



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

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

Leadership Present

Secretary Mark Edwards (Chair)

Members Present

(Unless otherwise noted below, all members joined the videoconference at the opening of the meeting at approximately 10:00 a.m. and all members exited the videoconference by approximately 12:03 p.m. when the meeting was closed.)

Annette Taylor
Andres Henao
Ben Money (left at 11:51 am)
Carlos Rish
Catherine Harvey Sevier
CC Lamberth
Cedric Bright
Charlene Green
Christy Clayton
Cornell Wright
Dionne Delli-Gatti
Gene Woods (Designee: Fernando Little)
Giselle Corbie-Smith

Gregory Richardson
James Johnson Jr.
John Lumpkin
Johnathan Augustine
Juvencio Rocha Peralta
Margaret Weller-Stargell
Pat Martinez
Rhett Brown
Sonyia Richardson
T. Anthony Spearman
Trey Rabon
Walter Baucom
Yvonne Holley

Members Absent

Adriana Chavela
Andres Henao
Dale Jenkins
Donny Lambeth
Kevin J. Price
Lenora Campbell

Lynn Bottone
Quinny Sanchez Lopez
Stephanie McGarrah
Viviana Martinez-Bianchi
Yazmin Garcia-Rico

Others Present

Governor Roy Cooper, Governor of North Carolina
Dr. Robert Bullard, Co-Chair, National Black Environmental Justice Network, Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy at Texas Southern University
Stephanie Hawkins, PhD, Lead, Racial Justice and Transformative Research, RTI International

Tammie Hall (Staff Liaison to Economic Opportunity & Business Development Subcommittee)
Guadalupe Jimenez (Staff Liaison to Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee)
Sa'Metria Jones (Staff Liaison to Educational Opportunity Subcommittee)
Catherine Rivera (Staff Liaison to Patient Engagement Subcommittee)
Emily Roach (Staff Liaison to Access to Healthcare Subcommittee)
Justin Truesdale (Secretary)

Call to Order; Welcome

Secretary Mark Edwards, Chair of the Task Force, called the meeting to order at approximately 10:00 a.m. Eastern time and welcomed all in attendance. Secretary Edwards reminded everyone of how important the work being done is.

Secretary Edwards provided an update on COVID-19 statistics in North Carolina and provided an overview of the Agenda. Secretary Edwards welcomed Governor Roy Cooper to the meeting.

Opening Remarks

Governor Roy Cooper noted that he worked closely with Andrea Harris and that she never stopped fighting for racial equality. Governor Cooper thanked everyone for their continued commitment to racial justice and stated that the pandemic is shining a bright light on all the issues being addressed by the Task Force. Governor Cooper said that while Secretary Sanders is moving on to serve as the Secretary of Commerce, he ensured the Task Force that Secretary Sanders is going to stay involved.

Governor Cooper indicated that he has read the Task Force's report and noted the importance of the first proposal of Medicaid Expansion. Governor Cooper also appreciated the recommendations regarding telehealth and acknowledged the need to expand access to broadband internet. Governor Cooper noted that he valued the need to expand economic opportunity to diverse businesses and increase workforce development. He further noted that he also appreciates the Task Force's focus on environmental justice.

Governor Cooper stated that the Task Force is being heard and its work is informing the utilization of funds in the upcoming budget for North Carolina. He further thanked the Task Force for its work regarding COVID-19 vaccine education and awareness and stated that it is important to ensure vaccine distribution equality.

Governor Cooper noted that we are turning the corner on the pandemic, but we must still take precautionary measures. Together we will beat the pandemic and make North Carolina a place that works for everyone.

Secretary Edwards thanked the Governor for his remarks.

Roll Call; Vote by Roll Call

Secretary Edwards asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Christy Clayton so moved, and the motion was seconded by Cedric Bright.

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

The Quest for Environmental and Climate Justice

Secretary Edwards introduced Dr. Robert Bullard, Co-Chair, National Black Environmental Justice Network, Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy at Texas Southern University, as the first speaker.

Dr. Bullard stated that when we talk about Environmental Justice Principles, it embraces the principle that all people are entitled to equal environmental protection.

Dr. Bullard noted that transportation impacts everything, including civil rights and environmental, economic and racial justice, including the ability to get a vaccination. Car ownership is associated with freedom and flexibility and 93% of US households have access to a car, however, people of color overall are least likely to have access. Dr. Bullard noted that the average American spends 17% of its household budget on transportation, while low income households spend about 1/3 of their budget on transportation.

Dr. Bullard stated the negative impacts of environmental racism are that it kills people and places, and steals health and wealth. Dr. Bullard noted that areas that are devoid of greenspace are typically in black neighborhoods and are 5-13 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than other neighborhoods. Currently, a person's zip code remains one of the most powerful predictors of health and well-being.

Dr. Bullard noted food deserts remain an issue, and when broken down by wealth, wealthier neighborhoods have more than 3 times as many supermarkets as poor neighborhoods. When analyzed by race, rather than wealth, there are 4 times as many supermarkets in mostly White neighborhoods as there are in mostly Black neighborhoods.

