove "Structural" from the report would make it sufficient, given that it focuses on Education, Housing and Employment. Carolyn also thanked James for his comments and for his encouragement to talk about the challenges that the task force faced; she hopes that the task force will have a frank discussion about the process and challenges.

Albert Stabler

Albert read the following statement:

As a group, several of us from Build Programs, Not Jails have read the drafts of nearly all the sections. Those we have seen have either adequately or admirably met the mandate set out by the Community Justice Task Force. The two-page sections on reforming local fines and fees, which are an undue burden on poor people and people of color, and public housing, which needs to be made available to people leaving jail and prison, are concise, well-researched, clear, and contain specific recommended actions for the county board. The sections on juvenile justice and restorative justice contain several potentially beneficial ideas, and suggestions for implementation, and make some mention of racial disparity. The section on community engagement, which deals with transparency and communication regarding criminal justice policies, makes ambitious recommendations, and clearly addresses the role of race.

The section that is truly alarming to us is the section on structural racism. It has a range of problems, the first being that it is at least six times longer than any other section, the second being that it makes no recommendations that can be directly acted upon by the county board, the third being its overall disorganization in terms of format, the fourth being its broad generalizations and its moralizing tone, and the fifth being its lack of insight as regards race. The essay, while pointing out some problematic policies, has no critical assessment of whiteness or blackness as political facts, it deals at length with psychological factors of racism (for white people), which are hardly structural issues, and it makes broad and ultimately unrealistic claims and recommendations as regards the legal and economic factors that could legitimately be thought of as structural. In addition, it is the product of one Task Force member who seemingly has communicated with but has not collaborated with her subcommittee, which includes people of color.

We feel that the inclusion of this section, without a substantial reduction in length and a corresponding increase in focus, will distract and comfort many white readers, including some members of the county board, and it will allow the county board to praise the report, and congratulate themselves, while not making any hard decisions as regards criminal justice. While the structural racism section contains a lot of interesting information it is inappropriate for a report such as this, and will make it much more difficult for it to be understood and acted upon, in and beyond Champaign County. Criminal justice is why the RJTF exists, and any part of this report that endangers even the most minor rollback of punitive racist state practices should be stricken.

Thank you

VI. Presentations

Review Final Drafts from Subcommittees

Juvenile Justice

They reduced the amount of SRO data. They also added a recommendation about youth in the detention center. Sara is also thinking about collapsing some of the recommendations together. She also just received access to data on diversion, and she would like to look at it for racial

disparities. Esther suggested being more specific in recommendation #1. She also asked for more specificity in a couple of the other recommendation requests. She recommended naming partners. Amy suggested making the statement about disparities in punitive measures more clear.

Restorative Justice and Practices

Sara said they added Restorative Circles under the “Circles” section because it is a model that is being implemented locally. She said the group also tried to add language about structural racism that can be a part of restorative practices. Lynn said that assessments and evaluations for the restorative justice programs should be applied to all of the areas the RJTF is looking at.

Police Practices

Ryan spoke about the updates to police hiring, community involvement in the training process, a community policing section that Ellyn wrote, and the U of I PTI. The group discussed the merit of supporting the PTI without knowing about the outcomes of training.

Community Engagement

Carolyn highlighted the changes made to the recommendations. She focused on the Community Engagement Oversight Commission recommendation. She said this was added because the group was not sure how the County Board would implement the recommendations. Lynn shared her suggested revisions to the section. David discussed the difference between commission of crimes and arrests for crimes. Carolyn discussed the feedback received by the subcommittee. She spoke about racism and power, racial disparity and its measurements, and race-neutral policies.

Structural Subcommittee

Amy thanked the people who helped her edit the section. The group removed the section on reparations. More ties are made to the justice system. She also tied it to the community meetings. The subcommittee tried to open a space for a discussion on the racism that has caused disparities in many different places in the community. They tried to remove judgmental or moralizing language. They also resisted comments about people not liking or feeling comfortable with the section. Esther shared thoughts on use of community voices as evidence, and Artice discussed how to position the report in the larger report as a discussion on racism and what can be done to fight racism as a County.

VII. New Business

Budget

Maryam moved to table this item to the next meeting. Sara seconded the motion. The motion carried.

David Sutton

Maryam moved to table the item to the next meeting. Artice seconded the motion. The motion carried.

VIII. Adjournment

Artice moved to adjourn.