

Champaign County Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF)
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 28, 2016
6:30 pm

I. Call to Order

Substitute Facilitator Sara Balgoyen (S. Byndom absent) called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

II. Roll Call

Members Present:

S. Balgoyen, L. Branham, P. Burnside, B. Butts, R. Byrd, A. Felty, D. Harber, R. Hughes, A. James, E. Patt, H. Ross, K. Schneider, S. Silver, D. Turner, G. Walter.

Members Absent:

M. Ar-Raheem, K. Bryan, S. Byndom, E. Dee, A. Evans, C. Randolph.

III. Approval of Agenda

Sara offered an amendment to the agenda to acknowledge alternates now serving as full time members because of two resignations. It was noted that no voting needs to occur to add the substitute members to full membership. Kevin Schneider recommended adding this note to the agenda for next week. Kevin moved to approve the agenda. Artice James seconded. The motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Esther Patt moved to approve the minutes. Artice James seconded the motion. The motion carried.

V. Public Participation

Astrid Berkson – Ms. Berkson addressed the task force to say that listening to stories of the community is very important. She encouraged the task force to go out to churches and clubs to listen. She noted that the work of the task force will be much easier if the task force can make it everyone's issue.

Patsi Petri – Ms. Petri noted that she sent data from the analysis of the jail population from mid-August of 2015. She also sent data on bookings which she requested for the weekend she visited the jail and from November to mid-March with random samples. She hopes the task force members will look at the data and pursue more data. She then introduced everyone to the new County Administrator, Rick Snider. She hopes the members will speak with him. Mr. Snider then addressed the task force. He encouraged the task force to reach out to him.

VI. Task Force Member Updates

Artice James updated the task force on the community forums. He noted that Henry Ross offered the Church of Living God as a venue for a task force forum. A date needs to be established. Artice believes the first part of June will be good for the meeting. A flier also needs to be developed. Finally, means of distributing the information of the meeting needs to be added. Henry added that he believes we should be going around to other churches and sites. Artice noted that we want to look at doing only one and then deciding if more are needed. Demario noted that the task force needs to involve other churches in the community forums.

Lynn asked when the format will be decided on and was concerned that her suggestion for structure was misunderstood. Sara said that the group of volunteers spoke about having a short introduction and then doing small groups. Artice thinks it depends on how many people show up and that the group needs to be prepared for some small groups. Kevin agreed with Artice and added that having a list of starting questions will be useful.

Sara recommended adding a discussion on the structure of the forums to the agenda for the next meeting.

VII. Presentations

Community Coalition

Tracy Parsons – Facilitator of the Community Coalition. This group was born out of the tragedy of an officer-involved shooting of an unarmed youth. They hosted a similar community forum, and the coalition was created out of that. It is a space for government, law enforcement, education, and the community to come together to address social and economic challenges around non-traditional youth. One thing the group has seen is that the community has gone through an unprecedented level of violence. Champaign County was listed after Chicago, Rockford, and East St. Louis as the most violent community in Illinois. The coalition meets monthly on the second Wednesday of the month. Mr. Parsons stated that police can't arrest their way out of the issue, and it will take a community approach. They found a program called "Don't Shoot" by David Kennedy. Peoria has a "Don't Shoot" initiative which local law enforcement officials have observed. A decision was made through the Community Coalition to adopt a "Don't Shoot" initiative as priority. He noted that this is not a program but an approach to address the issue of gun violence. He noted that when an incident occurs in a neighborhood, law enforcement comes in with a wide net and many people are at risk.

He introduced the task force to CU Fresh Start, and noted that one of the effects of gun violence is that dangerous situations in neighborhoods are normalized. He shared data on gun violence in the past year, and the task force was encouraged to look at the "Don't Shoot" book by David Kennedy. Mr. Parsons then explained the components of the initiative including stories from the visit to the Peoria program.

Kevin asked about the statistics that Mr. Parsons presented and then asked how individuals are selected. Mr. Parsons stated that there are at least 50 people who fall within the criteria that has been established. They are starting with a pilot of about 25 people. Peoria's program said that about 30% of the individuals come forward.

Artice asked about the status of the community service providers. Mr. Parsons said they are working on growing this and that a case manager will likely sit at the CU Prairie Health center. He stressed that the coalition is not a program, and they are working to build the community infrastructure to serve the initiative. Artice also asked if any data has been collected in the two years since they started. Mr. Parsons said that one of their many partners likely is collecting relevant data but the coalition is not. Kevin then asked how strong the correlations were between the criteria for at-risk individuals and actual crimes/issues observed. Mr. Parsons noted that this initiative is focused only on gun violence. He also said that objective criteria cannot be used, so the criteria presented is believed to be a fair and accurate description of individuals involved in gun violence. Kevin asked how to address law enforcement officials about the problem of “arresting their way out of issues”. Mr. Parsons stated that law enforcement are open to new strategies for effective policing and noted his support for leaders in local law enforcement.

