

FLORIDA COUNCIL ON THE SOCIAL STATUS OF BLACK MEN AND BOYS

May 18, 2011
MEETING MINUTES

A Quarterly Meeting of the Florida Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys was held on May 18, 2011 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Downtown Miami, Florida.

Council Members Present:

Eddy Regnier, Chair
Albert Simpson, Vice Chair
Ron Henderson, 2nd Vice Chair
Argatha Gilmore
Shila Salem
Ben Shirley, Jr.
Andre Smith
Wansley Walters
Gary Siplin

Council Members Absent:

Jenatta Cureton, 1st Vice Chair
Gypsy Gallardo
Matthew Gregory
William Hardin
Lois Scott
Perry Thurston
Shairi Turner
Stephen Wise

First agenda item: Welcome

Chairman Regnier welcomed everyone to the meeting in Miami, Florida. Thereafter he made the request for roll call.

Second agenda item: Roll Call

Roll call was executed by Council staff Tawanna Leven-Forbes.

Third agenda item: Opening Invocation

Rev. Albert Simpson gave the invocation.

Fourth agenda item: Call to Order

Chairman Regnier called the meeting to order at 1:40 pm. The agenda was adopted as posted.

Fifth agenda item: Chairman's Comments

Chairman Regnier talked about the problem of not having a quorum which prevents the Council from taking care of business. He stated that law makers created the Council to take care of important business; but in order to do so, members must attend. Chairman Regnier explained that the Council is mandated by Florida lawmakers to do important business such as to collect, organize and present information so that policy can be implemented or designed to help prevent problems of people of color. He stated that in Florida each county dropout rates are too high. Chairman Regnier stated that society use to be able to educated our young but now there's too much government in the schools; to many policies and regulations that constrains the teachers in their teaching and because of this kids are not getting educated. He stated that the government should remove themselves from the schools to allow teachers to educate the kids. Chairman Regnier said that where ever you travel in Florida you hear about unbearable crime rates where people do not feel safe in their homes or neighborhoods. He said that more dollars is spent on correctional institutions and the hiring of more policemen but yet the violence continues. Chairman Regnier stated that he would like for the Council to focus on the crime rates among teenagers between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. He said that he would like the Council to understand what is causing the crime, what the crimes are whether gang or economically related; and with

this information the Council will brainstorm on some solutions to reduce the crime rates. Chairman Regnier opened the floor for member comments.

Sixth agenda item: Member Comments

Ms. Walters stated that the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) could help a great deal in providing the Council with an overview of the Juvenile situation. She stated that there are many trends and patterns identified and the department had some success during the Legislative session where civil citation will be signed into law. Ms. Walters said that Civil Citation has been on the books in the State of Florida for a long time, and there are different citation programs throughout the state. She explained that commonality of these programs was that of being called Civil Citations. Ms. Walters said that part of a ten year demonstration project with the justice department in Miami is to transform our juvenile justice system and create a finance system. She stated that DJJ created a system wide Civil Citation where all thirty-seven police departments agreed. Ms. Walters said that they agreed to work in concert with the State Attorney's office that any first time misdemeanor would be assessed and put into a diversion program; and have a direct relationship with whatever was going on in that child's life that might be causing that child to act out by committing crimes. She explained that if the child is successful and the family is incorporated, the child arrest record goes away and that child gets to walk away from the experience without a record.

Rev. Simpson stated that he was very excited about what Ms. Walters is doing in her department. He stated that Sen. Wise wanted him to share some of the framework of what he is doing in wish he is very excited about. Rev. Simpson stated that Sen. Wise is looking at reasons behind long term sentences and a twelve month period where kids can go to school for six days a week with no interruptions.

Chairman Regnier stated that people have this belief that all kids are equal and they all learn the same way but they don't. He said that kids are different and they all learn differently; many of those who don't learn from traditional schools learn from nontraditional systems. Chairman Regnier stated that he like the idea of understanding the diversity in kids that nature modeled.

Ms. Gilmore stated that she spent twenty-five years with the Tallahassee Police Department under the direction of Chief Walter McNeil. She said that under Chief McNeil, Juvenile Civil Citation was implemented and discretion was given to officers; criteria's were given for city limits and types of violations with checks and balances of information that was required to go into the reports.

