

Minutes of the Special Committee on Racial Equity Meeting  
May 10, 2023, via Zoom

Attendees

Committee: Bob Bender, Margaret Della, Camelia Tepelus, Julie Reyes

Absent: Bob Fanuzzi

Guest: Renee Moore, Jonathan Custodio

Presenters: [Shirley Leyro](#), Administrative Director, [The Bronx Health Link](#); Vanessa Gamarra, Licensed Master Social Worker, Chief Medical Examiner's Office

Agenda

The Special Committee on Racial Equity (SCRE) meeting began at 7:02 pm and Chair Margaret Della welcomed the community to the meeting. March minutes were unanimously approved.

[Shirley Leyro](#), Administrative Director, [The Bronx Health Link](#)(TBHL)

- TBHL created by the Bronx Borough president in response to Bronx health outcomes especially Black and Brown women
- NYC's data says Black and Brown women are 10x more likely to die from childbirth than other women
- Black women are typically not listened to in hospitals which is why there is such an alarming. NYC focused on highest zipcodes where there is the highest maternal morbidity rates are:
  - Generations of Black, brown and indigenous people were exploited in the name of medical advancement. Some medical students and practitioners still falsely believe that Black people due to darker skin have thicker skin and can endure higher pain thresholds.
  - The hardest-hit communities the [Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity](#) has focused on since its launch include those most impacted by COVID-19, in addition to communities that have a high percentage of other health and socioeconomic disparities.
- Resources:
  - [Birth Justice Defenders](#) - A BJD is a BX community resident who is passionate about birth justice and advocates for respectful and dignified maternity care. A BJD also helps educate their community members about their rights using the New York City Standards for Respectful Care at Birth. In particular, you will help folks champion for an environment where pregnant women feel supported in asserting those rights in order to have a safe and dignified birth experience. If you would like to be a BJD, please fill out this [form](#).
  - Bronx Dula Access Project- informing birthing persons and community on birth and postpartum care, when hospital interventions needed, agency over body, all which result in better health outcomes. Workshops on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and how to put baby to sleep safely, parenting support group,
  - Holding movie night and educational awareness on maternal health

- Join mailing list: <https://www.bronxhealthlink.org/who-we-are>
- Womb bus travels in the Borough to provide health, education and community classes
- National issues where maternity wards are closing down since not lucrative. Even more critical that doula services.
- Advocating for a birthing center in the Bronx. Potentially in Riverdale. Previous center was closed years ago due to funding.

Vanessa Gamarra, Licensed Master Social Worker, Chief Medical Examiner's Office

- Bronx as a Borough struggles with health outcomes and requires resources
- My experience crosses mental health, Rikers Island, Black and brown community members have shied away from medical treatments because of past experiences.
  - Women who've asked for help were mistreated, blamed and not heard.
  - Commit survival crimes to get access to basic health care and services or just utilize ERs to access services. Rikers services to women are incredible - medical providers, therapists who are advocates, compassionate, supporters and go above and beyond. Women struggle to find same care when leave facility.
  - Making sure patients have access when they return to the community is a top priority. Fear, intergenerational distrust, and stigma has hindered women from accessing services.
- 'Warm hand-holding' with clients with deep-rooted fears helps to address concerns little by little. Community connections, and culturally relevant, language-specific service providers and material (looks like me, sounds like me) makes a difference.
- For criminalized survivors of Domestic Abuse/Intimate Partner Violence, Rising Ground and Women's Prison Association advocate for women to access resources and create extensions to do more in the community beyond what Rikers could provide.
- Community must strongly press for materials and resources. When you see something (missing), say something. If you are a provider and see obstacles to providing care in the community, speak up to agencies or community boards and raise awareness, advocate.
- Running groups popping up all over the Bronx create meaningful health conversations and communities. Overlooked spaces are meaningful ways of learning from others and what's going on in the community.

The Chair continues to outreach to Standing Committees for partnership and to prioritize areas in the District that the resource mapping project identified have been incomplete and unaddressed. The budget process is in progress. SCRE is also looking for additional committee members. Chair will highlight the work of the community to persuade more members to join.

- Annual interim report action items:
  - FY23 - Building report revisions for the May 2023 draft:
    - Update Executive Summary - Margaret, Julie, Bob B.
    - Update appendix with Racial Justice Commission and revised NYC Charter - Pending
    - Emphasize the significance of equity within budget priorities - Bob B. to draft - Pending
    - CB8 Mapping by FY Budget Requests, Committee priorities - Margaret - Pending

- Update Borough President posted 2022 data - Pending updated data
- Add DV/IVP presentation to appendix - Margaret - Pending

Next Meeting June 1st at 7pm. The meeting adjourned at 8:06 pm.

Minutes submitted by Margaret Della.