

Oregon
Commission
on Black
Affairs

December 31

2010

Working for the implementation and establishment of economic, social, legal,
and political equality for African Americans and Blacks in Oregon.

Annual Report

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To the Governor and the Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly:

The Oregon Commission on Black Affairs recognizes that all families desire to protect and foster their children's well-being. We also acknowledge that all children, including African-American children, thrive when they have a sense of connection to others; safe places to grow, learn, and play; and community institutions rich with cultural and social resources that foster a strong identity and sense-of-self based on shared values. The resiliency of African-American families has been attributed to many factors including, as Dr. Robert Hill finds, "strong kinship bonds, strong achievement orientation, and strong work roles." Drawing on and from these strengths, the Commission is striving to create opportunities to engage individuals, institutions, and governments in addressing key issues facing African-American families in Oregon. The 2010 annual report summarizes the Commission's activities in the past year relating to social, educational, economical, and political issues affecting African American families throughout Oregon.

Parents morally and socially hold the primary responsibility for rearing children. As a result of changing economic, employment, and social factors, African-American relatives and extended family members are increasingly assuming the primary caregiver role. Strong kinship bonds and shared responsibility is a central reason that more African-American children are living in kinship foster care arrangements than other racial-ethnic groups. While these arrangements provide love and care, they are not ideal for children. Whenever possible this should be provided in the context of their natural family, which is why the Commission is collaborating with state agencies to advocate for reunifying children in foster care with their birth parents. This requires a continued reorganization of the state's child welfare system to allocate resources that support foster parents, child welfare professionals, and court personnel to achieve this permanency outcome.

African-Americans have always believed that education provides an opportunity to improve one's condition in life and to improve the social fabric of society. For the past 100 years, each generation of African-Americans has been more educated than the previous. As a result, African-Americans have experienced greater health and economic well-being. However, in the 21st century, this may no longer be true. In 2007, African-Americans are more likely to attend schools that are under-funded, unsafe, and staffed with unprepared teachers. All of these factors have contributed to disparities in academic performance between African-Americans and other racial-ethnic groups. The education achievement gap between African-Americans and whites not only guarantees that African-American children will be left behind in a global economy, but that they will continue in a downward spiral of poverty, single parenthood, social isolation, and will be denied access to a quality life. Education is the primary way out of poverty for African-Americans. Moreover, with education come connections and relationships that can be drawn on to build strong community institutions and social networks that sustain businesses and economic development. In the absence of a national school system, Oregon must develop and fund a school system that ensures equality and quality in our schools.

The Oregon Commission on Black Affairs is collaborating with African-American leaders throughout the state to identify how government can better collaborate with community, faith-based, and civic organizations to invest in models, programs, and strategies that improve the quality of life of African-Americans in the state. We urge the Governor and Legislative Assembly to act in concert with public policy, education, business, and faith leaders to address the education, economic, health, and social well-being of African-American families and children in Oregon.

Primary Areas of Focus

In 2010, the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs worked in concert with a number of organizations, including state agencies, social service organizations, community-based groups, and academic institutions to promote and expand its goals of improving the economic, health, and social wellbeing of the African-American community in Oregon. The Commission's primary areas of focus in 2010 were: 1) human relations-reducing racial profiling and hate crimes throughout Oregon, 2) child welfare, 3) health care, 4) environmental justice, and 5) education achievement. This annual report highlights the Commission's 2010 activities and charts the planned course for the coming year.

HUMAN RELATIONS

Statistical data has shown a high level of racial profiling in Oregon for people of color, particularly Blacks and African Americans. The Commission has met with Mayor Adams and has requested him to come and speak to the Commission about the police racial profiling issues.

Maria Lisa Johnson, Director of the Office of Human Relations (Portland), provided the following introduction to their mission and activities:

- Eliminate discrimination and bigotry,
- Strengthen inter-group relationships, and
- Foster greater understanding, inclusion, and justice in Portland.

Portland's Office of Human Relations works to build peace and end discrimination. Their work is guided by the principles embodied in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Office of Human Relations has two programs: the Peace Building and New Portlander programs. The Peace Building programs promote awareness of local and global human rights issues through film and dialogue using multiple approaches. The New Portlanders program integrates newcomer communities into the social, political, and economic life of our city.

Community Issues

- Racial profiling by Portland Police
- Eliminating hate crimes throughout the state of Oregon.

Policy Recommendations

- Systematically work with other city and state agencies on strategies to address the needs of minority, poor, and rural communities throughout Oregon.
- Develop techniques to effectively turn community complaints about police misconduct into action and policy.

CHILD WELFARE

African American and Native American children being disproportionately represented in the states foster care system. A higher percentage of them receive foster care than their percentage in the overall population (Urban League, 2009).