Mr. Smith stated that the Council needs to know how to get to the information of the root cause of the crime and drop-out rates in schools. He said that the Council must talk about these causes and prepare to get this information to the Legislatures to put policies in place. Mr. Smith stated that State Farm had put up \$50000 for the Education Foundation to look at the differences between dropouts and graduates rates. He said that the Department of Education Data Warehouse pulled data information for the Foundation within three to four weeks. Mr. Smith explained that while looking at dropout rates, strategic questions should be directed to school superintendents about their plans to eliminate the dropout rates in their local areas because the state does not control schools, they are control locally.

Chairman Regnier stated that he was please for the directions from Mr. Smith which is the Director of Education Data Warehouse. He said that Mr. Smith suggested in a previous meeting that the Council need to ask the right questions to get the data needed for evaluation.

Ms. Walters stated that there is more dignity for a kid to become a behavioral problem then to admit they have a learning disability. She explained that when children are identified in the early stages as a child with behavioral

problems the need is to look closer at the child for a possible learning disability. Ms. Walters stated that the Council needs to look into this problem in the schools.

Chairman Regnier agreed with Ms. Walters saying that we all have different gifts and these gifts need the opportunity to be presented. He stated that he will make sure the right questions are asked to collect the right data to find where the problems exist.

Ms. Salem posed a question to Ms. Walters asking that in the assessments that children received in the Civil Citation Program could she share some of the trines that she saw where services was needed besides education.

Ms. Walters stated that other trines where not addressed but they were able to access the school records to see how the child was doing in school.

Chairman Regnier moved to the next agenda item.

Seventh agenda item: Adoption of Outstanding Minutes

Chairman Regnier stated that due to the Council not having a quorum he asked that everyone give the corrected meeting minutes to Council staff Ms. Forbes for final corrections. He said in the next meeting of the full Council the adoption of outstanding meeting minutes will take place at that time. Chairman Regnier moved to the next agenda item.

Eighth agenda item: Subcommittee Member Assignment

Chairman Regnier expressed that all members should volunteer to work on two committees which is required. He said that he would like to discuss the task of the subcommittees. Chairman Regnier stated that the criminal Justice and Gangs subcommittee will focus on black on black crime and murder rates, gangs and law enforcement reducing the violence in the black community. He said that he would like to look at the data that the Council had pulled together from the past, and find a solution to prevent kids from heading down the road of destruction.

Ms. Gilmore explained that from the perspective of an officer, once an arrest is made it goes to the state Attorney's Office. She said that when she was in Tallahassee she challenged the community to get involved by being in the courtroom before the judge. Ms. Gilmore stated that something could be done after an arrest has been made. She explained that if judges knew that an audience would be present in the courtroom and observing, she believes that sentencing would be different. Ms. Gilmore said that courtroom sentencing is not being watched at appropriate levels.

Chairman Regnier suggested that the subcommittees look into what is needed in the community by linking things together.

Mr. Henderson stated that with the issues of social and economic conditions in the community he questions the Council's ability to address these issues. He said that people are hungry and don't have housing, how could the Council address these issues, these issues would have to be addressed by a larger scale, they are underlining factors in the communities which will promote crime.

Chairman Regnier stated that once the Council finds the underlying causes of a problem, the Council would look at how we could make a difference.

Mr. Henderson stated that if the Council and the community does not advocate to the people who can make policy, we will never be able to change anything.

Chairman Regnier stated that the Health and Families subcommittee is to focus on two issues; how poor health contributes to academic performance and drop-out rates; education HIV and how to improve it among the 14-18 age groups.

Ninth agenda item: Local Council Member Assignments

Ms. Lillian Lima former Council member stated that the Florida Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boy is to help develop a local council of those communities that wanted to develop a local council. She stated that she could serve as interim liaison on behalf of the Tampa Bay area until someone else comes on board in the Council to cover that area. Ms. Lima added that her area of interest is youths and young adults and she is trying to tie her area of interest in with what she is doing on behalf of the Department of Children and Families.

Tenth agenda item: Public Comments

Chairman Regnier opened the floor for public comments.

Ms. Renita Holmes better none as “BigEmama” is the Executive Director of the “Wade Magnum Ascent” she stated that this organization responds to emergency issues in the community such as terrorism and trauma which mostly involves anti gang issues and black on black crime in the Miami, Florida area. She expressed her thanks to the Council. Ms. Holmes stated that she is proud that the Council is accommodating the issues that black men are facing. She introduced to the Council, Madam Barbara Rodgers Wade, a gang intervention specialist from the Chicago area.

