

HENNEPIN COUNTY
MINNESOTA



Race Equity Advisory Council
Annual Report
2021-2022

Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council
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Introduction to the Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council

The mission of the Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC) is to strengthen the county's goal of disparity reduction and to advise the county board and county administration on the county's vision and strategy focused on reducing racial disparities and advancing racial equity throughout Hennepin County.

REAC was created by Hennepin County board resolution 19-0387R1, adopted December 12, 2019. REAC shall "Report recommendations regarding strategies and ideas targeting reducing racial disparities for the residents annually to the County Board." This document serves as REAC's annual report and is focused on Hennepin County's disparity reduction domains of housing, justice and health.

REAC began meeting monthly in July 2021.

REAC uses a committee structure to do its work. The Climate Action and Racism as Public Health Crisis committees ended in 2021. Currently there are three committees which started work in December 2021 and meet regularly.

Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC) members:

Deran Cadotte (chair)
Paola Ehrmantraut (vice chair)
Larry Hiscock (secretary)
Debjyoti Dwivedy
Mahogany Ellis-Crutchfield
Bocar Kane, Raquel Jarabek
Johnathon McClellan
Susan McPherson
Miamon Queeglay
Roberta Reindorf
Yolonda Rogers.

REAC acknowledges past members:

Biiftuu Adam
Amani Stumme-Berry
Tekia Jefferson
Christina Luna
Sheila Webb.

Executive Summary

Introduction

In this year's report we have concentrated our efforts and focused our recommendations on three domains that have been particularly affected by the pandemic and its aftermath: health, housing, and justice. As we navigate the last year of the pandemic, mental health issues among LGBTQI+ BIPOC youth have increased dramatically. Housing issues, such as lack of affordable units, increased number of evictions and market instability have become severe and added to existing disparities.

These are areas where Hennepin County should aim at the elimination of disparities and inequities that have been historically created and perpetuated under intersecting systems of oppression and exclusion. In general, for the three domains, we seek to expand our understanding of the issues and requests for more information about the current environment.

Addressing REAC 2021 report feedback

After the presentation of the REAC 2021 report, the commissioners had the following comments and feedback:

1. Noted that REAC inaugural report is a foundational document.
2. Asked REAC to identify top three priorities for 2022.
3. Suggested two priority areas for 2022:
 - Focus on the income domain (wages, benefits cliff, uniform understanding of income and employment), and
 - Youth justice (violence impacts our youth) and ways we can expand how Hennepin County shows up in these areas
4. Supports wealth building as a priority as well as housing stability, primarily homeownership.
5. Identified three buckets of REAC recommendations:
 1. Strategies that staff were already implementing,
 2. Strategies that were out of the county's role, and
 3. New ideas worth digging into further.
6. Suggested focus on the Income domain for 2022, specifically on ways to get money into the hands of working people.
7. Suggested a report focused on one area.

REAC executive leadership sent the following response (sent to Commissioner Goettel on December 6, 2021 by Chair Ellis-Crutchfield):

REAC's official suggested priority areas are as follows:

1. Ensure adequate funding for health services for those incarcerated.
2. Provide BIPOC-owned/led business opportunities for participation early in the design or conception in the development process.
3. Strengthen and increase the number of BIPOC-owned businesses addressing maternal health disparities by providing grants and/or other funding mechanisms
4. Increase BIPOC participation throughout the affordable housing development process. This includes resources for community members, leaders and businesses.

However, our council also strongly recommends funding for community organizations that assist individuals with cash bail, for assistance to add youth to county councils, and funding for organizations and community programs assisting felons in the restoration of their rights.

Executive Summary

REAC 2022

How our report addresses this feedback:

REAC to identify top three priorities for 2022

This year the report is focused on three areas that have been particularly devastating for POC during the pandemic: health, housing, and justice.

Suggested two priority areas for 2022

Focus on the income domain (wages, benefits cliff, uniform understanding of income and employment), and Youth justice (violence impacts our youth), and ways we can expand how Hennepin County shows up in these areas;

Supports wealth building as a priority as well as housing stability, primarily homeownership.

These are areas that are related to the descriptions of issues under the domains of housing and justice. One aspect to consider as we embark on REAC 2023 is to be able to explore how issues of housing, mental health, justice and income come together, beyond the silos which we are currently using as areas of analysis.