According to the State of Black Oregon Report (2009), of the children in a foster care setting in 2008, about 7 percent were African American. This number is three times the representation of African Americans in the state's population.

Kory Murphy, Operations & Policy Analyst, Oregon Child Welfare Task Force provided the following vision for the task force:

“Create a child welfare system in which children's best interests must be met, community involvement is key to success, and were children, youth and families must have a strong, informing voice. All work must be done on behalf of children and families, giving particular focus to structural, cultural and policy changes. The vision of success for this work is one in which family is key and the children have lasting safety and permanency with their families and a strong sense of identity and well-being. The work must be empirically sound – informed by data, and evaluated regularly with measurable results that are monitored for their effectiveness, sustainability and replicability statewide and by other states and jurisdictions”.

The Commission will collaborate with the Task Force once the Operational Charter becomes effective.

Community Issues

- Family reunification
- Treatment services for parents
- Lack of resources for families in need
- False reporting by mandatory reporters

Policy Recommendations

- Provide a system that will allow caregiver to seek treatment without penalizing them
- Provide legislation that penalizes false reporters
- Provide a Oregon Resource that lists resources available to citizens by county they reside in.

HEALTH CARE

Access to quality care is vital to overall health and wellness, and health insurance plays a key role. Both in Oregon and nationwide, African Americans experience serious disparities in rates of insurance and access to health care.

Tricia Tillman, Director of the Office of Multicultural Health (OMH), provided the

following introduction to their mission and programs:

“Serve as a leader and catalyst in helping the Oregon Department of Human Services to promote equitable health and human services for communities of color, Indian tribal governments, and other multicultural groups”.

Multicultural Health & Services Initiatives:

- The Oregon Health Interpreter Council was created in Oregon statute 409.515-625 to assist the Department to establish standards relating to health care interpreters for persons with limited English proficiency. The Council will develop education and qualification standards, as well as explore certification and testing of these individuals.
- The Migrant Health Coordinator is dedicated to improving the health status of Farm workers and their families by providing support and assistance in the development of new Migrant Health Centers in the State of Oregon. The Migrant Health Coordinator is further committed to helping to reduce access barriers for this highly productive but most vulnerable of communities.
- The Governor's Racial and Ethnic Health Task Force has been hard at work in helping to eliminate health disparities within Oregon's communities of color.
- The OMHS Mini-Grant Program is made possible by funding from the DHHS Office of Minority Health. It provides Oregon 501(c) (3) community organizations with mini-grants to strengthen existing or develop new local health outreach projects that will improve health outcomes among Oregon's diverse, racial and ethnic populations.

The Oregon Health Plan (OHP) provides health care coverage to low-income Oregonians through programs administered by the Division of Medical Assistance Programs (DMAP). Currently, more than 380,000 people each month receive health care coverage through the Oregon Health Plan.

The goals of OHP are:

- Increase access to health care for low-income Oregonians.
- Improve the quality of health care and receipt of preventive services by low-income Oregonians, thereby improving their health.
- Contain health care costs.

Community Issues

- Informing citizens about the OHP
- Informing citizens about OMH and their programs
- Assisting citizens with completing OHP application

Policy Recommendations

- Provide uniform access to OHP supported medical services throughout the state
- Provide incentives for primary care physicians throughout the state to participate in the OHP.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The Commission is an active member of the Oregon Environmental Justice Task Force.

The Oregon Environmental Justice Task Force has received a **National Achievements in Environmental Justice Award** from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for effectively implementing Oregon's environmental justice legislation and incorporating environmental justice considerations into state agency programs. The

EJTF was one of five environmental partnerships' to receive recognition.

What does environmental justice mean?

- Environmental justice is equal protection from environmental and health hazards, and meaningful public participation in decisions that affect the environment in which people live, work, learn, practice spirituality and play. "Environmental justice communities" include minority and low-income communities, tribal communities, and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes.

Purpose of the Environmental Justice Task Force:

- When state agencies make decisions that affect our environment it is critical that low-income and minority populations are not disproportionately affected. The Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) was created by the Legislature to help protect Oregonians from disproportionate environmental impacts on minority and low-income populations. The EJTF encourages state agencies to give all people knowledge and access to improve decisions that affect environment and the health of all Oregonians.

Community Issues

- Clean up efforts in the area with high number of brown fields
- Informing citizens about the Task Force so environmental injustices can be brought to surface

Policy Recommendations

- Provide the Task Force with funding to engage the communities throughout Oregon
- Provide funding to agencies to clean up brown fields

EDUCATION

African American students can perform well academically when they have school environments similar to those of traditionally high-achieving students. A recent longitudinal study examined academic outcomes in mathematics for low-income, middle school African American, Latino and White students. Regardless of race, these students did well due to greater engagement in academic activities; an internal locus of control; positive school attitude; and positive self-esteem (Borman & Overman, 2004).

