

Champaign County Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF)
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 14, 2016
6:30 pm

I. Call to Order

Facilitator Samuel Byndom calls meeting to order at 6:30.

II. Roll Call

Members Present:

M. Ar-Raheem, S. Balgoyen, L. Branham, S. Byndom, A. Evans, A. Felty, D. Harber, R. Hughes, A. James, E. Patt, C. Randolph, H. Ross, K. Schneider, S. Silver, D. Turner, G. Walter, E. Dee, R. Byrd.

Members Absent:

K. Bryan, P. Burnside, B. Butts

III. Approval of Agenda

Lynn Branham requested that “Community Justice Task Force” be added to title of presentation on the agenda. Gerry Walter moved to approve the agenda. Kevin Schneider seconded the motion. The motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Gerry moved to approve the minutes of March 24th. Kevin seconded the motion.

V. Public Participation

1. *Patsi Petri*. She wanted to address the article published in the News Gazette regarding 3 County Board members who went to the county jail. She performed her own research regarding those in the jail for jaywalking. She contacted the sheriff to see data from Halloween weekend and Nov 1 to March 15. She received under 20% random sample: contained names, addresses, reasons in jail, race, age, booking date, and release date. She found nothing on jaywalking and nothing on jail for bonds. She stated the reasons they were in jail are not reasons we would want people walking around. She said most people in jails are from metropolitan areas, not the county. She did not rank the seriousness of the charges. She is concerned that there is very little deep analysis of the charges of people in jail. How many people would not be in jail if small charges were removed. The questions that we have to ask ourselves are if laws were changed, would it make a significant difference of how many people are in jail. She encouraged the task force to dig deep into the reasons people are in jail through analysis. David Harber asked if these people were all arrested or ticketed. Esther Patt asked if she had a random sample? What percent of the data did she receive? Patsi responded that she picked a range of time. Days

were sampled randomly, but each day received was a full day of data. Esther asked if she did not look at every person in jail during that time; Patsi responded that she has complete records but only for days given to her which include every person that was booked or there that day. She thinks it is important to consider how many people would be removed from jail if laws were changed, such as possession of marijuana. Kevin asked if she parsed out how many were for ordinance violations. She responded that they were each specific to the charge. There was a large amount of batteries. Sara Balgoyen asked whether these were arrests not proven guilty. Patsi responded yes, explaining that she only asked for who was in the jail; she does not have any guilty/not guilty information. Sara stated that she would love to see the data but wondered whether there a concern about privacy. Patsi said that she will check, but she was surprised she could see the data.

2. *Martel Millen (Urbana)* – He stated people won't be locked up for jaywalking; they will be locked up for missing court or not paying fines. He said that you need to see what happened in city court. He would like the task force to look into the reasons that people lose licenses. The task force should really look at the driving data in this county. He said that if you are stopped, you can be arrested for a lot of other charges in addition to driving without a license. He is really bothered that his friend died in the jail after being arrested for driving without a license and couldn't pay the \$300 fine. Kevin asked if he saw any reason why a license is not pulled. Martel responded that the officer has discretion for what tickets to give you. This could be improper lane, no tail light, excessive speed without a radar.

VI. Task Force Member Updates

Sara updated the task force on work that has happened for community meetings. She said we have a good alliance of a few groups who are joining together to host an event. They are working on finding a location for one meeting. The community center in Rantoul is happy to help host and they are looking at dates in May. Several times and locations would be good. Having them all set so they can be advertised together would be good. They are looking for suggestions or leads for Urbana.

Sara asked Kevin if the bar association is willing to support a meeting. Kevin said he will contact the group to see if they can support. Sara asked him to let her know when he talks to the group. Kevin doesn't know about the law of whether or not he could purchase on their behalf. Artice said we are still shooting for having the first event the second week of May. NCAAM is a 5013c that may be able to handle donations.

Esther contacted the ACLU and they are willing to contribute financially. The organization would like to know about how much to budget. Maryam said that the Independent Media Center is willing to host an event. Maryam can coordinate. Sara noted that the second week is graduation so we need to avoid that weekend. Sara asked that we need to have someone be the artist to help design a flier.

Ellyn said that she registered with UPTV and shared her idea that she could use people to speak about their experiences. The task force could work this into a whole program or video. It won't cost the task force anything. Sara agreed it would be a good idea if we taped the forums. David liked the idea and thought the statements would be more powerful for when we finish – final product. He suggested that the group solicit people at the community meetings. Demario liked the idea and the piece about being anonymous. Artice and Henry also expressed support.

Sara said the Community Coalition and CU Citizens for Social Justice both would like to present. Sam noted that Court Watch would also like to present.

