Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental and Health Equity Task Force
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 1, 2021
10:00 a.m.
Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

A regular meeting of the members (the “Members”) of the Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental and Health Equity Task Force (the “Task Force”) was held remotely on Wednesday, December 1, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. Eastern time via a virtual Microsoft Teams meeting.

Leadership Present
Secretary Pamela Cashwell (Chair)

Members Present
(Unless otherwise noted below, all members joined the videoconference at the opening of the meeting at approximately 10:01 a.m. and all members exited the videoconference by approximately 12:04 p.m. when the meeting was closed.)

Victor Armstrong
Catherine Harvey Sevier
Andres Henao
Viviana Martinez-Bianchi
Carlos Rish
Christy Clayton
Yvonne Holley
Trey Rabon
Walter Baucom
Lynn Bottone
Lenora Campbell
Sonyia Richardson
Margaret Weller-Stargell
Quinny Sanchez Lopez
Annette Taylor
Elizabeth Biser (Designee: Carolina Fonseca Jimenez)
Gregory Richardson
James Johnson Jr.
Johnathan Augustine
Cornell Wright
Gene Woods (Designee: Fernando Little)
Yazmin Garcia-Rico
Juvencio Rocha Peralta
Cedrie Bright
John Lumpkin

Members Absent
Giselle Corbie-Smith
Donny Lambeth
Stephanie McGarrah
CC Lamberth
Dale Jenkins
Kevin J. Price
Adriana Chavela
Pat Martinez
T. Anthony Spearman
Rhett Brown
Charlene Green

Others Present
Evin L. Grant, Policy Director, NC Department of Administration
Bailey Recktenwald, Policy Development Analyst, NC Department of Administration
Katie Hall, Legislative Liaison, NC Department of Administration
John Resendes Analytics and Innovations Manager for NC Department of Health and Human Services
Call to Order; Welcome

Secretary Pamela Cashwell called the meeting to order at approximately 10:01 a.m. Eastern time and welcomed all in attendance. Secretary Cashwell noted that with recent passing of the State budget, many State agencies have been busy allocating funds. Due to a packed agenda, Secretary Cashwell proceeded to the roll call.

Roll Call; Vote by Roll Call

Bailey Recktenwald, Policy Development Analyst, NC Department of Administration, asked for a roll call and vote on the October meeting minutes and indicated a quorum was present and the meeting minutes have been approved.

Governor’s Office Video

Secretary Cashwell noted that the Governor’s office had provided a video message the Governor wished to be shown to the Task Force. The video message from Governor Roy Cooper thanked the Task Force for all its work to find solutions to help all North Carolinians thrive and succeed. Governor Cooper noted that the recently approved budget includes many of the items the Task Force recommended. Governor Cooper asked that everyone keep up the great work.

Budget Presentation

Secretary Cashwell introduced Katie Hall, Legislative Liaison, NC Department of Administration. Ms. Hall proceeded to provide an overview of the State’s approved budget. Ms. Hall noted that the ReTOOL Program received an allocation of an additional $20 million in non-recurring funds to assist minority-owned businesses across North Carolina in rural and urban areas. There was also $500 million allocated to the Business Recovery Grant Program, which is run by the North Carolina Department of Revenue. Ms. Hall also noted that $73,000 had also been allocated to a position within the Commission on Indian Affairs to monitor and research the impact on tribes across North Carolina. In addition, $10 million was appropriated to NC American Indian Tribes, where certain tribes will be allocated approximately $715,000 each with an additional $4 million distributed on a per capita basis and 4 urban organizations will receive $250,000 each.

