

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 2022 Interim

November 15, 2022

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 6th meeting of the Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity was held on Tuesday, November 15, 2022, at 11:00 AM, in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Samara Heavrin, 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, Gerald A. Neal, and Whitney Westerfield; Representatives George Brown Jr., Nima Kulkarni, and Killian Timoney; Hannah Drake, OJ Oleka, and Erwin Roberts.

Guests: Representative Keturah Herron; Dr. Monique Williams, Assistant Professor, University of Louisville School of Public Health and Information Sciences; Dr. Sabrina Brown, Associate Professor, University of Kentucky College of Public Health; Tracy Pulley, Director, Fulton Independent School District/Family Resource Youth Services Center; Dr. Matt Berry, Research Director, Kentucky Center for Statistics; Leah Ramirez, M.S., Health Policy Director, Elevance Health Public Policy Institute; April Falconi, PhD, Associate Research Director, Elevance Health Public Policy Institute; Tabitha Ross, Health Equity Director, Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield Medical; and Hope McLaughlin, Sr. Director of Government Relations, Kentucky, Elevance Health.

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Brett Gillispie.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the October 27, 2022, meeting was made by Representative Timoney, seconded by Senator Neal, and approved by voice vote.

Maternal Health/Doula Access

Leah Ramirez, M.S., Health Policy Director, Elevance Health Public Policy Institute; April Falconi, PhD, Associate Research Director, Elevance Health Public Policy Institute; Tabitha Ross, Health Equity Director, Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield Medical; and Hope McLaughlin, Sr. Director of Government Relations, Kentucky, Elevance Health presented to the commission about maternal health and doula access.

Dr. Falconi stated that maternal mortality in the U.S. outranks every country in the developed world, and that the risk is significantly higher in Black and Native communities. Black mothers are more than two times as likely as white mothers to experience severe maternal health morbidities. This is exacerbated by shrinking access to obstetric care in rural areas due to hospital closures. The presenters offered doula access as a potential solution to this issue.

Dr. Falconi stated that a doula pilot program was evaluated in California and New York. The mothers who participated in this program saw an 8.1 percent rate of low birthweight infants vs. 12.3 percent in mothers who did not participate and a 5.9 percent rate of admission to NICU versus 11.4 percent in mothers who did not participate. Additionally, they were more likely to attend their post-natal visits. Women using a doula had 58 percent lower odds of having a cesarean delivery, 58 percent lower odds of postpartum depression or anxiety, and spent \$1,675 less on average on pregnancy-related medical costs.

Ms. Ross stated that Anthem has invested \$300,000 to support doula scholarships across Kentucky in order to help increase access to pre-natal care. This scholarship program has attempted to recruit diverse doula candidates in order to better serve disadvantaged communities. So far, the program has hired 25 doulas from diverse backgrounds and provided 87 birth scholarships.

Ms. Ramirez provided four different policy options that would allow Medicaid to cover doula access. Allowing Medicaid coverage of doulas would greatly increase access to prenatal care to low-income families.

In response to a question from Representative Kulkarni, Ms. Ramirez stated that the General Assembly could require cultural competency training and Medicare quality initiatives in implementing a doula Medicaid pilot in Kentucky.

In response to a question from Representative Timoney, Dr. Falconi stated that they are unsure why maternal health in the United States is such a persistent issue. She believes that doula access will be an important tool to increasing maternal healthcare.

In response to a question from Representative Timoney, Dr. Falconi said that more than half of maternal morbidities are currently being experienced in the post-partum period, and that women are not attending their post-natal visits.

Gun Injury Prevention: A Public Health Approach

Representative Keturah Herron; Dr. Monique Williams, Assistant Professor, University of Louisville School of Public Health and Information Sciences; and Dr. Sabrina Brown, Associate Professor, University of Kentucky College of Public Health presented to the commission on gun injury prevention.

Representative Herron said that gun violence prevention is one of her key legislative priorities. She emphasized that the purpose of her proposed legislation is not to take away firearms from Kentuckians as she is a gun owner and supporter of the Second Amendment. However, she believes that gun violence is a pressing issue and the approach currently being utilized by the criminal justice system is insufficient.

Representative Herron intends to file legislation to establish an office of gun violence prevention within the Department of Public Health. It would have an Executive Director appointed by the Secretary with the Governor's approval. Its goal would be to collect and disseminate data and make recommendations relating to gun violence intervention and prevention. The office's role would be similar to the Office of Drug Control Policy. Representative Herron believes that this office would likely be able to be funded through the Safer Communities Act passed by the United States Congress.

Dr. Brown provided statistics on firearms-related deaths in the U.S. and discussed a rise in homicides and suicides in Kentucky, as well as an increase in intimate partner violence-related homicides with a firearm among both males and females across the last five years.

Dr. Williams said that closing of public recreational spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic was coupled with serious negative health and violence outcomes. Additionally, 22 million firearms were purchased across the United States in 2020, a 64 percent increase from 2019. The leading cause of death for children 0-19 years of age in the U.S. is now firearm-related deaths, and firearms are the most common method of both homicide and suicide, and these issues disproportionately plague disadvantaged communities. She added that we currently do not have sufficient infrastructure in place to deal with gun violence prevention and that there are systemic factors that cause communities to be more vulnerable to gun violence. She said that there needs to be a coordinated body identifying and assessing gun violence and the risk factors associated with it in order to build community resilience.