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Health domain report

Committee chair: Miamon Queeglay

Primary report contributor: Paola Ehrmantraut

BIPOC Youth Mental Health

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment for BIPOC youth and their increased mental health needs. As we emerge out of a pandemic that heightened racial disparities, the need for mental health care multiplied in youth and young adults. Demographically, Gen Z is the most diverse in terms of LGBTQI+ identification and the most diverse in terms of their BIPOC identities. For these reasons, we would like to introduce and promote an intersectional lens that will consider how racial disparities intersect and compound with systems of oppression that discriminate on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation to impact health care access and needs.

Education and Mental Health

We would like to begin this section by highlighting two reports that bring together Education and Mental Health, two domains that are already intersecting in their efforts and that we believe will only benefit from further collaboration across their fields of influence. Racialized youth benefit from approaches that integrate educational services and mental health resources. In Hennepin County, School Based Mental Health has served 6,623 students each year in 231 public schools (100%) across 19 school districts (100%) as well as 22 mental health agencies.

In the Health Domain update on mental health the presentation states that Hennepin County is set to “expand mental health care” with a focus on eliminating disparities and creating culturally responsive providers and systems of care. Additionally, the county has budgeted \$2.4 million from pandemic recovery investments to support culturally responsive supports. Last, this presentation poses two key questions to further the discussion: Do you affirm the direction of the mental health strategy in Hennepin County? Have we scaled this work appropriately?

Our response is that we affirm the direction of the mental health strategy in Hennepin County and that we would like to provide an important dimension of analysis as the county moves forward to scale the services to meet growing demands in this area: to include considerations of gender identity and sexual orientation when addressing racialized youth mental health issues, care, and access across the entire county serving all students representative of the county commissioner districts.

The board update on Education also provides relevant information for our report. In this update, we found a concerted effort to reach out to students, stakeholders, and the community to provide feedback on their efforts. We were pleased to see direct actions taken to connect with community members. There is also a commitment to a culturally responsive, family-centered framework, with an emphasis on upstream help already in place. Mental Health and Education domains are currently working as an established and impactful model for the reduction of historically constructed racial disparities that we recommend continuing to develop and strengthen. Two programs seemed

positioned to identify racialized youth mental health issues and to help connect with the right resources already available. The first one is Education Support Services, directed by Christa Mims. 85% of students served are BIPOC students who attend over 170 schools across the state. The program is already fully multi-lingual, with staff able to support families in Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. Referrals come from Child Protection Services, Child Access, Children’s Mental Health, and Juvenile Probation. The second program is the LEAP/PLUS program, with Andria Blade as the program manager. The participants of this program are 86% BIPOC students who can be connected with resources to help them deal with mental health issues, access, and care. This infrastructure of care represents a great opportunity for access for racialized youth..

Intersectionality for impact

It is widely accepted that race-related stressors can affect the mental health of socially disadvantaged racial and ethnic populations (Williams 2018) and that many times in our state BIPOC mental health issues go untreated, underdiagnosed (BlueCross) or lack accurate, timely response to the crisis (Sapong 2020). When we look at racialized youth, the steep demographic growth of this population has not been translated into matching resources to address their mental health issues. A study that focuses on Minneapolis youth states that “[a]lthough ethnic minority youth now represent over half of the U.S. youth population, few studies have investigated potential protective factors in the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health across diverse ethnic minority immigrant youth from different cultural backgrounds.”

It has also been pointed out that the percentage of adults and youth who identify as members of the LGBTQI+ community is growing. Among youth, Gen Z is the generation that is identifying as most gender diverse.

- “In 2020, 9.1 percent of Millennials in the United States stated that they identify as LGBT, while in 2017, 8.2 percent of respondents from the same generation said the same. Members of Generation Z were the most likely to identify as LGBT, at 15.9 percent.” (The Statista Research Department)
- “LGBT identification is up among Black, White and Hispanic adults, more Hispanic adults than White, Black adults identify as LGBT, and higher Hispanic LGBT proportion due to the population's relative youth” (2021 Gallup Poll reported by Jones 2021).

