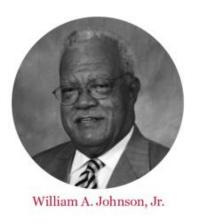# Charge of the Commission

Commission created on June 18, 2020 by Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren and Monroe County Executive Adam Bello with a charge to:

1) inventory and assess current local laws and policies that either promote or are intended to eliminate <u>institutional and structural biases, racism and inequities</u> in the City of Rochester and Monroe County

2) provide recommendations to enhance current local laws/policies to increase effectiveness, and/or "sunset" local laws/policies that are ineffective or no longer applicable

3) provide recommendations on any new local laws/policies to address identified gaps.

Commission

3 co-chairs

William A. Johnson, Jr.

Arline Santiago, Esq.

Dr. Muhammad Shafiq

21 members
◦ 8 pre-designated by the Mayor and the County Executive because of leadership roles in local governance and law enforcement

Commission Members

o 230 community members applied to serve on Commission

o Selection Committee of 15 community members reviewed applications, interviewed applicants and recommend a slate of candidates to the chairs

Aaron Anandarajah

Todd Baxter

Steve Brew

Logan X. Brown

Eric Caine

Marcus Dunn

Karen L. Elam

Sady Fischer

Mitch Gruber

Wayne Preston Harris

Frank Keophetlasy

Willie Lightfoot

Kim T. Nghiem

Danielle D. Ponder

Bruce Popper

Luis E. Ormaechea

Denishea R. Ortiz

Richard Tantalo

Catherine Thomas

Stephanie Townsend

Damond Wilson

Commission's Work

Six-month process:
- Analyzed local laws and policies to <u>identify mechanisms driving structural racism</u>
- Collected and analyzed data to <u>deeply understand racial inequity</u>
- Engaged the community

9 Working Groups
- Each facilitated by two to three Commissioners
- Complemented by citizens who volunteered to serve

Working Groups:
- Business Development
- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Healthcare
- Human Services
- Housing
- Job Creation
- Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Policing

Community Engagement

The Commission gathered input from hundreds of community members to gain insight into residents' experience of structural racism:

o Virtual sessions using variety platforms, including streamed live on Facebook

o Online and paper surveys

o Interviews of community members

o Tours of affected communities to speak with residents and business owners

  o Bus tour to gather perspectives from small business owners

  o Discussions with incarcerated youth, high school students and formerly incarcerated men

Steps Leading to Commission Findings

o Working Group members identified <u>top issues driving racial and structural inequities</u> in their focus area.

o They brainstormed a wide range of recommendations.

o The Commission then identified <u>6</u> overarching themes running through the Working Group issues.

o Commission members then developed <u>5</u> broad solutions encompassing the Working Groups' key recommendations.

Theme 1: Access to Resources

Inequitable and inadequate access to essential resources and systems critical to closing equity gaps

Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) have inadequate access to networks of opportunity, including:

o Access to capital to develop and support businesses

o Civil service jobs within government

o Variety of housing options in local areas and neighborhoods across the County

Theme 2: Inequitable Systems

Structures and protocols inequitably impact and disadvantage BIPOC

People of color, especially Black people, are disproportionately <u>arrested</u>, <u>suspended</u> from school, and <u>brought into systems like child protective services, foster care and juvenile justice</u> that often do not serve their needs.

Theme 3: Cultural and Linguistic Competency

Structures and personnel lack cultural/linguistic competencies critical for effective engagement

Systems ranging from courts to 911 to health, mental health and substance abuse service providers to schools to human services are sorely lacking in cultural and linguistic competence.

◦ Cultural competence exists when individuals and organizations are able to effectively interact with diverse populations since they possess information about different cultural value systems, beliefs and knowledge.

◦ Linguistic competence exists when community members are able to access interpreters, translation services and materials in their native language.

Theme 4: Systemic Disadvantage

Systems create and perpetuate disadvantages

These systems include:

o Hiring systems with historic but unnecessary job requirements, or screens for criminal convictions or drug use

o Human services system, which applies rules that limit the availability of financial assistance to those who need it

o The testing and accountability system for schools, which labels urban schools with predominantly BIPOC student bodies as failing, with demoralizing effects on students

Theme 5: Accountability

City/County structures lack reliable transparency and accountability operations, negatively impacting trust among BIPOC

Many of the systems the Commission studied do not track or report their impact on individuals by race/ethnicity, which allows racial inequity to continue.

