

State of Connecticut ***Commission on Health Equity***

Inaugural Meeting Minutes, October 30, 2008

Commission Attendees: Kenneth Alleyne for Cato Laurencin (Director, UConn Health Center), Nancy Berger (Department of Public Health), Bruce Carlson for Cato Laurencin (Dean, UConn School of Medicine), Jeannette DeJesus (Hispanic Health Council), Ann Ferris (UConn Center for Public Health and Health Policy), Paul Flinter (Department of Education), Cheryl Harris Forbes (African-American Affairs Commission), Cathy Graves (Urban League, Southern Connecticut Chapter), Kevin Lembo (Office of the Healthcare Advocate), Rod O'Connor for David Carlow (Department of Developmental Services), Jose Ortiz (Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services), Natasha Pierre (Permanent Commission on the Status of Women), Jim Rawlings (Connecticut NAACP), William Rivera for Janet Williams (Medical Director, Department of Children and Families), Marie Spivey (public member—Capitol Workforce Partners), Gregory Stanton (public member--Lawrence & Memorial Hospital)

Other Attendees: Senator Toni N. Harp

Administrative Attendees: Victoria Veltri and Michael Mitchell (Office of the Healthcare Advocate)

All members were provided with a copy of the meeting agenda and Public Act 08-171 and asked to sign in to confirm attendance.

Jim Rawlings opened the inaugural meeting of the Commission on Health Equity by introducing Senator Toni N. Harp, the chief proponent of the legislation that created the Commission, Public Act 08-171. Senator Harp welcomed the members of the Commission and explained the previous incarnations of the Commission and the purpose behind this most recent legislation. Sen. Harp remarked that previous state commission efforts to address the issue of racial and ethnic and linguistic disparities were unsuccessful in part because the commissions were never launched. She stated that one of the reasons the new commission was located in the Office of the Healthcare Advocate is the office's commitment to addressing the issue. Though appropriations were not provided in this year's budget and though we are in a difficult budget situation, Sen. Harp suggested that commission members utilize the expertise of legislative service agencies (e.g., OFA, OLR, etc.) as well as that of the individual members' offices to support the commission's work.

State Healthcare Advocate Kevin Lembo led the members in self-introductions. He then explained the Office of the Healthcare Advocate's role in the Health Equity Commission.

While the Healthcare Advocate has a seat on the commission, the commission itself is located in the Office of the Healthcare Advocate for administrative purposes only. This means that the office will provide any necessary administrative support to the commission, including facilitation of the commission until officers are elected. However, the office itself will have no role in setting the commission's direction, other than its one membership seat.

Jim Rawlings provided some background about the efforts to enact Public Act 08-171 in order to address the issues outlined in several reports about the disparities in healthcare access and outcomes faced by racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities. He expressed the need for a broad and diverse group to work together toward the goal of eliminating these disparities. He outlined the CT NAACP's work on this issue and the work of others including the Connecticut Health Foundation in collecting data that will help the commission start its work.

Vicki Veltri, general counsel for the Office of the Healthcare Advocate did a brief overview of P.A. 08-171, including the preamble of the Act which recognizes healthcare as a human right and contains the broad mission and power of the commission. She also explained the duties of the commission and the authority of the commission to gather data from public and private entities in order to complete its mission. She also provided members with a non-exhaustive list of references that they could use as a guide to get up to date on racial, ethnic and linguistic disparities in healthcare.

The members informally discussed whether the Discussion/ Action Items section of the agenda (attached) should go forward or whether members wished to discuss other issues. Members agreed to discuss the issues outlined in the agenda. First, members discussed the need for by-laws to govern the commission and to outline the procedure for electing officers. Members agreed to establish a by-laws work-group to develop draft by-laws for review by the membership prior to the next commission meeting with the goal of voting on the by-laws at the next meeting. The following members volunteered for the by-laws work group: Ann Ferris, Paul Flinter, Jeannette DeJesus, Gregory Stanton and Natasha Pierre.

The discussion about officers was deferred until the by-laws are adopted.

The members discussed the need to get some financial support for the commission. A financial support work group was formed to discuss funding possibilities with local and national foundations. The members of the financial support work group are: and Kenneth Alleyne, Bruce Carlson, Jeannette DeJesus, Cathy Graves, Kevin Lembo, Jim Rawlings and Marie Spivey.

There was some discussion of staffing for the commission. Because of the projected state budget deficit, the members decided that funding for staffing should be included in the financial work group's scope of work.

Members agreed to meet in November and December to move the commission's agenda forward. The next two meetings are currently scheduled for November 20th and December 18th at 9:30 a.m. in the LOB, room number TBD.

Note: Since scheduling these meetings, a few members have told us of standing conflicts with the 3rd Thursday of the month meetings. Members will be asked to rescheduling the regular meeting date beginning with the December meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.