A strong theme that emerges from the bibliography and conversations we had during the production of this report is the need for data that speaks to the specific, intersectional nature of youth identities. One area of particular concern is the role of identifying as LGBTQI+ in developing programs and solutions that effectively address youth mental health. By identifying as LGBTQI+ and being racialized, youth confront compounding systems of oppression that necessitate specific strategies to address. A report titled “MENTAL HEALTH IN LGBTQ YOUTH OF COLOR” (2018) revealed that:

- LGBTQ youth of color reported that they usually felt...
 - Depressed (79%)
 - Hopeless or worthless (73%)

- Nervous or anxious (82%)
- Only 11% of LGBTQ youth of color in the study felt their racial or ethnic group is regarded positively in the U.S. This was shared by only 4% of Black youth and 5% of Latinx youth
- 58% of youth of color think about racism often or every single day. This was shared by 62% of Asian or Pacific Islander youth.
- 82% of respondents experienced racism-related stress in their lifetime.

Three in four LGBTQ youth of color experienced varied microaggressions — ranging from having to educate white LGBTQ people about race issues to being misunderstood by people within their own racial or ethnic community. From the literature consulted for this report and conversations with stakeholders, intersectionality emerges as the lens through which we should assess programs and services to ensure most clients are receiving culturally relevant care and access to much-needed mental health resources.

Intersectionality was first introduced by African American legal scholar Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Dr. Crenshaw explains this is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. She explains it's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Often, that framework erases what happens to people subject to all of these things. In the particular context of this report, intersectionality means applying multiple, convergent lenses of analysis to ensure that specific groups, such as BIPOC youth that identify also as LGBTQI+, are not invisibleized by the data the county collects or has collected in the past. These efforts would also help us better understand youth culture, which is evolving and shifting, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic and its unequal impact on communities of color.

Moreover, we encourage Hennepin County not only to collect data that brings light to the intersectionality of racialized LGBTQI+ youth mental health but to ensure that data collection, from the design of surveys to the questions that guide community listening sessions, is not overly determined and distorted by a perspective of lack and deficit applied to racialized communities. Data is necessary also to help us understand what is working, and what practices are producing results and healing.

Challenges for LGBTQI+ BIPOC

At the national level, LGBTQI+ youth are incarcerated at a higher rate than non-LGBTQI+ youth (Unjust 2017). Additionally, LGBTQ is overrepresented in foster care: "Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people are over-represented in foster care, where they are more likely to experience discrimination, abuse, neglect and the risk of harm. A 2019 study found 30.4 percent of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ and 5 percent as transgender, compared to 11.2 percent and 1.17 percent of youth not in foster care." (LGBTQ Children's Rights, Baams et.al.).

The 2021 study *Intersections of racial discrimination and LGB victimization for mental health: A prospective study of sexual minority youth of color* by Mallory, A. B., and Russell, S. T., describes how "the disproportionately of IBV, poor mental health, and lower academic achievement faced by LGBTQ youth and youth with intersecting stigmatized identities suggests that they may benefit from tailored and targeted treatments." Similarly, Forster, M., Grigsby, T., Rogers, C., Unger, J., Alvarado, S., Rainisch,

B., and Areba, E. (2022) arrive at a comparable conclusion while calling for further research in the intersection of gender identity, sexual orientation and racialized identities of youth to better address their mental health needs. Richards, D., Gateri, H., & Massaquoi, N. (2018) discuss the compounding power of the “intersectional effects of stigma and discrimination” highlighting at the same time that although the challenges are serious, individuals who participated in their study also demonstrated resilience. Arlee et. al. concurs with previous researchers in that sexual minority people who are also racial minorities (people of color) face significantly more complex life stressors than their white counterparts. Arlee et.al. study underscore that further research on double-minority populations is necessary to understand stigma, discrimination and mental health disparities in this specific population.