Ms. Hall noted that the Carolina Association of General Contractors would receive two appropriations. First, $3 million was appropriated directly to the Carolina Association of General Contractors Foundation to establish a Historically Underutilized Business Contractor Academy. The academies will be in partnership with the Community College System and the HUB Office at the Department of Administration, with a particular focus on rural areas and recruiting minority participants and women-owned businesses. Three of the academies will be located at Historically Black Colleges and
Universities in North Carolina. The participation will be free of charge to disadvantaged, minority and women business enterprises. The second program to be funded to the Carolina Association of General Contractors Foundation totals $3.5 million, which is to be used to create a construction training and apprenticeship program. Participants will be targeted to include low wealth individuals, minorities, women and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Ms. Hall also noted that $150 million of non-recurring funds would be allocated to the Department of Health and Human Services to remediate lead pipes and asbestos abatement in our public schools. $30 million will go towards funding a program to require public schools to test their drinking water and replace service lines and pipes in schools. $109 million will go towards the remediation of lead pipes and asbestos abatement.

Nathaniel Denny, Deputy Secretary for Broadband and Digital Equity of the Department of Information Technology, provided an overview of the broadband provisions in the recent budget. The Governor’s budget proposed to appropriate $1 billion of American Rescue Plan Funds to build digital equity over 3 major buckets: (i) infrastructure investment, (ii) affordability and (iii) digital literacy and enablement. The General Assembly addressed the infrastructure investment (approximately $950 million) and the digital literacy and enablement goal (approximately $50 million). Governor Cooper’s goal is to connect 98% of NC households to high speed internet and reach 80% of households subscribed to high speed internet across demographic populations. While the budget didn’t address the affordability component of broadband access, President Biden’s bipartisan infrastructure package extends the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, which provides a $30 per month discount for high speed internet for low-income households. Applicants for the discount can apply at https://getemergencymoband.org.

Catherine Sevier asked for an overview of the criteria for obtaining the $30 per month discount on high speed internet. Mr. Denny noted that the eligibility is listed at the above link, but is similar to the SNAP eligibility requirements.

Matt Gross, Assistant Secretary for Government Affairs of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, noted that the big topic this year was Medicaid expansion and we got close to having it adopted, but didn’t quite get there. Mr. Gross noted that there was some progress. First, there was the Medicaid for pregnant women extension, which extends coverage for women a year postpartum. Second, Medicaid was extended to maintain coverage for parents who lose their children to the child welfare system. In addition, the Build Back Better Plan has a provision that would extend the subsidies for marketplace coverage below 100% of Federal poverty, which is where they stop now creating a coverage gap.

Sonyia Richardson asked that with the Child Welfare System and allowing parents of children that go into the system to keep Medicaid, would the policy be retroactive or just forward-looking. Mr. Gross noted that he would need to follow-up with the Medicaid team and confirm. Emma Sandoe noted that North Carolina is the first state to do this and that it is unchartered territory, so the answer is not yet clear, but she suspects it to be prospective, rather than retrospective.

Catherine Sevier asked if Mr. Gross could speak to changes to any aging plans. Mr. Gross noted that the biggest change in the aging space is the personal needs allowance increase.

Secretary Cashwell thanked Ms. Hall, Mr. Denny and Mr. Gross for their presentations and update on the approved State budget.
Subcommittee Reports

The Task Force proceeded to provide subcommittee reports.

Access to Healthcare Subcommittee

Dr. Sevier, a member of the Access to Healthcare subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee is excited about the broadband opportunities as that is something they have been focused on. Dr. Sevier also stated that as the subcommittee looks at commissions and other third parties to participate in State Government, it is important to include people with lived experiences. The subcommittee also continues to support Medicaid expansion.

Educational Opportunity Subcommittee

Dr. Charrise Hollingsworth, staff liaison to the Educational Opportunity Subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee continues to work with the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and the State libraries to use funds to implement digital literacy programs. In addition, the subcommittee has also worked with program evaluators to ensure that there are metrics aligned with the overall goals of the Task Force. The subcommittee met prior to the budget being finalized, so some of the recommendations have changed some. The subcommittee is also considering health centers to partner with similar to the way they are looking at the digital literacy projects.

Economic Opportunity and Business Development Subcommittee

Rep. Yvonne Holley, chair of the Economic Opportunity and Business Development subcommittee, stated that the subcommittee just received a copy of the HUB language for inclusion that they plan to review and comment on. The subcommittee also had a presentation from the NC Business Committee for Education that went well, and the subcommittee is considering areas where they can work with them.

