

**MARION CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Wednesday July 8th, 2020, 6:30 pm**  
Location: Zoom Webinar ID:831-5852-9909

**Commissioners Present:**

Okpara Rice  
Frederick Brown  
Renaë Forsyth-Christy  
Dave Baumler  
Selita Jansen  
Jenifer Tibbets  
Bret Nilles  
Kent Jackson  
Chris Stoner  
Danielle Brazant  
Kim Eiler

**Commissioners Absent:**

**Staff/Other Present:**

Amal Eltahir, City of Marion  
Lon Pluckhahn, City Manager  
Nick AbouAssaly, Mayor  
Stefanie Munsterman-Scriven, Executive Director, CRCR

- I. **Call to Order**  
Noting there was a quorum, Commissioner Jackson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.
- II. **Roll Call/Introductions**  
Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.
- III. **Presentation:** Marion Alliance for Racial Equity, Janessa Carr, Sophia Joseph-Cofounders  
Circe Stumbo, Ana Clymer: Members of Steering Committee

Carr, Co-founder of the group stated that the alliance was formed to address social injustice and exists to bring to light the reality that people of color are currently living. Group is looking for partnership with the commission in dismantling racism. She acknowledged that not all the requests they have been calling for are specific to Marion as the scope intended to help the people of color and marginalized groups beyond Marion. Sophia Joseph, Co-founder presented the following demands:

1. Stop racial profiling in traffic stops and establish a Marion Citizens Police Review Board with the authority to require and analyze data. Data released by Linn County say 9.7% of marijuana charges were against blacks while blacks make a small percent of the population. Advocate claiming that this demand is only achievable through a review board.
2. Decriminalize marijuana and repair damage done by unfair and unjust practices. Advocate is calling for reducing the sentencing to misdemeanor.
3. All city departments must continually work to be more welcoming, inclusive, respectful, and diverse. Advocate is calling for 8 credit hours on bias training.
4. Open doorways to make voting easier. The alliance heard complaints about harassment in Marion.
5. 24-hour mental health liaison available for Marion Police crisis calls who is trained to deescalate and funded from the police budget.
6. Jerry Vander Sanden, DA in Marion, and Cedar Rapids must resign. Advocate claims that his resignation is essential to progress and to dismantling racism as he justified the 9.7 to 1 ratio in arrests by making a hideous racist claim that the area blacks are worse than everywhere else.

Commissioner Brazant asked whether the group is willing and open to studying the demands further with the help of investigators and experts to see impact and the racial inequality in those issues, before making recommendations to council. Commissioner heard a counter argument that the discrepancy is not a racial issue even when it feels like a racial issue. For example, taken at face value marijuana screams race but digging in those cases substantiated otherwise. Both Stumbo and Carr expressed willingness to work with the police department and the commission however, the group has a strong sense of urgency in taking a strong position and voicing concerns to move this preventative agenda fast and forward.

The group encourages the commission to open the table for community inviting marginalized groups to listen and to be proactive rather than responsive. The group is looking for the commission to recognize and support the presented issues of disparities and is advocating for the commission or any other qualified entity to have the responsibility and authority to demand data and analyze it to solve problems. The alliance's is more than willing to help with making solutions happen. Commissioner Eiler noted that the demands improve the life of a lot of people especially people of color, speaking from experience working with minority and mental illness and abuse populations.

Commissioner Rice moved to support opening of the discussion in support for addressing concerns raised by the Marion Alliance for Racial Equity group and to recommend that the city and the commission engage in a dialogue with the group to find solutions, seconded by commissioner Jensen, motion passed.

#### **IV. Public Response**

The was no public response.

**V. Director's Report**

Munsterman-Scriven said that staff is working remotely on investigations and mediations with all outreach efforts being virtual.

Munsterman-Scriven said that the fact that we have not seen an uptick in complaints can be attributed to the fact that people are in survival mode.

Evictions moratorium was lifted in May and the federal one is expected to end soon. Director is working with legal aid on rights and resources panel to help with evictions. With the hiring of an investigator, the city is expected to be fully staffed.

For those who are interested, application will close July 17<sup>th</sup>.

With temporary rights from publishers, reading on Facebook for kids and virtual book club for adults is still on featuring the book "How to be an anti-racist".

Cedar Rapids Commission released a statement in support for advocates for social justice and Council voted to address the seven demands.

Munsterman-Scriven will be serving on a police advisory council as resource and in collaboration with the department.

**VI. Approval of Minutes**

Commissioner Rice moved to approve the May minutes as presented. Seconded by Commissioner Forsyth-Christy, motion passed.

**VII. Report from Chair**

Commissioner Jackson reflected on discrepancy in racial impacts that recent data is showing such as COVID 19 and police brutality pointing the bright side being the opportunity for change. The commission expressed gratitude for sharing stories and for bringing forward concerns. Commissioner Nilles note that making Marion a better place is a shared goal.

**VIII. Committee Reports**

- a. *Executive Committee*- Commissioner Brown stated that the committee met with the police chief. Chief presented the department's stats, use of force policy, changes he made regarding body camera initiative, and talked about implicit bias and de-escalation training they are currently employing.

Commissioner Brown stated that data presented by the chief at the executive committee meeting is troubling as it showed higher African American numbers in every category, making the case that the racial profiling is the root cause and stopping African-American six times more than others will produce more cases.

Chief is open to discussion and is already moving on policy changes. Commissioner Nilles noted that the chief is new in his position and the commission is currently working with the chief. The commission has requested more data to look closely at the trend by year.

b. *Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission Liaison* - Renae Forsyth-Christy  
There was robust discussion around the seven demands brought forward by a social justice advocates group. City council voted to support priorities and to address all issues:

1. Establishing a Citizen's Review Board
2. Significant investment in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
3. Ban the use of chokeholds, knee-to-neck maneuvers (and other lethal restraining techniques) and strengthen existing use-of-force standards.
4. Decriminalize minor marijuana crimes and other lower-level offenses.
5. Impose strict body camera provisions for officers.
6. Make the negotiations between municipal authorities (management) and the bargaining units that represent police officer's public.
7. Abolish qualified immunity for officers.

c. *Communication and outreach Committee* -

Commissioner Stoner stated that the committee was working on ideas and guidelines and that this agenda gives the committee a strong framework to work with. Commissioner is looking forward to the partnership with the Alliance group.

IX. **Unfinished Business** Commission's role in driving the racial equity and social justice conversations, working in partnership with police department:  
Commissioner Rice reiterated the immediacy of the issues brought forward by the group and raised the question about the commission's role. City manager, Pluckhahn pointed out that the scope, powers, and authority of the commission is defined by the civil rights ordinance and that the commission is a recommending body. If there is a desire to change, council would take action to amend the ordinance.

X. **Good of the Order**

Mayor AbouAssaly expressed gratitude for bringing issues forward emphasizing the importance of inclusiveness in the community. Mayor commended the spirit of collaboration shown in the discussion noting his vision for Marion to be the welcoming community where everyone can enjoy their life and achieve their goals.

Commissioner Nilles said that a lot is happening and while we have people's attention, the opportunity presents itself for the commission to raise awareness as it is key to change.

XI. **Adjournment**

Commissioner Rice moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Jensen, the meeting adjourned at 8:08 pm.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 6:30 pm Via Zoom

*Respectfully submitted by Amal Eltahir, City of Marion*