Representative Heavrin commended Representative Herron for her advocacy on this issue.

In response to a question from Senator Neal, Dr. Brown stated that she would make data available to him.

In response to a question from Senator Neal, Representative Herron said that the goal of this office would be to both research and make recommendations. She added that this office would collect data on incidents involving both legal and illegal firearms, but that it is impossible to criminalize gun violence out of existence.

Senator Neal stated that discussion of policy solutions on gun violence often evaporates due to the fear of losing gun ownership. Representative Herron agreed and added that this legislation is in no way intended to take firearms from Kentuckians.

In response to a question from Representative Kulkarni, Representative Herron said that she wants Kentucky to be a leader in gun violence prevention, but she is unsure which states have implemented a similar office.

Senator Berg commented that public violence is a serious issue for constituents in her district. She stated that the proposed office has her full support, and that the data it would provide is needed to combat gun violence. She added that states with basic firearms regulations such as safe storage suffer fewer gun-related deaths. She said that the number of teenagers who have been admitted to emergency rooms for suicidal ideation in the U.S. in the last year has increased by 50 percent, and that Kentucky may be facing a significant increase in youth suicides with firearms.

In response to a question from Dr. Oleka, Dr. Brown stated that data is kept on factors related to a suicide or homicide such as socioeconomic status and intent.

In response to a question from Dr. Oleka, Dr. Brown said that much of their data comes directly from death scene investigators and if the ownership and legality of the firearm is provided by law enforcement, then that data is kept.

In response to a question from Dr. Oleka, Dr. Brown said that there has been a significant increase in homicides since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Dr. Williams added that both the weapon of choice and the underlying factors need to be addressed in an approach to gun violence, and that policy needs to be informed by the data that would be collected by the proposed office.

In response to a question from Ms. Drake, Dr. Brown stated that there are many different societal factors that need to be linked to the data on gun-related deaths such as socioeconomic status and food security. Representative Herron added that the office would be focused on identifying the root causes of gun violence and would want to collaborate with schools, healthcare providers, and law enforcement.

In response to a question from Representative Heavrin, Dr. Brown stated that there is an escalation of gang activity contributing to increasing homicides with a firearm. Representative Heavrin added that suicide prevention is an issue that is deeply important to her.

Fulton County Access to Healthcare

Tracy Pulley, Director, Fulton Independent School District/Family Resource Youth Services Center presented to the commission on access to healthcare in Fulton County. She

stated that Fulton County is 24 percent Black, only matched in terms of proportion of Black residents by Jefferson and Christian Counties.

Ms. Pulley stated that Fulton County is ranked in the top 16 poorest counties in the state, and is the only one of the top 16 not located in Appalachia. In addition, the latest County Health Rankings report listed Fulton County as 116 of 120 counties, dropping 17 places in a single year. She linked the high rate of poverty with poor health outcomes.

Ms. Pulley said that Fulton County used to be home to Parkway Hospital and an associated primary care clinic, Hillview Clinic, but that the hospital and clinic were purchased and closed by their new owners, making it extremely difficult for local residents to seek medical care. In addition, Fulton County has limited access to dental care. There are few dental care providers in the area, and even less access for families using Medicaid.

Ms. Pulley advocated for the General Assembly to initiate a pilot dental program in Fulton County to increase access to dental care for low-income families.

In response to a question from Senator Neal, Ms. Pulley stated that the Purchase District Health Department oversees the county health department in Fulton.

In response to a question from Dr. Oleka, Ms. Pulley stated that Fulton County is more significantly impacted by methamphetamines than opioids.

In response to a question from Dr. Oleka, Ms. Pulley said that regional agencies don't provide proper services to the community.

Kentucky Demographics Update

Dr. Matt Berry, Research Director, Kentucky Center for Statistics, presented to the commission on demographics in Kentucky. Dr. Berry examined demographic trends across racial and ethnic groups over time. He stated that Kentucky's white population has decreased, its non-white population has increased, K-12 enrollment for non-white students has increased, and the Black, Asian, and multi-racial workforce has increased.

Dr. Berry stated that Kentucky's youth population has grown more diverse along with the larger population. He added that postsecondary education enrollment has decreased, but degree completion has increased. He said that the labor force participation rate has remained essentially stable across all demographics.

Dr. Berry said that Kentucky K-12 students are far more likely to be non-white than their teachers. Students are 3.2 times more likely to be Black than their teachers, 8.6 times more likely to be Hispanic, and 51.4 times more likely to be two or more races.

Dr. Berry stated that median income has risen across all demographics, and Black Kentuckians have experienced the greatest increase. However, they still maintain the lowest average raw income. Kentucky's inmate population has decreased in terms of the raw numbers, and the Black inmate population has decreased by about 3 percent of the total inmate population.

In response to a question from Senator Givens, Dr. Berry said that the Kentucky Center for Statistics gathers data from agencies and partners across the state covering many issues such as childhood development and workforce participation.

In response to a question from Representative Timoney, Dr. Berry stated that the overall population of Kentucky has increased from about 4.3 million to 4.5 million.

Representative Heavrin acknowledged Dr. Oleka's resignation effective November 30, 2022, and thanked him for his service to the commission and the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

With there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.