VII. Presentations

Community Justice Task Force (Lynn Branham)

The task force was created in 2012 and finished in 2013. Lynn introduced the careers and backgrounds of members on the group. They developed 10 recommendations – she reviewed these recommendations. A handout was shared with the task force. Special notes are listed below:

- Restorative justice – this places the focus on working with people and the community.
- She explained that the county applied to MacArthur grant along with the attorney general who would play lead role in applying restorative justice.
- Pre-trial services are critical for assessing risk of not showing up to court and the risk to public safety.
- She explained the news that after report was published, a memo was sent to county board from justice officials stating that pre-trial services were tried as a pilot, and it was determined they would not be successful. This was refuted by an independent organization. Kevin asked which judge it was. She named the judge but reiterated that we need to work with all members of the criminal justice system.
- The County received a grant from DOJ to facilitate planning a program related to behavioral health crisis services in order to limit the number of people with mental health issues taken to jail. There appears to be positive movement on this issue.
- She feels recommendation #7 is key for a well-functioning criminal justice system. There was not strong support for this type of council.
- When the grant application was put together, they received great support from people in the county working on improving the criminal justice system.

James Kilgore also spoke briefly about the task force. He spoke of the re-entry program which has been implemented (funded by the County Board) and has been operating for two year. He said that they are working with people returning from country jail and state prison for case management and service referrals. The County Board voted to give money to pre-trial services but it was not used. He explained that there were contentious issues in the CJTF and talked about how they worked through them. The most contentious was racial justice and exploring racial justice disparities. African American community members came and expressed strong support

for including racial justice as an issue. There were also differences regarding the participation of a criminal justice coordinating council. He said there were two phases of the task force. The first was to gather information and the second was more directed and included the group working well together. He recommended that a different style of operation be used when the group is trying to come to a final product.

David asked if anything was put into place to assemble data into a single location or to cross reference it? He wondered why there is a seeming lack of transparency. Lynn deferred to Dottie Vura-Weis. Dottie stated that some information is available. Anyone can look up who has been booked in the County jail. The deputy Sheriff did make some general data available on the sheriff's website. She is working on getting data together. No aggregate information is really available. She believes this area is a major concern. Lynn noted that a criminal justice coordinating council would include data sharing. She also stated that the MacArthur Foundation announced they will be doing something, likely a competitive grant, this fall.

Kevin asked if they aggregate the data in any way. She stated that she does not know. He also asked if anyone has tried using FOIA requests for information. She responded that when she has made requests for additional data, the Sheriff's office has answered the requests quickly. David asked if the information that is requested could be made public. She stated that once the request is made, the data could be shared publicly.

Esther Patt asked if the money for pre-trial services that was allocated by the County Board went anywhere else. James explained that the re-entry program was given money to form, but pre-trial services were not funded. He noted that Susan Silver is a member of the Re-entry council. Artice asked what Community Elements is. Kevin said it was previously the Champaign Community Health Center.

Build Programs Not Jails - James Kilgore, Alex Berrera, Dottie Vura-Weis, Kristina Khan.

James introduced why the program was started. Community members were opposed to the construction of a new jail, and they felt this way because they thought there was a disproportionate number of African Americans in the jail. The group found that in the state of Illinois, the disparity was worse. Wisconsin has the highest per capita incarceration rate of African American men. Iowa has the highest rate of disproportion between whites and blacks. James stated that this is specifically anti-black racism. People in Champaign who are classified as Hispanic are "underrepresented" in the prison population. James has not found states that have higher disparity between African Americans in prison and those in the general population.

Dottie Vura-Weis presented data which was included in handouts to the RJTF. Alex also presented data from handouts to the RJTF. He also encouraged the task force to explore the data. Kristina spoke about the recommendations of the group. She highlighted the school to prison pipeline work that they have been doing, and stated they would like to get a better snapshot of how this is playing out locally.

The task force asked how many students were suspended from Urbana in 2014-2015. Kristina responded she believes it was 9 students. She also walked the group through more specifics of the suspension data.

Artice asked about the jail population. He also asked what percentage of individuals in the jail are from CU and Rantoul. The group did not know. He asked how the numbers of kids expelled from CU vs. those who live in the County.

Kristina explained the online system of how to look up school data. Amy Felty asked if data about the year of students was available. Kristina noted that all of that data is FOIA. She stated that Urbana will give data freely but Champaign will fight you on it. David noted that this data has to be presented to the state on an annual basis.

Kevin asked if they looked at what percentage of different levels of bail were for which offenses. Dottie noted that she has not looked at this because of the confusing language of charges. He also asked if they looked at why people had warrants and were excluded. They did not. He asked if they knew how many people were being held on civil bonds. She was not able to look at that. Kevin asked about the lengths of people held in jail. He asked how many people were pleading to a crime in order to be released. They did not have this data.

Susan asked if they have determined a specific procedure that judges determine the bonds they assign. Dottie explained that there is a list of charges with appropriate bail amounts, and the judge can make judgments on moving this up or down. Lawyers may argue for more reasonable bails. Amy asked about who can decide charges.

VIII. Task Force Member Comments

Artice brought up the data on drivers' license data and recommended people look at this.

Amy thinks that personal stories from people are very important. People can state how they felt, so the RJTF can begin to pin the anguish of what people go through to what we are doing through criminal justice. Secondly, personal stories help us find out which questions we should be asking.

Ryan Hughes brought up idea of supporting the Urbana City Council's recent action to reduce the fine for possession of marijuana.

IX. Adjournment

Maryam Ar-Raheem moved to adjourn. Kevin seconded the motion. The Chair adjourned the meeting.