Dr. Bullard noted that people living in areas with high levels of fine particulate matter are 15% more likely to die from COVID-19 than someone living in an area with 1 unit less of the fine particulate pollution. Dr. Bullard highlighted the higher temperature areas that Black people live in and the negative impact on pregnancy, premature birth and other impacts that come with that. He noted that environmental disasters typically widen the racial wealth gap in the US, benefiting White communities and hurting Black communities. During environmental disasters, the groups hit hardest are people of color, people without cars, homeless people, elderly people, disabled people and sick children.

Dr. Bullard noted that sustainable plans must address equity and racial justice, including equitable development and aid for families below the poverty level. COVID-19 has brought these issues to light more than other disasters in the past. These issues need to be addressed to result in fairness, justice and equity for all.

Ms. Rivera thanked Dr. Bullard for his presentation and opened the meeting up for discussion.

Dr. Corbie Smith noted that in a recent podcast for a medical journal it was asked whether structural racism exists. The conclusion was that the primary issue was socio-economic status. Dr. Bullard stated that reaching that conclusion is similar to people who say they don't believe in gravity, because it is real whether or not you believe in it. The data is overwhelming. For example, middle income African Americans live in more polluted neighborhoods than White people who make \$10,000 per year.

Secretary Money stated that we are entering an economic shift towards electric automobiles, which also creates opportunities. Secretary Money asked how communities of color can take advantage of this shift towards clean energy. Dr. Bullard indicated that as we create a green energy economy, we need to provide opportunities to allow groups that have been historically left behind to prosper. Dr. Bullard noted that there should be a focus on getting students of color in training for these future jobs.

Dr. Catherin Sevier asked if there is there any particular thing we should focus on today that will help North Carolina have early success. Dr. Bullard stated that there are lots of low hanging fruit. There is an opportunity to have partnerships and networks that can work directly with communities and local government to come up with solutions that can be implemented sooner rather than later.

Secretary Dionne Delli-Gatti asked Dr. Bullard to send the materials detailing the drop in GDP he discussed during his presentation so that she can highlight the cost of inaction. Dr. Bullard said that he would provide the study and noted that given that the numbers are so different for the South, as compared to the North, the South should be taking more dramatic action.

Rev. Johnathan Augustine stated that he would like to see the churches do more to advance environmental justice. He noted that it easier to rally people getting out to vote, but people are not as excited about environmental issues and asked for advice to inspire people. Dr. Bullard stated that the faith community is beginning to step up, and that every successful social movement has always had the faith leaders involved. Dr. Bullard noted that getting the youth involved is important, highlighting that the racial justice movement that started in 2020 was led by the youth. The churches should ensure that their members are educated and can make the right decisions in elections and other actions and positions being taken. Dr. Bullard noted that the quest for justice is not a sprint, it is a marathon relay, stating that one generation runs its marathon, then it passes it on to the next generation to run their marathon.

Dr. Charlene Green noted that the life expectancy in Black and Brown communities is decreasing, due in part to COVID-19, and asked if Dr. Bullard could send five policies to the Task Force that it could consider supporting. Dr. Bullard said that he would forward some of the policies being worked on by the groups he is involved with. Dr. Bullard highlighted that an important part of implementing policies is ensuring accountability.

Secretary Edwards thanked Dr. Bullard for his presentation and for his enthusiasm about environmental justice.

Policy Implementation Plan, RTI International

Emily Roach informed the Task Force that RTI International would be working with the Task Force for the next 6 months to be an extension of the Task Force in forming and executing on an implementation plan. Emily introduced Stephanie Hawkins, PhD, Lead, Racial Justice and Transformative Research, RTI International.

Dr. Hawkins noted that RTI plans to use the 4 guiding principles the Task Force agreed to at the start of its work: (i) put people first, (ii) ensure sustainability of efforts, (iii) be adaptable to change and scalable to need and (iv) ensure transparency and accountability. Camille Gourdet noted that she will be leading the first 2 tasks of RTI with respect to the Task Force where they will assess the best ways to implement the policy recommendations. Ms. Gourdet stated that they want focus on the impact of the recommendations to ensure that they reduce disparities, rather than widen them. RTI will focus on whether the policies are best implemented through State law, an executive order or a procedural change within certain institutions. Erin Mallonee noted that she will serve as the Policy Implementation Plan task leader. Ms. Mallonee noted that there are 5 tasks in the implementation plan, as follows: (i) review the task force biannual report, (ii) determine policy categories, (iii) develop policy implementation plan, (iv) identify policy gaps and (v) present deliverables.

Cornell Wright asked if RTI would be available to work with the subcommittees as well. Dr. Hawkins noted that RTI would certainly work to figure out ways to support and work closely with the subcommittees in developing the implementation plan.

Dr. Corbie-Smith noted that one thing many members have talked about is an overarching strategy and framework for the Task Force and wanted to know what RTI thought about forming the strategy and framework. Dr. Hawkins noted that the areas mentioned as focus points were meant to be for discussion, so that they can be changed and adjusted as needed going forward. Ms. Roach noted that the staff liaisons would meet monthly to ensure that the thoughts of the subcommittees are incorporated in RTI's work.

