

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2021 Interim

September 22, 2021

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 3rd meeting of the Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity was held on Wednesday, September 22, 2021, at 3:00 PM, in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Senator David P. Givens, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator David P. Givens, Co-Chair; Representative Samara Heavrin, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, and Whitney Westerfield; Representatives George Brown Jr., Nima Kulkarni, and Killian Timoney; Jamir Davis, OJ Oleka, and Erwin Roberts.

Guests: Olga McKissic, Director, Western Academy; Mackenzie Wallace Longoria, Director of Public Policy, Alzheimer's Association; and Edie Yau, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Engagement, Alzheimer's Association.

LRC Staff: Alisha Miller and Elishea Schweickart.

Western Academy

Olga McKissic, Director of the Western Academy at the Neblett Community Center, began her presentation by explaining that the Western Academy launched in October 2019, and was created to let African American and biracial boys know that they are at promise and not at risk. The Neblett Community Center was founded in 1936 by Dr. Reginald Neblett and his wife Hattie Neblett in order to reach out to the local youth.

The Western Academy encourages and motivates scholars academically to reach their full potential. Information pulled from the Owensboro school system showed that 77 percent of African American boys, starting in the 3rd grade, are not at grade level. In Daviess County public schools, 84 percent of African American students in the 3rd grade are below grade level in reading. Ms. McKissic stated investors are investing in prisons based on school test scores in hopes of getting a return on their investments. In order to address the academic gap, Western Academy is using a blueprint of the Black Male Working (BMW) Program that was established in 2005 by Roszalyn Akins in Lexington. The program reaches out to boys of color with a different learning style, with an Afrocentric lens, in order to encourage and empower them to create a positive footprint in the world. Many African American academies have been established across the United States in order

to encourage the success of black children who have been historically failed and mislabeled.

The Western Academy is held on Saturdays, and the scholars attend two sessions a month. Uniforms are required for every scholar. There is also a creed that the scholars memorize and recite every session, and a power story of African American men is shared every session. Along with using project based curriculum, the Western Academy also focuses on life skills, such as cooking. Scholars are also expected to follow the Well Principles, which include being well-behaved, well-mannered, well-dressed, well-spoken, well-read, and well-traveled. Scholars are rewarded with gift cards, trips, and etc., for their success in the program.

The Western Academy works with children in Owensboro and Daviess County. They are currently trying to reach out and work with other surrounding counties.

Responding to questions from Co-Chair David Givens, Ms. McKissic stated that at the age of 13 students are no longer under their childcare division, but they can attend the Recreation Center which is open to children up to 18 years old. Ms. McKissic stated that the Western Academy currently has 35 scholars enrolled and are still in the open enrollment period. The biggest challenge to getting children to commit to joining the academy is parent involvement and other commitments the children may have. Ms. McKissic stated that their effort would only be a failed effort if they did not continue to reach out to potential scholars, and if they did not continue working with the public school systems.

Responding to questions from Commissioner OJ Oleka, Ms. McKissic stated that the ultimate goal is for the Western Academy to be an A5 Title school. Ms. McKissic stated that there is an educational disparity in treatment when it comes to African American children. African American boys are more likely to be placed in special education or medicated, attend school without proper resources, and their punishments are harsher. The goal of Western Academy is to support and offer guidance to the scholars and their parents.

Responding to a question from Representative Killian Timoney, Ms. McKissic stated that sometimes there are challenges, but the Western Academy has very supportive parents.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Jamir Davis, Ms. McKissic stated that Western Academy receives funding from Owensboro public schools, private donors, and grants. Ms. McKissic stated that the Western Academy is currently a nonprofit and 501(c)(3).

Responding to a comment from Co-Chair Samara Heavrin, Ms. McKissic stated that they would love to have their scholars page for the House of Representatives and the Senate during the legislative session.