Demario Turner asked if Mr. Parsons thinks this framework could be applied to other violent crimes (domestic violence, violence in school systems). Mr. Parsons believes that the principles can be applied and discussed the history of over-policing of Black communities. Demario also asked if he thought this could be applied to non-violent crimes such as traffic violations. Mr. Parsons stated his belief in sound, data driven policing.

Susan Silver asked about the funding for these services. Mr. Parsons stated that he does not believe in waiting for the resources to begin helping the issue because it is a crisis situation and then noted on-going justice grant applications.

Pam Burnside asked if the service provider component involved helping individuals look for employment. He noted that other models are very individual-driven and believes this initiative will be as well.

Lynn Branham asked where in the process that the family of the individuals is involved. Mr. Parsons stated that families may be invited to participate in the call-in. Lynn commented that this initiative is very important to the community. She also stated that having the family involved is very effective. Mr. Parsons responded that PLL (family model to address violence and anger issues) would be encouraged to be used as a resource for the individuals in the initiative.

CU Citizens for Peace and Justice

Brian Dolinar, Chris Evans, and Durl Kruse. Brian noted that organizations in the community fought for this task force and CU Citizens for Peace and Justice is still appalled by individuals who are attempting to negatively influence the task force. CUCPJ has been around since 2004 and their first issue was fighting the use of tasers. The group also does court-watching, has protested drone use, and serves as first responders when someone dies in jail. The group believes that community pressure and participation has brought about recent changes to law enforcement.

Mr. Kruse introduced himself and shared the IDOT traffic stop data that he has studied. He shared data for the Sheriff, Champaign, Urbana, and University of Illinois. He presented the data which was shared with the task force in packets of information. He noted that the data presented likely shows similar trends from previous years before data was collected and shared. Most

notably, no other racial group is represented in the traffic stop data above their representation in the general public. Additionally, he noted that the Hispanic population is cited at a much higher rate than their representation in the general population. He recommended that the task force request whatever data the group would like to look at from the local law enforcement agencies. He expressed that the data suggests traffic stops are used for reasons other than consistently trying to improve traffic safety. He also noted that the racial disparities of traffic stops were observed no matter the number of annual traffic stops. Mr. Kruse believes that the traffic stop disparities have become commonplace and that traffic stops are important because they represent the first contact with the criminal justice system.

CUCPJ also collected data on charges and court cases involving juveniles in Champaign County, and Mr. Kruse shared summaries of this data with the task force. He recommended that the task force look at how juveniles are treated in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Evans presented summaries of data on the county jail bookings.

Mr. Dolinar stressed that they do not find that individuals who are placed in the criminal justice system are always people who should not be in the community. He also noted the recent deaths in jail of two Black individuals: Toya Frazier and Paul Clifton.

Esther asked if they have data on who gets ticketed vs. who gets warnings. Mr. Kruse noted that this information is in the data but that it needs to be compiled. He also highlighted that the traffic data reports are summary level and simply show that the issues of racial disparity need to be investigated further, but that the local agencies should be pressed to begin collecting additional data to determine specifically why the disparities exist. He noted that the rates of citations across the groups do not appear to show racial bias, but the number and rates of stops by race does.

Kevin asked if they could talk more about the subject of whether or not most individuals booked are dangerous and should not be released. Mr. Evans responded. Mr. Dolinar asked Mr. Evans how many cases end up being pursued by the state's attorney. Only 4,000 prosecutions of 8,400 per year are taken further. He suggested that investigating the race of the cases that are prosecuted is important.

Kevin asked if there is any data on bond amounts by race. Mr. Evans responded that they do not have this. Kevin asked about a racial disparity in failure to respond charges. Mr. Evans did not have specific data on this question.

Artice asked if individuals cited for traffic violations have to go to jail. Mr. Evans stated that this is unclear. Pam stated that in bond court, individuals were arrested on petty offenses and were thus "non-jail-able" but they would be kept in jail overnight. She clarified the process of specific charges and how and why individuals are sent to bail court.

Kevin asked about the racial makeup of juries and whether CUCPJ observes any racial disparity issues. Mr. Dolinar noted that the numbers of African-Americans serving on juries has increased but they are still small. He also stated that he feels the County has only been continually collecting data and stories and creating task forces and organizations.

VIII. Task Force Member Comments

Esther Patt stated that Community Elements presented to the housing authority regarding the housing authority's policy of restricting convicted individuals and she believes some progress is being made on this topic.

Ryan Hughes addressed the subject of supporting the City of Urbana in their recent resolution to reduce the fine for possession of marijuana. Kevin and Esther supported the idea of a resolution. Lynn suggested that the task force stay focused on our mission and continue collecting information and stories before creating any recommendations. Kevin suggested discussing this at the next meeting.

IX. Adjournment

Kevin moved to adjourn and Artice seconded the motion and the motion carried.