Inaccessibility to information about compensation policies, police training curriculum and the juvenile justice system also limit understanding about disparate outcomes for Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

Theme 6: Economic Investment

Current City/County/State systems possess insufficient economic investment in structures and resources critical to attaining equity

Across many systems, economic investments that could make a difference for people of color are lacking or inadequate. Major issues include:

o <u>Low wages</u> across sectors dominated by BIPOC

o <u>Failure of the Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise</u> program to have a large impact on business success for people of color

Income is a profoundly important contributor to outcomes for individuals, families and communities, impacting health, education levels and life expectancy.

Solution 1: Expand Economic Opportunity

Create and invest in sustainable economic opportunities in Black and Latinx communities to promote and maintain self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship and career advancement. Recommendations include:

o Establish a local process for becoming MWBE certified, as well as entrepreneurial mentoring and expanded access to capital, with a clear focus on businesses owned by people of color

o Redesign civil service functions to ensure equitable and unobstructed access to qualified applicants, leading to a racially diverse workforce

o Build on the momentum toward a $15/hour minimum wage by ensuring the City and County have $15/hour minimums, persuading all employers to raise their starting pay to that level, and making this minimum wage a requirement to do business with local government

Solution 2: Increase Cultural Competence

Implement and incentivize practices and programs that increase the racial/ethnic diversity and cultural competence of employees, vendors, and contractors. Recommendations include:

o Increase and sustain the cultural competence of City/County workforces with new systems including budget resources, advisory committee with community representation and training tied to job roles.

o Use government contracting and procurement practices to require all contractors to have diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in place, including diverse hiring practices and leadership.

o Increase linguistic competency by ensuring Monroe County school districts provide the full range of curriculum offerings for English Language Learners, and that programs aimed at assisting students and their families are offered in native languages.

Solution 3: End Inequitable Practices

End practices that disproportionately drain resources from Black and Latinx communities. Recommendations include:

◦ End the use of pretextual stops (stops for a minor offense to investigate something else), decriminalize and de-prioritize violation-level offenses, make incarceration a last resort; and embrace a philosophy of diversion and restorative justice.

◦ End Monroe County's high use of financial assistance sanctions in human services to ensure individuals who need help can get it.

◦ Increase access to mental health and social emotional support services for all Rochester City School District BIPOC students.

Solution 4: Embed Services in Community

Decentralize services and embed them in trusted agencies throughout the community. Recommendations include:

- Create and fully fund community alternatives to police, including trained community responders, crisis intervention specialists and community mediators.

- Create a community-based program for youth facing criminal charges that includes counseling and mentorship, restorative justice circles, case managers, respite services, and a forensic psychiatric specialist.

- Redesign child protective and foster care services to do more to keep children with their families, including using blind removal meetings, hiring culture brokers, and developing kinship navigators.

- Decentralize Monroe County Department of Public Health services and put locations in neighborhoods with high populations of BIPOC.

Solution 5: Accountability to Increase Equity

Embed accountability measures in all policies to ensure equity and fairness across all services, programs and delivery models.
Recommendations include:

◦ Create a <u>racial justice task force</u> comprised of the major players in the criminal justice system and community members to review data and identify strategies to eliminate racial disparities.

◦ Increase the access of BIPOC to all housing options by adopting <u>tenant protection strategies such as a right to counsel, a local fair housing law, and incentives to expand affordable housing options</u> throughout the County including our suburbs.

◦ Support and invest in the <u>Livable Communities for Older Adults Initiative</u> to address racial discrimination and systemic inequities impacting older BIPOC adults, under the oversight of representative and diverse advisory boards.

Into Action

Report delivered to Mayor Warren and County Executive Bello on March 16, 2021

Commission called on them to:

o Identify recommendations they and/or their elected bodies can implement

o Develop a process to bring other needed entities to work on recommendations that require their involvement

o Create a successor to the RASE Commission to monitor implementation efforts

o Develop plans to address recommendations requiring additional resources or state or federal action

To Get Involved

To download the full report: https://rocrase.com/files/report-rase.pdf

To request a presentation: https://rocrase.com/presentation-request.

Questions: send email to racialequitycommission@monroecounty.gov