As early as third grade, a sizable performance gap is evident between Black and White students on Oregon state examinations. The Commission on Black Affairs has researched ways to address this education achievement gap. This report offers highlights and recommended courses of action for local educators, universities, state policymakers, and other local political and community leaders.

For Local Educators

- Develop and implement different strategies and approaches for working effectively with the families of color.
- Organize and sponsor workshops for training school board members on issues related to the academic achievement of African-Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities.
- Strongly consider establishing focused support programs during the freshman year that enhance a personalized, caring school culture to respond to the high dropout rate for African-American

males between eighth and ninth grades and during the freshman year.

- Give priority status to professional development and in-service opportunities that provide current Oregon teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help eliminate school violence, ameliorate the effects of poverty on learning, and enhance cultural responsiveness.
- Target resources to determine effective strategies for parental empowerment, enrichment and development as one method of identifying why students are not achieving at acceptable levels and what can be done to help them.
- Work with community leaders, establish mechanisms to empower parents and community members in the decision making process used to place students in certain tracks or in special education programs.
- Implement a multifaceted approach to reverse the trends of increased dropout rates of African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities, including early identification of students and active outreach to parents and caregivers of students at risk of dropping out.
- Assist students to reach performance expectations by providing educational opportunities before and after school and in the summers.

For Universities

- Ensure that teachers are prepared to effectively serve a multicultural, multiracial student population by deepening teacher knowledge in the areas of literacy, culturally responsive teaching, relationship building, differentiated instruction, and best-teaching practices.
- Strengthen teacher preparation programs by including a requirement for a minimum of 20 weeks of student

teaching and coursework on critical issues in education, such as the achievement gap and its causes.

- Present teaching as a viable occupation for undergraduate and graduate students of color.
- Provide minority students with the information and support they need to qualify for, enroll, and remain in postsecondary education until they complete a certificate or degree program so the achievement gap does not continue in their lives as an economic gap.
- Examine overcrowding in public schools as an influence on student performance and make recommendations about desirable class sizes to policymakers.
- Organize and conduct community forums that will review and discuss the academic performances of students in the community.
- Hold school administrators and policymakers accountable for the academic performance of students.
- Prepare and circulate community achievement report cards that document goals for and progress on closing the achievement gap.
- Push local political leaders to be actively involved in local community efforts to address the achievement gap.

Eliminating the debilitating disparities in academic performance will command extraordinary leadership and involvement in the governor's office, in the Legislative Assembly, in city halls, in teacher preparation programs, in corporate suites, in churches, synagogues, and mosques, in civic and community groups, in families and, of course, in schools throughout Oregon . There is no single answer, no single point of responsibility.

The education disparity between African-American and White students is at epidemic
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portions and if not immediately addressed will subject a generation of students to a life of poverty, unemployment, and substandard living. All of us have a stake in the outcome and a role in reform – as parents, as citizens, as taxpayers, as educators, as people determined to move Oregon forward.

Bridging the existing divides will challenge us, but it is not a mission impossible unless we lack the will to engage it.

2010 Commission Outreach

- Department of Human Services Diversity Conference
- Oregon Assembly of Black Affairs,
- City of Portland Office of Human Relations
- City of Portland Office of International Relations
- Oregon Department of Justice/ Attorney General
- Jobs for Justice
- Humboldt Neighborhood Association (Portland)
- Governor's Policy Team on Racial Hate Crimes and Racial Profiling (Salem)
- University of Oregon Development Office Event (Portland)
- National Black Graduate Student Association Mentor (Eugene Conference)
- Urban League of Portland Event
- Mature Sister City Association
- Africa Aids Response (Organized World Aids Day Fundraising)
- Federal Court Mediation
- City of Portland Police
- Portland State University/Black Studies Department
- Portland Public Schools/Administration Office
- Delta Sorority Event

2010 Commission Partnership Development

- Urban League of Portland
 - Initial discussions on forming partnership for legislative issues in 2011
- Bureau of Labor and Industries
 - Support of Legislative Concepts
- Oregon Commission on Asian, Hispanic, and Women Affairs
 - Signed Resolution Condemning Arizona's Senate Bill 1070
 - Compiling OACO Policy Manual
- Oregonians for Alternative to Death Penalty
 - Signed Resolution to Repeal of the Oregon Death Penalty
- Oregon League of Minority Voters
- Oregon Child Welfare Task Force
- Blacks in Government (BIG)
Eugene/Springfield Branch

References

Oregon African American Family Commission

Oregon Child Welfare Task Force

Oregon Department of Human Services

Oregon Environmental Justice Task Force

Oregon Health Plan

Oregon Office of Multicultural Health