



**RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, March 19, 2025, 6:30 P.M.**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**ATTENDEES:**

Checked boxes indicate present. Unchecked boxes indicate absence.

***Community Members:***

☒ Dr. Pat Grant (Chair), ☒ Sonia Canzater, ☒ Dr. Isaac Cudjoe, ☒ Joseph Hurst, ☒ Dr. Tasnuva Khan, Shane Lloyd, Akufuna Ngonda, Judith Thomas and Gustavo Torres.

***County Staff Members:***

James Stowe (Vice Chair), ☒ Selena Mendy Singleton (Parliamentarian), ☒ Dr. Anthony ☒ R. Alston, ☒ Ilana Branda, ☒ Lieutenant Oneil Ormsby, Dourakine Rosarion, ☒ Aisha Williams

***Guest:***

☒ Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield (D-19), ☒ Khalid Afzal

**CALL TO ORDER**

- The meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm by Dr. Pat Grant.

**AGENDA**

- No objections. The agenda was adopted.

**MINUTES**

- The January 22, 2025, meeting minutes were approved.
- The February 19, 2025, minutes were motioned to be accepted as corrected/amended. Ilana pointed out she was marked present, although she was not present. She also abstained from voting on the minutes because she was not there.

**AGENDA ITEM:**

**Item 1:** Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield (D-19), who serves on Maryland's Judiciary Committee and chairs the Subcommittee on Family and Juvenile Law, shared updates on several bills important to her and the community.

She first explained that the legislative session is nearing its end, with approximately 20 days remaining. At this stage, bills from the House and Senate have been exchanged, known as the “crossover,” meaning these bills have a stronger chance of becoming law.

Delegate Crutchfield highlighted three specific bills:

### **HB 1198: Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Prerelease Services for Female Incarcerated Individuals**

- This bill addresses a critical gap: Maryland currently has prerelease units exclusively for incarcerated men, but none specifically designed for women. HB 1198 aims to establish the state’s first women-only prerelease unit, ensuring the facility is appropriately designed, located, and managed. It would help incarcerated women nearing release receive the necessary tools, resources, and support for successful reintegration into society. This bill emphasizes accelerating the timeline to establish the facility, as the current proposed location is deemed unsuitable.

### **Next, Delegate Crutchfield discussed HB 1423:**

- This bill proposes creating a commission to review racial disparities in Maryland’s criminal justice system. The commission would investigate why African Americans are disproportionately represented in the state’s prisons. She highlighted the troubling fact that Maryland incarcerates African Americans at higher rates than even states such as Alabama and Mississippi. Although HB 1423 did not advance to the Senate this year, Delegate Crutchfield plans to sponsor the bill again at the next session.

### **Lastly, Delegate Crutchfield described HB 964:**

- A bill establishing the Task Force to investigate historic racial injustices in Montgomery County. Specifically, this task force would address the forced displacement of a historically Black community in Montgomery County due to urban renewal policies enacted under the Housing Act of 1949. The task force would explore the historical context, document the reasons behind the displacement, and consider possible resolutions or reparations for affected families. This bill has passed the House and is currently awaiting Senate consideration.

### **Comments:**

#### **1. Committee Member’s Questions:**

##### **a. Question 1:**

- Topic:** Capacity of the new women’s prerelease facility under HB 1198.
- Response:** Delegate Crutchfield notes the facility aims to accommodate around **90 women**, based on the current number of women in prerelease status statewide. She acknowledges that Maryland has multiple prerelease units for men (about five), highlighting a disparity. However, she does not have exact numbers for men at hand.

### **Key Points:**

- Approximately **90 women** currently qualify statewide for prerelease status.
- Maryland operates about **five men's prerelease units**, but none specifically dedicated to women.
- The planned women's facility (**HB 1198**) seeks to address this imbalance.

### **2. Committee Members' Clarifying Questions (Aisha, DOCR Staff, Montgomery County Detention Center)**

- a. Acknowledges that Montgomery County's prerelease facility currently houses both men and women, but with far fewer women (presently around **six women**, previously **15–20**).
- b. Asks for clarification about whether state-level prerelease facilities for women exist at all, or if the Montgomery County facility is unique.

