



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

**Wednesday, June 2, 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, June 2, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. Eastern time via a virtual Microsoft Teams meeting.

#### **Leadership Present**

Secretary Pamela Cashwell (Chair) (joined the meeting at 10:07 a.m.)

#### **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 12:02 p.m. when the meeting was closed.)

Andres Henao  
Annette Taylor  
Carlos Rish  
Cedric Bright (joined the meeting at 10:14 a.m.)  
Charlene Green  
Christy Clayton  
Cornell Wright  
Dionne Delli-Gatti (Designee: Carolina Fonseca Jimenez)  
Gene Woods (Designee: Fernando Little)  
Gregory Richardson  
Johnathan Augustine  
Juvencio Rocha Peralta

Kevin J. Price  
Lenora Campbell  
Lynn Bottone  
Margaret Weller-Stargell  
Quinny Sanchez Lopez  
Rhett Brown  
Sonyia Richardson  
Stephanie McGarrah  
Trey Rabon  
Walter Baucom  
Yazmin Garcia-Rico  
Yvonne Holley

#### **Members Absent**

Adriana Chavela  
Catherine Harvey Sevier  
CC Lamberth  
Cedric Bright  
Dale Jenkins  
Donny Lambeth

Giselle Corbie-Smith  
James Johnson Jr.  
John Lumpkin  
Pat Martinez  
T. Anthony Spearman  
Viviana Martinez-Bianchi

#### **Others Present**

Jim Weaver, Secretary and State Chief Information Officer, NC Department of Information Technology  
Tammie Hall (Staff Liaison to Economic Opportunity & Business Development Subcommittee)  
Carolina Fonseca Jimenez (Staff Liaison to Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee)  
Sa’Metria Jones (Staff Liaison to Educational Opportunity Subcommittee)

Michael Leach (Staff Liaison to Access to Healthcare Subcommittee)  
Catherine Rivera (Staff Liaison to Patient Engagement Subcommittee)  
Justin Truesdale (Secretary)

### **Call to Order; Welcome**

Deputy Secretary David Elliot called the meeting to order at approximately 10:01 a.m. Eastern time and welcomed all in attendance.

### **Roll Call; Vote by Roll Call**

Deputy Secretary Elliot asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Annette Taylor so moved, and the motion was seconded by Christy Clayton.

Catherine Rivera, Boards and Commissions Coordinator, NC Department of Administration, asked for a roll call and vote on the May meeting minutes and indicated a quorum was present and the meeting minutes have been approved.

Secretary Pamela Cashwell apologized for being a few minutes late, because she was at another confirmation hearing. Secretary Cashwell thanks Deputy Secretary Elliot for starting the meeting and noted that he has started as the new Deputy Secretary for Advocacy, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the Department of Administration and will be working closely with the Task Force.

### **ARP Broadband Plan to Close the Digital Divide**

Secretary Cashwell introduced Jim Weaver, Secretary and State Chief Information Officer, NC Department of Information Technology, as the meeting's first speaker. Secretary Cashwell noted that Secretary Weaver brings over 30 years of professional experience in the IT space and with regards to leadership.

Secretary Weaver provided an overview of the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program and Governor Cooper's ARP Broadband Plan. With respect to the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, it provides households with a discount of up to \$50 per month off the household's internet bill. The benefit will increase to \$75 per month for those living on tribal lands. In addition, eligible households can receive benefits to aid in the purchase of a computer. Qualified households are households with income at or less than 135% of the Federal poverty guidelines. A household can also qualify if at least one member participates in a Federal benefits program, such as Medicaid, receives benefits under the reduced school lunch program, lost a job or a significant amount of income in the past year, received a Federal Pell Grant, or is part of an internet service provider's low income or COVID-19 program.

Secretary Weaver stated that there are a lot of new and high tech business coming to North Carolina, primarily because of our infrastructure and highly trained workforce. COVID-19 has underscored the need for high speed internet. Secretary Weaver noted that over 1.1 million households in North Carolina are on the wrong side of the digital divide, highlighting that White households have high speed internet at greater rates than other minority populations.

