

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

August 22, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 3rd meeting of the Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity was held on August 22, 2023, at 1:00 PM in Room 131 of the Capitol Annex. Senator David P. Givens, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator David P. Givens, Co-Chair; Representative Killian Timoney, Co-Chair; Senator Karen Berg, Senator Gerald A. Neal, Senator Whitney Westerfield, Representative George Brown Jr., Representative Samara Heavrin, Representative Nima Kulkarni, James Coleman, and Erwin Roberts.

Guests: Dr. Aaron Thompson, President, Council on Postsecondary Education; Dr. Eli Capilouto, President, University of Kentucky; Ashli Watts, President and CEO, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce; and Ray Daniels, Co-Founder, President and CEO, ESG Consulting, LLC.

LRC Staff: Brandon White, and Brett Gillispie.

The Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity recognized Erwin Roberts for his service to the Commonwealth and his contribution to the Commission, on the occasion of his final meeting as a member.

Approval of Minutes

Senator Neal made a motion to approve the minutes taken at the July 24, 2023, meeting. The motion was seconded by Senator Westerfield and approved by voice vote.

Postsecondary Education - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Dr. Aaron Thompson, President, Council on Postsecondary Education and Dr. Eli Capilouto, President, University of Kentucky presented on diversity, equity, and inclusion in postsecondary education.

Dr. Thompson said that the goal of Kentucky's higher education leaders is to make education Kentucky's great equalizer. He added that the best route to a strong economy is a robust postsecondary education system that is accessible to all citizens. The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education's goal is to ensure that 60 percent of Kentuckians have a postsecondary credential by 2030. As of 2021, 54.3 percent of Kentuckians have a postsecondary degree or certificate, up from 50.3 percent in 2017. Additionally, Kentucky's growth in completion rates is one of the highest in the United States.

Dr. Thompson said that equity refers to providing all students, regardless of background, with the tools needed to succeed, and that diversity does not refer to forcing an ideology onto an individual or group. He added that the retention and graduation rate progress of underrepresented minority (URM) and low-income students often exceeds the overall progress for

their sector, and that the overall rates have also increased. Kentucky is making excellent progress in postsecondary education and that the current momentum should be continued.

Dr. Capilouto said that the University of Kentucky's mission is to help build a healthier, wealthier, and wiser Commonwealth. He discussed the university's history in serving minority populations, including its status as the first university in the Southeastern Conference to racially integrate its athletics programs, and discussed its desire to provide access to opportunity for all.

Dr. Capilouto said that the overall amount of degrees and credentials awarded by the University of Kentucky has increased from 6,278 in 2014 to 9,456 in 2023, and that degrees awarded to URM students have increased from 594 to 1,416 within the same period. Additionally, total four year graduation rates rose by over 20 percent in 12 years from 2006 to 2018. This growth has been facilitated by enrolling a more diverse student body, with more than a quarter of University of Kentucky graduates being first-generation college students.

Dr. Capilouto said that the number one obstacle to student retention is unmet financial need. In response to this issue, the University of Kentucky created the UK LEADS, a one-time grant program targeted at students with an unmet financial need of more than \$5,000. This has led to greater than expected retention of students who might otherwise be unable to stay at the university. The university is also debuting a new program called UK Invests, which gives every student on campus access to their own brokerage account to invest in their financial literacy and stability.

Dr. Capilouto said that Kentucky faces unique challenges as a high poverty state, with 45 counties suffering from persistent poverty. Additionally, Kentucky has cancer rates significantly higher than the national average. The University of Kentucky is investing heavily in creating diverse teams to combat persistent poverty and cancer in an increasingly diverse Commonwealth. He added that diverse issues require a diverse workforce to solve them, and that everyone should have an open field and a fair shot at success.

Dr. Thompson said that diversity is the difference among population groups, inclusion is asking every person and group for participation, and that equity is giving every person and group the tools that they need to succeed. He added that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is not limited to racial or ethnic diversity.

In response to a question from Chairman Givens, Dr. Capilouto said that 25 percent of all in-state students at the University of Kentucky come from families whose income is less than \$25,000/year, and that the university is deeply committed to serving these students.