Healthcare Disparities

Mackenzie Longoria, Director of Public Policy and Edie Yau, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Engagement, with the Alzheimer's Association presented on healthcare disparities. The Alzheimer's Association is a global organization, started in 1980, and works to provide care and support to people currently living with Alzheimer's and to advance research. Alzheimer's disease is the 6th leading cause of death in Kentucky, and there are an estimated 75,000 individuals currently living with Alzheimer's in Kentucky. Of these estimated 75,000, there are almost 3,000 in hospice with a primary diagnosis of dementia.

The 2021 Special Report: Race, Ethnicity and Alzheimer's in America surveyed minority Americans living with Alzheimer's to better understand their experiences when it comes to getting quality care. The report found that there are ethnic and gender disparities. Older African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and women are more likely to have Alzheimer's and are more likely to receive late diagnosis and experience barriers when it comes to quality care. Studies have shown that social class can also contribute to healthcare disparities. In 2017, Lancet Commission identified nine potentially modifiable risk factors for Alzheimer's: less education, hypertension, hearing impairment, smoking, obesity, depression, physical inactivity, diabetes, and low social contact. In 2020, three more risk factors were recognized: excessive alcohol consumption, traumatic brain injury, and air pollution.

The 2021 Special Report also studied discrimination and if it was a barrier to accessing quality care. More than 1/3 of African Americans and nearly 1/5 of Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans stated that they believed discrimination was a barrier. Furthermore, nearly half of African Americans and 1/3 of Hispanic, Native, and Asian Americans report that they have experienced healthcare discrimination. Diversity is also needed for research and trials, but less than five percent of trial participants are African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, or Native American.

Ms. Yau stated that in order to have equity in Alzheimer's and other dementia five things need to happen. These five suggestions include:

- Conduct, promote and support multi-level health disparities research;
- Increase diversity in health systems and health-related institutions;
- Enhancing cultural competence in dementia research and care;
- Accountability; and
- Participatory engagement to build trust and agency.

The Equity in Neuroscience and Alzheimer's Clinical Trials Act (ENACT) is a way that the Alzheimer's Association is pursuing equity. This act has three prongs, which include expanding access and increasing outreach to underrepresented populations, increasing diversity among clinical trial staff, and reducing the participation burden.

Another way the Alzheimer's Association is pursuing equity is through national partnerships. Ms. Yau stated that the ultimate goal is equity, which means everyone gets what they need to survive and access opportunity.

Ms. Longoria stated that, on average, Kentucky spends about \$803,000,000 in Medicaid dollars for Alzheimer's and dementia care. Because African Americans and Hispanic Americans are more prone to developing the disease and more likely to get diagnosed in later stages of the disease, the cost of their treatments are higher. A study conducted by Us Against Alzheimer's Center for Brain Health Equity found that Kentucky's 6th Congressional District is 13th in the nation where African Americans are most impacted by Alzheimer's and has spent nearly \$190,000,000 annually in Medicare, and the 2nd Congressional District is ranked 21st and has spent nearly \$200,000,000 annually in Medicare. Also, Franklin County ranks 2nd out of 25 counties across the United States with the highest prevalence of Alzheimer's among African Americans.

Ms. Longoria suggested a way to improve the health system is to increase public awareness, especially with early detection and early diagnoses, and that public awareness should be culturally competent and sensitive. Ms. Longoria also suggested that data collection in Kentucky needs to improve, and that as of now, no public health websites mention data on Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. In order to get data, Ms. Longoria must present to the Department of Public Health to get their Cognitive Module included and then find the funds to run that module. The Alzheimer's Association is currently working with several groups, including the Kentucky Association of Black Nurses and Norton's Healthcare, to focus on race and health disparities.

Responding to a comment from Co-Chair Samara Heavrin, Ms. Longoria stated that she believes the new dementia services coordinator position that was recently created will help with data collection specific to Kentucky.

Responding to a question from Commissioner OJ Oleka, Ms. Yau and Ms. Longoria stated that they will find information on which states close to Kentucky are working well when it comes to Alzheimer's disease.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:47 PM.