Under Governor Cooper's ARP Broadband Plan, by 2025, North Carolina intends to become a top 5 state by high speed internet adoption. The first goal is to raise the percentage of North Carolina households with high speed internet from 73% overall to 80% overall. The second goal is to increase broadband internet adoption to 80% across all racial subgroups. The final goal is to raise the percentage of North Carolina households with children with high speed internet from 81% to 100%. As part of this plan, Governor Cooper proposed a \$1.2 billion state investment spread over 4 years to achieve these goals.

The ARP Broadband Plan focuses on three pillars to close the digital gap. The first area is infrastructure and access, the second area is affordability and the third area is around digital literacy and enablement. Secretary Weaver noted that having broadband access doesn't mean people can use it. They also need the devices to access it and knowledge of how to use it. Secretary Weaver stated that a fourth pillar that is not called out specifically, but is embedded into the other three pillars, is regarding equity.

Dr. Cedric Bright asked if there is a difference in bandwidth that is needed for a business vs. personal or educational uses. Secretary Weaver noted that they are thinking about broadband access in terms of households, and are pushing to make access to 100 download/20 upload speeds throughout the state and expects that to increase over time with technology.

Secretary Cashwell thanked Secretary Weaver for his presentation.

### **American Rescue Plan Budget Recommendation Updates**

Secretary Cashwell introduced Stephanie McGarrah, Executive Director, NC Pandemic Recovery Office, Office of State Budget and Management, and a member of the Task Force, as the next speaker.

Ms. McGarrah stated that the American Rescue Plan was signed into law by President Biden on March 11 and noted that North Carolina received \$5.7 billion and local governments across North Carolina received \$3.2 billion. Ms. McGarrah stated that the goals of the Governor's recovery plan are to assist families that have been hardest hit, upgrade our infrastructure, prepare our workforce, promote business development and innovation, and position our government to best serve North Carolinians.

In addition to the \$1.2 billion dedicated to broadband funder, Governor Cooper has proposed more funding for affordable housing. Of the \$5.7 billion North Carolina received, about \$1 billion has been allocated to rent and utility assistance.

Ms. McGarrah noted that funds have been allocated to various other priorities and they are pushing to support affordable pre-K and aftercare for kids up to the age of 13. Ms. McGarrah stated that they understand that there are a lot of needs in North Carolina, including our \$22 billion in storm water needs and they have allocated \$800 million to that to help remedy the biggest issues.

Dr. Bright asked what pushbacks are they anticipating with this type of budgetary expenditure. Ms. McGarrah stated that legislature has to propose their own budget, so there will be places where they won't see eye to eye. Most agree that broadband access is a problem, but affordability is also a problem. The average internet cost in North Carolina is \$65 per month, which is not affordable for many. Ms. McGarrah noted that there are currently some Federal subsidies out there, but they are temporary, so they are looking for long term solutions.

Secretary Cashwell thanked Ms. McGarrah for the presentation and noted that many of the items being funded stem directly from the Task Force's proposals.

### **LGBTQ+ In Health Presentation**

Secretary Cashwell introduced Dr. Rhett Brown, Family Medicine Specialist, Novant Health, and a member of the Task Force, as the next speaker.

Dr. Brown note that it is Pride month and is happy to be able to provide this presentation. Dr. Brown noted that when talking about health equity, the LGBTQ community suffers and a lot of that if feeling not

welcomed when seeking healthcare. Dr. Brown highlighted that 41% of transgendered patients will attempt suicide and 25% will attempt suicide by the age of 13. Dr. Brown noted that several surrounding states have passed anti-transgender laws that will end up costing people their lives.

Dr. Brown provided an overview of patients who underwent surgery to align with the gender they identified with, which has helped them thrive in life. In one instance, a patient that was succeeding following surgery was misidentified as the wrong gender following an accident and it drove the patient into depression. Dr. Brown stated that North Carolina as a state can and should do better.

Juvenio Rocha Peralta asked what recommendations Dr. Brown would make for the Task Force and for the State of North Carolina to address the health disparity issues in the LGBTQ community. Dr. Brown noted that North Carolina Medicaid is generous in covering a lot for transgendered patients, but North Carolina does not cover much and should do more.