### **Delegate Crutchfield's Response:**

- Clarifies the difference between the **county-level** facility in Montgomery County (housing both men and women) and the **state-level** system, which currently lacks any dedicated women's prerelease facilities.
- Notes the current issue at Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW), where women in prerelease programs reside within the central correctional institution, causing tension and disruption. Women eligible for prerelease may face hostility or resentment from women who are not eligible, creating a disruptive environment.
- Emphasizes creating a dedicated State **woman-only prerelease unit** to address these issues.
- Commends the Montgomery County facility as one of the best examples in the state, drawing attention from other jurisdictions.

### **3. Motion Made:** Joe Hurst motioned that we immediately write letters of support for HB 1198 (Women's Prerelease Facility) and HB 964 (Task Force addressing historical displacement) and prepare to write a supportive letter for HB 1423 upon its reintroduction. Sonia Canzater seconded the motion. **The committee formally approved the motion.**

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**Item 1:** Sonia provided important updates and context to the committee regarding significant challenges immigrant communities face in Montgomery County. She highlighted several specific issues:

Sonia explained that due to growing fear around immigration enforcement, many immigrant families, particularly from African, Caribbean, and Latin American communities, have dramatically altered their daily behaviors. Local schools with high immigrant populations are seeing noticeable student enrollment and attendance declines.

Parents have become extremely cautious, often packing their essential belongings into cars so they can quickly relocate if threatened. Some parents are so fearful of being targeted that they have stopped personally bringing their children to school, opting to drop them off at a distance or have them walk to avoid potential encounters with the authorities.

Additionally, Sonia raised concerns about recent federal actions to reduce multilingual accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. She specifically mentioned reintroducing the “Public Charge” rule, which restricts immigrants’ access to green cards if they use specific public assistance programs. She explained that this policy discourages immigrant communities, even those safely established with green cards or in the immigration process, from utilizing critical social services such as Medicaid, healthcare, and other supports, due to fear of jeopardizing their immigration status.

This federal policy change has led many immigrant families to withdraw from essential programs, negatively impacting their health and well-being, as families fear that participating in these programs could make them appear dependent and, therefore, less eligible for permanent residency or citizenship.

Sonia emphasized that these challenges affect immigrant families silently and urged the committee to remain aware of how such federal policies translate into everyday hardships for community members. She advised the committee to raise awareness, engage with the county council on policy solutions, and ensure these issues are regularly discussed and addressed proactively.

**Item 2:** Anthony Alston provided updates regarding Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) efforts to support immigrant students and their families, particularly amid concerns related to immigration enforcement:

- **Increased Enrollment from Frederick County:** Montgomery County schools have experienced a recent increase in student enrollment from Frederick County, likely due to Frederick County’s stricter immigration enforcement practices. He noted that since Frederick County has allowed greater federal immigration enforcement presence (ICE activities), families have relocated to Montgomery County, leading to higher student enrollment numbers in some areas.

#### **MCPS Immigration Support Efforts:**

Anthony highlighted several proactive steps MCPS has taken:

- **Clear Stance from MCPS Leadership:** MCPS has publicly emphasized that all students are “welcomed, valued, affirmed, validated, respected, and loved,” reinforcing a safe and inclusive environment for immigrant students and families.

- **Resources for Staff and Families:** MCPS developed comprehensive resources and step-by-step guidance on how school staff should respond if ICE or other federal immigration authorities approach the school. Principals were provided with presentations and drop-in sessions to answer questions.

- **Know Your Rights Information:** A QR code, linking to multilingual “Know Your Rights” resources, has been compiled, making it accessible for families and staff.
- **Community and Family Support:** MCPS has adjusted its family directory policies to allow parents to opt out, protecting families concerned about misusing their personal information.
- **Legal and Procedural Clarity:** Anthony emphasized that MCPS guidelines prioritize student well-being, legal compliance, and transparency. They clearly outline procedures for interaction with ICE agents, such as documentation and communication protocols to protect students.