Trey Rabon, a member of the Economic Opportunity and Business Development subcommittee, stated that they have been working through the intended outcomes of the Mentor Protégé Program, which is intended to aid diverse suppliers who don’t understand how to do business with the State in connecting with the State and with additional business opportunities.

Rep. Holley also stated that the subcommittee has been looking at State government policies and procedures that could be revised to assist in making the contract process more accessible to diverse vendors.

Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee

Carolina Fonseca Jimenez, staff liaison of the Environmental Justice and Inclusion subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee’s most recent focus was on Long Term Goal #1, which is to support a legislative strategy to identify additions and changes to statutes and rules to incorporate environmental justice criteria into regulatory actions. Ms. Jimenez stated that the subcommittee is focused on the listening session that is being proposed, including process and listening session questions. The subcommittee is also connecting with the Governor’s Office of Public Engagement on the listening session since they agreed to assist with that. As soon as dates are nailed down, they will be shared more broadly.

With regards to Short Term Goal #2, which is to conduct an inventory of aging infrastructure in buildings (e.g., schools, senior centers, hospitals, etc.) that have exposure to radon, asbestos, mildew and mold and consider remediation projects of impacted facilities for job creation initiatives. In the budget
there is $150 million allocated to DHHS for funding of programs to remediate lead and asbestos in schools and child care centers. Over $30 million of the funds will be used to test drinking water. The subcommittee is excited about these developments.

Dr. Cedric Bright asked if the funds in the budget are for testing the drinking water in the schools. Ms. Jimenez indicated that it was. Dr. Bright asked whether there were funds if the water was not safe. Ms. Recktenwald noted that the majority of the available money is for remediation, so there are funds to address issues that are discovered.

Patient Engagement Subcommittee

Cornell Wright, chair of the Patient Engagement Subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee has been focused on pipelines for healthcare and medical schools and making sure that in those conversations, the Latinx communities are not left out. During the New Year, the subcommittee will focus on equity and inclusion in the work and goals and ensure that the right interested parties are involved.

Business Engagement Group

Justin Truesdale, Secretary of the Task Force, stated that he continues to work with Mr. Grant and Ms. Recktenwald to organize and coordinate virtual conferences covering diversity, equity and inclusion topics that are aimed at informing North Carolina businesses about, and encouraging them to adopt, DE&I practices. Mr. Truesdale noted that since the last meeting, he, Mr. Grant and Ms. Recktenwald determined that it was best to aim to hold the conference in connection with the MLK Holiday or Black History Month, rather than during the holiday months. Mr. Truesdale stated that they had collectively identified several potential panelists and will be reaching out to them shortly to line them up for the conferences. Once the panelists, dates and information are finalized, it will be shared with the Task Force.

Mr. Evin L. Grant, Policy Director, NC Department of Administration, noted that there have been conversations with parties outside of the Department of Administration that could possibly expand this to a larger platform than initially planned.

Department of Health and Human Services Presentation

Secretary Cashwell introduced Michael Leach, Staff Liaison to Access to Healthcare Subcommittee and Special Assistant at NC Department of Health and Human Services, to provide an overview of the work the NC DHHS has been doing. Dr. Sevier stated that when looking at their recommendations, the Access to Healthcare subcommittee revised one of their recommendations to state that their goal is to expand the opportunities for people of color and historically marginalized populations to participate in State government affairs by actively seeking input from individuals with shared experience, community leaders, advocacy groups and interested parties in public policy decisions, including but not limited to State plans, waivers and policy mandates. Mr. Leach noted that a number of NC DHHS members will provide updates.