The literature consulted often reference the need for further data and study, and this lack of specific data informs the first of our recommendations. Levandowski, B. A., Miller, S. B., Ran, D., Pressman, E. A., and Van der Dye, T. (2022 study) support public health interventions that are informed by the intersectionality of LGBTQ and BIPOC youth experiences. There is a long way to go to serve the needs of BIPOC youth and we are made optimistic by recent studies that point towards new methodologies and approaches that will guide a more intersectional approach to the increased mental health needs of racialized and LGBTQI+ youth. For instance, Poquiz et.al.’s research considers the positive impact of strategies that support pride, activism, resiliency, and community in racial and gender minority identities and the effects of telemedicine-based process group for trans and non binary (TNB) BIPOC adolescents and young adults (AYA). At the same time, we would like to warn that just because we may hear announcements that the pandemic is over, this should not be interpreted as the end of its disparity-enhancing effects. The aftermath of the pandemic is poised to have far-reaching negative effects on youth that identify as LGBTQI+ (Ormiston, Williams 2022).

Youth public safety wellness

A public health framework needs to be analyzed by looking at social determinants of health. The central tenet of the Social Cognitive Theory states a person is embedded among and influenced by the individuals around them. We are receptive to influence by the things that are happening around us. We believe we are overlooking the gaps and disparities that directly cause systemic racism and social and health inequities, including the pandemic leaving fewer people on the street.

We do want to acknowledge the vitally important efforts by Hennepin County that include \$20 million to address the effects of COVID-19 on mental and chemical health. The funded strategies will provide real benefits to families, mitigate harm and mobilize additional support. In addition, we encourage the county board and administration to consider taking further action and/or exercising its relationships to further mobilize public- and private-sector resources for the benefit of our communities.

What are we doing with the operating budget with the County Home School, now closed? How is or does the county redirect those funds to shift the approach to juvenile offenders to keep young people out of correctional facilities at all costs? A small subset of youth needs to be in an out-of-home placement for a limited time. The move to close the facility without a replacement illustrates the challenge of doing away with juvenile correctional facilities altogether, even as they’ve fallen out of favor with judges, probation officers, and elected officials alike. Complete closure without a local alternative has resulted in get-tough policies and is already backfiring. Youth are often kept in

detention centers for weeks, awaiting a stable placement, or sent to the more restrictive program in Red Wing or even farther from home, impacting families, communities, and birthing people.

Gaps in the data

New challenges require us to ask new questions. There is no denying that after the 2020 lockdown and the loss of instruction, increased isolation, unseen loss, financial and racially rooted stress directly impacted youth's severity and nature of mental health issues. We have identified opportunities to collect data at the intersection of LGBTQI+ and BIPOC identities to design better solutions to mental health access and care.

The Brooklyn Bridge Alliance (BBA) for Youth is an intermediary created by the cities of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park to advance positive youth development. In the summer of 2020, the BBA Youth Data Squad planned and initiated a data-gathering project to understand issues that are affecting youth and what helps accelerate their success. One of the six key findings was mental health. Youth shared that social isolation due to pandemic restrictions is having serious effects on their mental health. However, only 40% of youth felt that they learned about what mental health is and how to maintain it, and 53% of youth said that mental health classes would help them. Youth need education about what mental health is (vs. mental illness or crisis), and skills to be able to maintain positive emotions and psychological and social functioning.

Movement Advancement Project (MAP) latest data on Minnesota underlines the existing gap in data collection relevant to the health-care laws and policies for LGBTQI+ youth. The state currently receives a 0 in the following categories:

State does not include sexual orientation module in its state-based YRBS ^[1] survey of youth, or does not participate in YRBS.	0	State does not include gender identity module in its state-based YRBS survey of youth or does not participate in YRBS.	0
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While Hennepin County SHAPE 2018 survey provides data on discrimination and respect by including one question on perceived discrimination due to gender identity and sexual orientation (E11. How often are you in situations where you feel unaccepted because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?), this survey falls short of gathering information on youth mental health and LGBTQ/ BIPOC identities. Similarly, the latest information available to the public through the Public Health data site is gathered in the Adolescent Mental Health Report of 2016 generated by Hennepin County, which should be updated with post-pandemic data, and which also shows a lack of intersectionality when it comes to BIPOC/ LGBTQI+ identities.

Finally, we would like to encourage Hennepin County to expand its relationship with the University of Minnesota, the Hennepin-University Partnership (HUP), which could be leveraged to produce a number of reports on this topic. At the time of writing this report, this partnership had produced only one 2021 project which included an evaluation of the effects of school-based mental health services. We believe this could be a great asset in the design of new data collection tools that reflect an intersectional approach to racialized youth mental health needs.

