



JUSTICE ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

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Memorandum

To: Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
From: Justice Administration Department
Date: December 11, 2020
Subject: Update: Re-Instating Committee focused on addressing Racial and Ethnic Equity

As part of the Justice Administration Department's work to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system driven by our participation in the Safety + Justice Challenge, this memorandum provides updates regarding our progress and next steps for the reinstatement of a future committee tasked with addressing racial and ethnic equity in the criminal justice system. Based on the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council's guidance, JAD reached out to stakeholders to gain insight about the process of reinstating the committee and desires for its future role/impact. In this effort, JAD requested meetings with 16 community and system stakeholder representatives previously engaged in the Committee's work and broader efforts of the Criminal Justice system; ultimately conducting 10 interviews. The technical assistance of the W. Haywood Burns Institute and Justice Management Institute supported this effort. See the appendix to review the questions asked during the interviews.

In our audit of the previous Committee's work, most stakeholders felt that the Committee could have the most significant impact by focusing on incorporating the community's perspective into the CJCC. This focus would allow community members to develop a greater understanding of the nuances of the criminal justice system and support the creation of community-based interventions that mitigate disparities and provide education/transparency about the existing system. The Committee should aim to support community-led initiatives to bring about racial and ethnic equity. Considering feedback also received from the MacArthur Foundation, the Committee should consider a name change in the future. JAD recommends, for the time being, the Committee be known as the Racial and Ethnic Equity Committee. The recommended name will remain in place until the Committee has formed and chooses a name for itself.

In sum, based on the collective feedback received, JAD proposes the following structural changes to the Committee and its appointment process:

- The Committee should consist of 17 voting members

- Community stakeholders/representatives to hold thirteen (13) vacancies for appointment through an open application process
- Government agencies/departments hold four of the vacancies. Recommended departments: Justice Administration Department, Harris County Sheriff's Office, Houston Police Department, and Harris County Juvenile Probation Department
- The Committee will maintain a standing agenda item on the CJCC meeting agenda

While the number of County representatives on the Committee is significantly decreased from its previous form, JAD fully anticipates that as the Committee develops initiatives and policy recommendations, representatives from various departments can serve as ad-hoc or ex-officio members of the Committee.

As referenced in the proposed changes, JAD is committed to the community's equitable access to participate on this Committee. Therefore, JAD recommends a public application process to identify the individuals to hold the vacancies designated for community stakeholders. This process will prioritize identifying individuals with lived experience to serve as part of the Committee. Additionally, JAD aims to develop a Committee that can bring together diverse stakeholders from external systems such as the homeless response system, domestic violence advocacy, and immigration advocacy.

Appendix:

- Interview Questions from JAD Stakeholder Interviews

ACTION ITEM: Approval of the recommended changes.

Former Racial Equity and Disparity Committee Member Interview Questions

Name:	Response Notes
What is your understanding of the Committee's Role?	
Do you think that the Burns Report was accurate in its assessment of the Committee and the recommendations?	
How do you see the relationship between the CJCC and the Committee evolving? What responsibilities should it serve to the CJCC?	
Moving forward, what governmental and local organizations are necessary stakeholders for the Committee and why?	
What do you think was the most important achievement of the former Committee?	