In response to a question from Representative Kulkarni, Dr. Capilouto said that the university is heavily focused on increasing the amount of STEM degrees. Dr. Thompson added that Kentucky was one of the first states to have college enrollment rebound after the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to a follow-up question, Dr. Capilouto said that the provided numbers include international students, but that international students represent a small fraction of the total number of undergraduate students.

In response to a question from Representative Brown, Dr. Capilouto said that the University of Kentucky has a responsibility to follow the law as interpreted by the Supreme Court in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. the University of North*

Carolina, but that the University of Kentucky also has a responsibility to continue the advances it has made serving all students. Dr. Thompson added that students need to feel that they will be welcome at the university regardless of background, and that he sees this as a DEI effort. In response to a follow-up question, Dr. Capilouto said the university is helping to teach students financial literacy through a variety of means. Dr. Thompson added that the university is working with employers to develop essential skills among students from diverse backgrounds, and that his goal is that all Kentucky students will conduct an employer-based program by 2030. In response to another follow-up question, Dr. Capilouto said that the university is making it easier to procure from diverse vendors.

In response to a question from Senator Berg, Dr. Thompson said that dialogue on issues relating to DEI between higher education and the legislature is important, but that the momentum of progress in Kentucky's higher education should not be ruined. Dr. Capilouto added that the University of Kentucky's definition of diversity is broad and includes students who were formerly in foster care, eligible for free or reduced lunch, and had no parents with a bachelor's degree.

Dr. Capilouto and Dr. Thompson emphasized the importance of higher education for individual students and Kentucky as a whole.

Kentucky Chamber Foundation's Center for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Ashli Watts, President and CEO, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and Ray Daniels, Co-Founder, President and CEO, ESG Consulting, LLC presented to the Commission on the Kentucky Chamber Foundation's Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

Ms. Watts said that the Kentucky Chamber Foundation's Center for DEI has created a DEI task force of business and community leaders in order to help recruit a more diverse workforce for Kentucky employers and foster economic opportunity. The Center for DEI recently hosted a DEI Academy for Kentucky employers including Goodwill, Toyota, and Bellarmine University that received an overwhelmingly positive response. Additionally, the Center for DEI hosted a Shop Conscious Minority Business Certification Event to improve access for minority-owned businesses. The Chamber has also begun hosting an annual DEI summit to bring together business and policy leaders from across the Commonwealth to discuss pressing issues facing Kentucky's economy and workforce. Finally, the Center for DEI has created a Kentucky Minority Owned Business Database to increase accessibility to smaller businesses for companies looking to diversify their supply base.

Mr. Daniels said that economic disparity was listed with health and education disparity because economic opportunity often has a positive impact on other issue areas, and that the Chamber is motivated to create a better workforce for Kentucky by accessing untapped talent. The Chamber has been using its resources to connect minority-owned businesses with the resources that they need to improve their business models and achieve success. He added that minority-owned businesses invest in their local communities by hiring local, spending their money in the local community, and paying taxes in their locality.

In response to a question from Chairman Givens, Mr. Daniels said that a major disappointment is when companies ultimately decide to leave Kentucky due to the belief that they will not be profitable here. In response to a follow-up question, Mr. Daniels said that he is concerned with workforce retention and turnover. In response to another follow-up question, Ms. Watts said that the work-life balance post-COVID-19 has become less clearly separated and that the workforce

is seeking more flexibility in employment. She added that Kentucky's workforce participation rate is in the bottom 10 states, and that employers are offering more diverse benefits to attract new talent. Mr. Daniels added that young students are committed to work and are seeking out internships and dual credit opportunities before they arrive at their university.

Chairman Timoney complimented the Kentucky Chamber's DEI efforts and expressed his belief that DEI initiatives add something of value to Kentucky's economy and workforce.

Representative Brown complimented the Kentucky Chamber for its DEI efforts. He said that the Shop Conscious events have been effective, and expressed his support for the Chamber's Second Chance Hiring program that provides job training for formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrating into society.

Chairman Givens recognized the work being done by the Kentucky Office of EEO and Contract Compliance and encouraged the guests and members of the Commission to connect with that office.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Givens adjourned the meeting at 2:45 p.m.