Recommendations

1. To collect data with an intersectional lens on youth mental health. We strongly suggest that in order to understand this new environment, the county adopt an intersectional lens to provide accurate and updated post-pandemic landscape assessment. Specifically, we recommend that Hennepin County bring the category of gender identity and sexual orientation to its data collection efforts, including seeking input from the community.
2. To continue and expand surveys to listen to our community ideas on how to strengthen supplementary support systems, beyond Western models of mental health providers. Listening to ideas generated by the community on what mental health means, the expectations of care and access, working with BBA Youth, allowing youth to lead research about themselves and engaging them in making decisions that affect themselves and others.
3. To reassess if community organizations who currently work with Hennepin County are providing services that strengthen positive mental health outcomes and are connecting in relevant ways to the evolving youth culture, with its focus on gender identity and sexual orientation as key dimensions of BIPOC identity.

Youth public safety wellness recommendations

- Teen employment
- Grassroots anti-violence initiatives
- Youth activities, engagements and enrichment opportunities at free or low cost
- Ask legislative staff to advocate for:
 - Supports for rural, suburban and urban youth
 - Mental health (suicide) and addiction
- Mental health disparities and equitable access
 - Eliminating cost barriers
 - Support for parks and recreation
 - Healing circles
- Alternative interventions
 - Restorative justice
- Reopen the County Home School
 - Public Health Critical Race Praxis framework

Progress REAC 2021: How do our recommendations intersect the previous set of recommendations generated for the REAC 2021 report?

We strongly believe in the REAC 2021 recommendations to position Hennepin County to better address disparities historically created and reproduced along the lines of race. Moreover, we would like to establish how the recommendations of this new report, REAC 2022, intersect and interact with the previous set of recommendations. More specifically, the recommendations we would like to highlight and review are from the chemical and mental health services, REAC Report 2021 numbers 1, 4, 5 and 6:

Recommendation 1 advises to “[c]ontract with providers who use alternate models. There are many community providers that the county has not connected with because they follow models that are different from what the county considers mainstream. However, these are providers whom community members trust and from whom they could have better outcomes. The county must identify and contract with and/or fund these providers.” We believe this is still a valuable recommendation. Although we do not have specific names of organizations or providers, we would like to encourage Hennepin County to explore providers that work with a diversity of approaches and to follow up on the development of a licensure for Art Therapy Practitioners currently under development by the Minnesota Art Therapy Association (MNATA).

Recommendation 4 advises to “[c]ompensate cultural knowledge fairly like any other professional skill. Doing so will not only improve access to culturally specific health options, but also build community wealth, stability, sustainability, and resilience in culturally diverse communities. Furthermore, this is a valuable skill that the county must factor into compensation for new employees who could become trusted messengers.” We understand the difficulties of assessing “cultural knowledge” or its next level of depth, “cultural awareness” (cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural competence). We still believe this is a valuable criterion to include when thinking on how to expand the professionals who deliver this important aspect of care. There is a lot of relevant literature on what constitutes a culturally competent organization that delivers mental health care and this area would benefit from closely adhering to those principles (for instance, the Cultural Competence Standards in Managed Care Mental Health Services, created by the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services). Our recommendation encourages bringing “cultural knowledge” to the level of cultural competence and producing a rubric that would evaluate professionals on this specific set of criteria.

Recommendation 5 in the area of mental health calls for an “[i]ncrease [of] contract rates so community providers can have a livable wage too, similar to the \$20/hr minimum wage for county employees, and so staff can access training, education, and skills that will benefit residents. Often people working in these agencies are closest to and most trusted by communities.” We understand that Hennepin County has established updated models of compensation for county employees in this area that respond to this recommendation. We would like to point out that given current inflation rates and competitive labor market, compensation should be revisited often.

Recommendation 6 advises “[f]und research and educational institutions to work with communities of color and develop models that would align with their cultural values. Then, BIPOC communities are more likely to trust and use these treatments.” Addressing this point, we would like to underscore the

2021 Minnesota Statute 245.4902, which has created a task force to work on the issue of culturally responsive mental health. Their first report will be of great interest to the county, and it will be produced no later than January 1, 2023.