Nic MacGregor, a Task Force guest, asked how can we ensure that protections for the LGBTQ community are enforced. Dr. Brown stated that it starts with being visible, because it is hard to hate someone you know and love. He also noted that if there is discrimination in situations like the workplace, there should be consequences for the employer.

Secretary Cashwell thanked Dr. Brown for his presentation and noted that is important for all of us to be soldiers out there to keep these conversation going in our communities.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

The Task Force proceeded to provide subcommittee reports.

#### **Access to Healthcare Subcommittee**

Dr. Giselle Corbie-Smith, the chair of the Access to Healthcare subcommittee, highlighted the members of the subcommittee, noting that Lakeshia Moore and Emma Sandoe recently joined the subcommittee. Dr. Corbie-Smith noted that many inequities have been identified during the COVID-19 pandemic, including that inequities in access to testing and vaccines just highlighted long standing inequities in access to care. The testing and vaccines have improved, however the access to care remains a need. Dr. Corbie-Smith stated that other existing inequities include disparities in chronic medical conditions, deferred prevention, chronic disease management and primary care, economic impact of the pandemic on health in historically marginalized communities, mental health issues and post-acute COVID syndromes.

The subcommittee's recommendations are to (i) expand Medicaid, (ii) expand broadband access and (iii) ensure equitable access to telehealth. Dr. Corbie-Smith focused on advancing equity through Medicaid expansion in her presentation. She noted that more than half of the uninsured in North Carolina are low-income adults under 40 years old, there are high uninsured rates in hospitality, retail and manufacturing, racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to be uninsured, 2 in 5 uninsured adults are parents of children under 18 years old and there are tens of thousands of veterans uninsured. Medicaid expansion would cover low-income parents, low-income adults without children, low-wage workers, veterans, children who age out of Medicaid and women who would be covered if they were pregnant. Dr. Corbie-Smith also noted the benefits that other states have realized after adopting Medicaid expansion.

Secretary Cashwell asked if the subcommittee has talked about any specific proposal for accomplishing Medicaid expansion. Dr. Corbie-Smith stated that given the pandemic there are opportunities now to push forward with expansion.

### Economic Opportunity and Business Development Subcommittee

Representative Yvonne Holley, the chair of the Economic Opportunity and Business Development subcommittee, stated that Tammie Hall, Staff Liaison to the subcommittee would be providing the presentation.

Ms. Hall noted that economics is a strong driver to well-being of our communities. So, one of their goals has been to create economic incentives to encourage HUB participation around new corporations coming into the state. The subcommittee has drafted an MOU for consideration to garner buy-in from new/existing corporate partners to support statewide HUB efforts. The subcommittee has also discussed the implementation of a Tier 1 (prime) and Tier 2 (subcontractor) subcontracting plan. The subcommittee's third goal is to support apprenticeships and workforce pipe lines that create job growth. The final goal is to support implementation of the North Carolina Disparity study.

Trey Rabon stated there is a wonderful opportunity to develop a memorandum of understanding between the HUB office and business partners that would encourage business partners to embrace supplier diversity and hit stated metrics. The MOU would have an addendum to help develop apprenticeships to promote a future diverse workforce.

### Educational Opportunity Subcommittee

Lenora Campbell, a member of the Educational Opportunity subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee submitted 4 recommendations, each of which was focused on literacy. The first goal regarding financial literacy was to advocate for the North Carolina General Assembly to pass a comprehensive budget that includes funding for House Bill 92430 which would provide for personal financial literacy education for high school students, as well as a mandatory requirements for post-secondary institutions. The subcommittee also had a goal of supporting community health centers, focusing on broadband and telehealth initiatives. The third goal involved working with the NC Department of Public Instruction and others to adopt a digital literacy curriculum and toolkit that is accessible to North Carolinians and targets our culturally diverse communities.

### Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee

Carolina Fonseca Jimenez, staff liaison to the Environmental Justice and Inclusion subcommittee, noted that she would be presenting on Short Term Goal #1, which is to evaluate the feasibility of and/or designate a permanent full-time position on Environmental Justice, Equity and Inclusion in the Department of Commerce, Department of Transportation, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, and at the Office of Emergency Management. Each of the agencies helped draft a summary of the potential positions and the subcommittee provided feedback. These positions are currently in the Governor's proposed budget.

Dr. James Johnson Jr. provided an update on Short Term Goal #2, which is to conduct an inventory on aging infrastructure (schools, senior centers, etc.) that have exposure to radon, asbestos, mildew, mold, etc. and consider remediation projects of impacted facilities for job creation initiatives. Dr. Johnson noted that they have been focused on retrofitting "sick" school buildings in Edgecombe and Robeson counties that involves both remedying facilities and creating economic opportunities. Dr. Johnson noted that many of the impacted school buildings disproportionately impact children of color and is an estimated \$3.1 billion problem in North Carolina. The subcommittee has established an intervention framework that identifies the supply chain for assessment of clean-up and retrofitting to turn the sick schools into green school facilities.

Rev. Dr. Johnathan Augustine provided an update on Long Term Goal #1, which is to determine a legislative strategy to look at additions and changes to statutes and rules to incorporate environmental justice criteria into regulatory actions. In an effort to build support for any relevant regulatory actions, the subcommittee compiled a stakeholder contact list of interested parties, and continues to engage people from various backgrounds who are interested in environmental justice legislation.

Secretary Cashwell stated that one of the stated uses of pandemic recovery funds is to address issues with school buildings, including HVAC systems, and asked if that was part of the plan that Dr. Johnson is leading. Dr. Johnson noted that there is a community health initiative that is going on where they have raised \$1 million and are working with local government entities to do the proof of concept demonstrations.

Dr. Bright noted that Dr. Johnson looked at 2 of our 100 counties and asked how extensive the sick school buildings problem is. Dr. Johnson noted that it is a statewide problem in every county, but that provides the opportunity to rectify it while providing economic opportunities in all of our counties.

Juencio Rocha Peralta noted that as we fill the positions on Environmental Justice, Equity and Inclusion in certain branches of government that we consider bilingual individuals for those positions.

Dr. Charlene Green stated that she really appreciates Dr. Johnson's work on the infrastructure for the future. She also commented that people renovate their homes often, but are ignoring that they are sending their children to schools that are in disrepair, which hampers their ability to compete globally.

#### Patient Engagement Subcommittee

Catherine Rivera, staff liaison to the Patient Engagement Subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee's top priorities were (i) establishing mandatory data collection methods that are more culturally competent and (ii) expanding Medicaid. Following those priorities were (i) expanding the medical school pipeline and (ii) funding for Federally Qualified Health Centers.

Ms. Rivera noted that the pipeline program is the biggest priority to achieving equity, considering that it will help get more doctors of color into the healthcare industry in North Carolina.

#### Closing Remarks

Secretary Cashwell noted that based on the subcommittee updates that were given, combined with the presentations about the state budgetary actions that are being taken, it should give everyone optimism about the work that is coming out of the Task Force.

Secretary Cashwell also noted that she reached out to her colleagues at other agencies to request staff members to help with the work of the Task Force, and she received positive feedback and participation from most requested. Secretary Cashwell noted that the following staff members of other agencies are now assisting the Task Force:

- Department of Health and Human Services
  - Michael Leach (now the Staff Liaison to Access to Healthcare Subcommittee)
  - Lakeisha Moore
  - Emma Sandoe
- Department of Commerce
  - Betty Marrow-Taylor
  - Dr. Jenni Harris
- Department of Transportation

- Tunya Smith
- Office of State Human Resources
  - Regina Streaty
- Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
  - Brian Strong
  - Timothy Owens
  - Tracey Burns
- Community College System Office
  - Judy K. Jefferson
- Department of Information Technology
  - Jeff Sural
- Office of State Budget and Management
  - Michael Arnold

Secretary Cashwell noted that subcommittees should not feel they have to meet on the same day or only once per month, but noted that the next subcommittee meeting is scheduled for June 16 and the next full Task Force meeting is July 14.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 12:02 p.m. Eastern time.