Ms. Wade stated that she came to speak to the Council at Ms. Holmes request, and with her she is accompanied by two young men, Joey Brooks and Screw Driver who represents the OG’s (original gangsters) and they came with her because she was in the process of looking for other OG’s to get started on stopping gang problems. Ms. Wade stated that she have worked with street gangs since 1960 in Chicago and came to Florida in 1979 and started the first Domestic Violence Program. She said that shortly afterwards she got a call from Chief Harms saying that he wanted her to come to work for him in the Miami Police Department to help with gang problems. Ms. Wade stated that she came to talk to the Council about how serious it is on the streets for young men. She said that we are not building schools anymore but building prisons. Ms. Wade stated that she started, The Respect Program in Chicago and twice a week she talks to incarcerated black men from 14 – 18 years of age. She introduced one of the young men in whom she worked with when he was sixteen; he is called “Screw Driver” a name that belonged to a street gang in 1984. She stated that Screw Driver have done a great amount of work and traveled over the world, he is connected to agencies that do great work, he has children and he is a gang member. Madam Wade stated that the Council can help by involving the community by planning with them not planning for them.

Mr. Joey Brooks stated that he is a native of Liberty City and expressed that in the past he had made some bad choices. He said it’s all about getting educated, given opportunities and directions. Mr. Brooks said they are trying to come up with a way to grab the attention of the kids to keep them out of the street life. He explained that they are trying to coordinate a program to educate the young boys to give them an outlet. Mr. Brooks said that he grew up in a neighborhood where you had to be careful of the neighborhoods you went into. He said that he tried to find himself and eventually he did by going to a Commercial Driver’s License School (CDL); and while in school an entrepreneur who happened to be one of his teachers got his attention.

Mr. Michael known as “Screw Driver” stated that he was part of the gangs since he was 16 years old and had over 200 charges of auto theft. He stated that Ms. Wade guided him in the right direction and got him back in school. Michael stated that he had spent 14 years in the Marine Corp on the obstruction hostage and the terrorism team. He stated that during his years in the Marine Corp he traveled the world and noticed that all gangs had the same common factor of no one being there for them. Michael said when he came back to the states he went to work for an agency and five months before retiring he went to Ms. Wade. He said that he found out that it was legal to have a CDL license at the age of 18, so he went to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Michael said it was then he met Joey. Michael stated that a program needs to be created to educate young people on what they are familiar with; they need to be educated about the programs and resources that are out there.

Ms. Shelia Salem thanked the guess for coming in to speak and share with the Council. She stated that the Department of Corrections is poised for change because a prison population of over one hundred and two thousand individuals is incarcerated. Ms. Salem stated that in dealing with the re-entry issues gangs is one of those areas where we are looking for model programs that have imminent space practices proven to work as we help these individuals to re-enter their own communities. She said that we don’t need to do a lot of work behind the fence and pour resources into them, only for them to walk back into an environment that will be counterproductive to their success.

Ms. Holmes expressed her appreciation to the Council for allowing them to share. She stated that she had not in a long time seen a Council that advised people to take the option to move things around to make them work.

Eleventh agenda item: Future Subcommittee Meetings Dates & Approval

Chairman Regnier stated that the future subcommittee meetings should be decided upon as soon as possible. He move to the next agenda item.

Twelfth agenda item: Future Council Meetings

Chairman Regnier stated that he will try to limit all teleconference meeting to one hour and a half to eliminate excessive time spent meeting. He stated that perhaps this would encourage more participation from Council members.

Rev. Simpson stated that he does not think that the new Secretary’s are educated about the Council in terms of what the Council does and there’s always a budgetary restraint. He stated that Secretary’s are not aware of the mandate that Council members are to be present.

Mr. Henderson stated that his department has a new State Surgeon General who knows very little about the Council and if the Deputy Secretary Dr. Turner didn’t fill him in on something’s he would not have known anything. The Council needs to be reintroduced to the new division and department heads.

Mr. Shirley stated that with the Council being mission critical, each Secretary can determine what is mission critical in each department. He said that the schedules of the Council should be looked at and the meetings should be build into the budget. Mr. Shirley said that is different when a department is working under a grant, but with general revenue funds this could be build into the budget.

Thirteenth agenda item: For the Good of the Order

Chairman Regnier expressed his thoughts to the Council by saying that the Council should move forward by acting as a beacon of light beckoning to the lawmakers to follow us because we know the way. The Council most get the data so that we can lead them true.

Fourteenth agenda item: Adjournment

Chairman Regnier asked for a motion for adjournment. Mr. Shirley motioned that the meeting be adjourned; Ms. Gilmore seconded the adjournment. Chairman Regnier declared the meeting adjourned.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