Victor Armstrong, Deputy Secretary for Health Equity for NC DHHS, noted that because he was traveling, he asked Cornell Wright, Executive Director for the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities for NC DHHS, to give the presentation. Mr. Wright provided an overview of Healthier Together, where their goal was to increase the number of individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and from other historically marginalized populations receiving COVID-19 vaccinations across the state of North Carolina. As part of the Healthier Together initiative, they have provided about $1.5 million in grants to support community-based organizations across NC to support equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. From June to November of 2021, Healthier Together contacted more than 571,000 individuals, resulting in 7,000+ vaccine appointments and 7,500+ 2nd dose reminders. The initiative also
included regional health equity teams that support vaccine outreach and education efforts, use of vaccination data to inform planning and investment of resources and help matching vaccine providers with community-based organizations. Mr. Wright also provided an overview of how COVID funds were being used for Federal Qualified Health Centers.

John Resendes Analytics and Innovations Manager for NC DHHS, provided an update on the Community Health Workers for COVID Response and Resilient Communities. The purpose of this program is to create a robust infrastructure of Community Health Workers that can provide access to primary health care and coordinate social support needs for individuals quarantining and isolating to advance health equity. There are currently 480 Community Health Workers working to connect individuals with resources and educate their local communities on the COVID-19 vaccine, with the goal of reach 700 workers. Of the current Community Health Workers, 82% are women and 90% identify as Hispanic/Latinx or African American. The Community Health Workers have, to date, scheduled about 45,000 vaccine appointments.

Margaret Sauer, Director North Carolina Office of Rural Health for NC DHHS, provided an overview of the Community Health Worker Initiative. The initiative’s goal is to build, reinforce and integrate a statewide Community Health Worker infrastructure with the healthcare system with an overall vision to advance health equity. Ms. Sauer noted that the work Mr. Resendes presented on is funded with CDC dollars and the Community Health Worker Initiative is funded via a grant the NC DHHS applied for. The grant provides $3 million per year for 3 years. In doing this work, the NC DHHS has partnered with various parties who are involved in different roles (e.g., leads and coordination, training, statewide infrastructure, practice and AMH integration and evaluation) within the initiative.

Juvencio Rocha Peralta stated that it is critical for the Healthier Together and the Community Health Worker Initiative programs to interact and work together with community based organizations, and he has seen the good work that comes out of these partnerships.

Gregory Richardson asked whether there was a connection between the housing authorities and the Healthier Together and the Community Health Worker Initiative programs. Ms. Sauer said that during the pandemic they have looked a lot at quarantine and isolation housing, but acknowledged that it doesn’t fix the housing problem long-term. There is an opportunity for community health workers to help people in the community sign up for more long-term benefits beyond the pandemic where needed.

Lenora Campbell noted that Ms. Sauer mention faith-based organizations in her presentation, but wants to understand a little more on how they are engaged. In addition, Dr. Campbell noted that she didn’t hear much about healthcare systems in the presentation and asked about their level of engagement, particularly when thinking about sustainability. Ms. Sauer, noted that they work closely with the NC Healthcare Association because there are already healthcare systems that are employing community healthcare workers in their systems. She also stated that they have worked closely with community-based organizations and faith-based organizations as those organizations are the most closely connected with the community.

Juvencio Rocha Peralta asked if Ms. Sauer has the breakdowns of the people that are served by the programs. Ms. Sauer said they do have that information and would provide it separately.

Robyn McArdle, Community Development Specialist for the North Carolina Office of Rural Health for NC DHHS, provided an overview of the DHHS Health Literacy initiatives. Dr. McArdle noted that with health literacy they have focused on how the community understands information about the vaccine and helping to alleviate misinformation. Dr. McArdle noted that community health workers were vital to this process.
Announcements and Closing Remarks

Secretary Cashwell informed the Task Force that Dr. Mandy Cohen, Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, is retiring at the end of 2021. Secretary Cashwell noted that she was sad to see Secretary Cohen leave, but has a lot of confidence in Kody Kinsley as the next Secretary.

Secretary Cashwell noted that the Task Force was slated to end at the end of June, and accordingly a survey was sent to members of the Task Force to get feedback on determining next steps. The survey received responses from 50% of the members of the Task Force, and Secretary Cashwell and her team are considering the feedback.

Secretary Cashwell reminded everyone of the next Task Force meeting on February 2, 2022, and thanked everyone on the call and for their work and efforts.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 12:04 p.m. Eastern time.