Representative Yvonne Holley noted that many of our educational institutions are limited in what they can do while churches have more freedom, however, churches don't have access to the research function of educational institutions. Rep. Holley asked if RTI will be able to help with ways to combine resources and efforts of the institutions and communities. Dr. Hawkins noted RTI's role is to implement the goals that the Task Force laid out and the goals are clear that community engagement is important, which includes engagement of educational institutions and churches.

Juvencio Rocha Peralta noted that one of the biggest gaps he's seen with the pandemic is the Latino community and asked that when the Task Force and RTI proceeds with implementation the Latino community not be overlooked. Dr. Hawkins stated that RTI will need to be accountable to the Task Force and agrees that attention to the Latino community is important.

Ms. Rivera thanked Dr. Hawkins for attending the meeting and sharing information about RTI's role with the Task Force and its implementation plan.

Subcommittee Reports

The Task Force proceeded to provide subcommittee reports.

Access to Healthcare Subcommittee

Dr. Corbie-Smith, the chair of the Access to Healthcare subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee had a robust conversation around vaccine delivery and equity and the ongoing work at the Department of Health and Human Services. The subcommittee also had a combined meeting with the Educational Opportunity Subcommittee to continue the discussion around vaccine delivery.

Dr. Carlos Rish informed the Task Force that they had their first community-wide vaccination program for Hispanic and Latinx people. They were able to use social media, as well as television and radio stations to help get the message out. All 200 vaccines were distributed, and they are set to get more vaccines. Dr. Rish noted that he feels the Latinx community is starting to get more attention, which is positive movement.

Dr. Sevier stated that starting today, there is a program that is going to be rolled out in connection with DHHS and AARP to target 13 zip codes in North Carolina that are predominately minority, high risk communities to engage with HUB dialing to help set up vaccination appointments. Dr. Sevier also noted that Dr. Lenora Campbell is also working with 9 pastors and congregations to address social determinants of health in high risk communities.

Economic Opportunity and Business Development Subcommittee

Rep. Yvonne Holley, the chair of the Economic Opportunity and Business Development subcommittee, noted that the subcommittee discussed that 40% of Black businesses had gone out of business due to COVID-19. The subcommittee discussed equity funding and how to get more minority businesses the support they need to get back into business or sustain their businesses during the pandemic. The subcommittee is continuing to analyze the disparity report and considering how COVID funds are being spent and recommendations regarding uses of available funds.

Educational Opportunity Subcommittee

Sonya Richardson, a member of the Educational Opportunity subcommittee, stated that the subcommittee had a meeting with the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to discuss access to diverse and marginalized members of the population and ways in which access and education to them could be increased. The subcommittee also noted the need to slightly update a recommendation to be sure that the needs of marginalized populations are made a priority and not an accommodation, particularly given the inequities in educational systems that are being exacerbated due to COVID-19.

Environmental Justice and Inclusion Subcommittee

Carolina Fonseca Jimenez, staff liaison to the Environmental Justice and Inclusion subcommittee, reminded the Task Force that Short Term Goal #1 is to evaluate the feasibility and designate a fulltime 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. Ms. Jimenez noted that the agencies have provided draft position descriptions and the subcommittee members have reviewed those and provided some feedback.

Ms. Jimenez noted that Short Term Goal #2 which is to conduct an inventory of aging infrastructure and buildings (schools, senior centers, hospitals, etc.) that have exposure to radon, asbestos, mildew, mold, etc. and consider remediation projects of impacted facilities for job creation initiatives. Dr. Jim Johnson had a conversation with the superintendents of Robeson and Edgecombe counties to gauge their interest in working with the subcommittee to gather data and information to help with determining remediation.

Patient Engagement Subcommittee

Cornell Wright, the chair of the subcommittee, stated that the conversations in the last subcommittee meeting centered on the need and desire to have linguistic equity as a part of the conversation. The subcommittee feels that this has been forgotten, even before COVID, and if we are considering issues regarding safety and guidance, particularly information that is forward facing to the patient population, it needs to be provided in multiple languages. The subcommittee also noted that the concept of linguistic equity should be in the framework and fabric of state government.

Business Engagement Group

Justin Truesdale, Secretary of the Task Force, provided an update on the Business Engagement Group, noting that the group has collected information from among the group regarding corporate best practices related to diversity efforts. The group is refining the list and information and is planning to meet later this month to update and incorporate comments from the group into the list. The Business Engagement Group is also considering the best presentation of the information so that it can both be accessible and helpful to other businesses in North Carolina.

Closing Remarks

Secretary Edwards thanked Dr. Bullard for joining the meeting and for his enthusiasm that we should all have in order to get the change we are looking for. Secretary Edwards also thanked RTI for joining the meeting and providing an update. Finally, Secretary Edwards thanked the Task Force members for their time and work.

Secretary Edwards asked for a motion to approve the adjournment of the meeting. Cornell Wright so moved, and the motion was seconded by Annette Taylor.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 12:03 p.m. Eastern time.