Anthony concluded by offering to share these resources widely, reinforcing MCPS’s commitment to protecting immigrant families and students within the school system.

### **Comments:**

- The consensus is that the goal is to speak with someone from HHS to tell us how they handle Public Charge.
- Ilana said she is happy to contact someone within the county and get back to us to understand how people are responding.
- Concerns were raised about social cohesion within Montgomery County. Due to immigration policies, there is a risk of social tension or community displacement, as there has been increased migration from other areas (such as Frederick County).
- Emphasis was placed on clarifying that immigrant students are not being associated with increased crime, but rather that students and families face heightened anxiety, trauma, and feelings of displacement.
- Concern was expressed about the long-term impacts of these stresses on students’ mental health and academic support, including:
- Increased student fatigue and frustration because school counselors and staff are overwhelmed and hard to reach.
- Students feel unsupported or misunderstood because they’re unaware of the larger systemic pressures affecting educators.
- There was a suggestion to consider re-evaluating MCPS policies like the “no-show” or “30-day” absence rule, as these may negatively affect immigrant students facing significant challenges or fear-based absences.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

**Item 1:** Dr. Grant Shared that HB 1006 - Not moved. The House committee added it to another bill (HB579 - Criminal Procedure: U Nonimmigrant Status Petitions and Immigration Enforcement at Sensitive Locations). Requiring federal law enforcement officers to notify specific individuals of federal immigration action at certain sensitive locations; altering the requirements for certification of a U Nonimmigrant Status Petition;

altering the individuals eligible to request a certain official to certify victim helpfulness relating to accreditation of a U Nonimmigrant Status Petition; authorizing the disclosure of certain information under certain circumstances; etc.

HB 1222 was passed out to the House committee, and the crossover occurred on Monday. It now heads to the Senate.

HB 1431 – Paired with SB977 (Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law - Restrictions on Access to Information: Maryland Data Privacy Act)

**Item 2:** The committee discussed ideas for an upcoming event, considering whether to organize a retreat or a town hall.

Dr. Grant proposed inviting Daniel Dawes, a widely respected health equity policy expert, author of *The Political Determinants of Health*, and Senior Vice President of Global Health at Meharry Medical College, to speak to RESJAC. Dawes expressed interest in participating and does not require an honorarium, though the group discussed the possibility of making the event community-facing due to his prominence.

### **Committee Input:**

- Dr. Isaac Cudjoe strongly advocated hosting the event in person, highlighting the importance of community connection and direct engagement after extended virtual interactions. He also suggested inviting community leaders who work closely with young people, such as coaches and mentors, to maximize community engagement and social cohesion.
- Sonia Canzater enthusiastically supported inviting Dawes, noting his work provides powerful frameworks for health equity and social, educational, and political advocacy. She recommended creating targeted discussions based on Dawes' adaptable models to enhance community understanding and engagement.
- Joseph Hurst suggested inviting additional speakers, such as Ken White, Chair of the Maryland Black Chamber of Commerce, to address local economic impacts and workforce-related federal policies. He emphasized that including these perspectives would broaden the conversation around community impacts.

Additionally, Dr. Cudjoe recommended a separate, internal committee session or call for members to reflect openly on the committee's effectiveness and discuss community and county staff perspectives to strengthen their future impact.

The committee ultimately agreed to move forward with planning an in-person community town hall featuring Daniel Dawes (availability after June) and potentially additional community leaders, pending further exploration and planning.

- **Motion Made:** Moved that we take steps to plan a town hall in 2025 - motion carried. Sonia Canzater and Joe Hurst agreed to help with the town hall planning.

- **Motion Made:** We moved that we have a RESJAC check-in call separate from the RESJAC meeting, and the motion was carried out. Dr. Cudjoe, Sonia Canzater, and Ilana Branda agreed to help with the planning of a check-in call

#### **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES:**

- Councilmember Jawando has introduced legislation to let federal workers have a hiring preference in Montgomery County.
- Dr. Grant passed on comments by Director Stowe that segregated facilities are no longer explicitly banned in federal contracts.

#### **ADJOURN:**

- Meeting adjourned at 8:34 by Dr. Pat Grant.