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Housing domain report

Committee members: Bocar Kane, Deran Cadotte and Larry Hiscock

Primary contributor: Larry Hiscock (chair)

Executive summary

The REAC Housing Committee focused this year's report on renters and followed up on portions of last year's recommendations. The history of discriminatory laws, lending and real estate practices along with general bias has resulted in the present-day racial disparity in ownership and in the rental market. Housing status has strong correlations to health outcomes, employment and access to education. It is estimated that 70% of BIPOC individuals in Hennepin County rent. The experience of renters, lack of available affordable units and the instability of the rental market have inherent racial equity implications requiring aggressive response and leadership by Hennepin County.

Hennepin County should view the promotion of housing stability as an important strategy to address income disparities. Evidence indicates that housing instability contributes to job loss. In a study regarding housing and employment insecurity, the "authors used statistical models to show that experiencing a forced move increased the likelihood of a worker losing his or her job by up to 22 percentage points. The authors point out that the effect of housing loss on job loss is greater than the effect of job loss on housing loss." (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2018)

Hennepin County has made important and impactful strides to support the production and preservation of affordable housing along with changes in services to provide legal support and resources to tenants. This includes the county funding its 10,000th affordable housing unit. There is much to appreciate in the leadership provided by county commissioners and the dedication of county staff.

Committee overview

The Housing Committee members gathered information through independent research and interviewing staff from Adult Representation Services and nonprofits providing legal and advocacy support on tenant issues. Housing Committee members recognize there is substantially more research and engagement of stakeholders that needs to be done to expand on the work in this report. Our early exploration of tenant rights and well-being indicates that the lack of affordable units, rapid increase in evictions, and market instability may add to existing disparities and may undermine other disparity reduction efforts being led by Hennepin County.

County's current efforts

Hennepin County has a vast array of programs and strategies supporting low- to very-low-income people, resources to support affordable housing and other community development

initiatives. Hennepin County's leadership and focused resources are critical to regional efforts to advance racial equity. We want to acknowledge a few of Hennepin County's many points of progress and promising practices.

1. **Use of the Racial Equity Impact Tool (REIT):** The Housing and Economic Development Department has begun incorporating the use of an adapted REIT and results-based accountability, including at monthly team meetings for the Housing Development and Finance Division. We look forward to learning more about the use of this important tool in program design and implementation.
2. **Social workers in Housing Court:** This is a promising practice providing in-person support to navigate resources with individuals/households in crisis. The importance of these resources was noted by both nonprofits and Adult Representation Services staff. Legal services are a siloed resource, but people renting do not live siloed lives. The early and integrated social worker support is an important improvement that should be monitored for further investment or application in other environments.
3. **Adult Representation Services:** The expansion of Adult Representation Services in Housing Court is relatively new; however, Housing Committee members were impressed by staff, descriptions of work to date and potential of the service. "Equitable access to justice is a gamechanger."
4. **Alignment with community/nonprofit partners:** Hennepin County has been an important partner supporting affordable housing construction, creating/preserving commercial space and supporting resources for renters. We want to acknowledge existing partnership and alignment work and encourage additional work. Making progress on racial justice will require continued efforts that leverage and build the regional infrastructure related to tenant rights, well-being of renters, access to affordable housing and wealth creation opportunities.

Analysis of challenges

According to the 2019 ACS, 38% or more than a third of Hennepin County households are renters. This percentage is increasing rapidly, especially in the western cities. The Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP) cites double-digit renter household growth in Plymouth, Eden Prairie and Golden Valley. Within the BIPOC Hennepin County community, 70% are renters. This majority-renter representation points to inherent racial inequities. The history of covenants and intentional segregation featured in built environment design planning, such as gouging interstate freeways through historically BIPOC middle-class enclaves while simultaneously locating unwieldy and dangerous diversions to preserve historic white upper-class ones, is one example of a planning practice replicated throughout most U.S. urban centers. These wrongs, however, have realized a half-century of impact. Our present-day attempts to mollify these wrongs are falling woefully short.

We are not likely to build our way out of a rental housing crisis. The majority of new units added in the last decade have not contributed to affordability in a meaningful way. As MHP notes, since 2010, the overall average rent in newly constructed Hennepin County properties has increased by 90% (2019).

Three factors are exacerbating inequities in BIPOC renter households:

First, 18 out of the county's 24 cities have rental vacancy rates below 5% (a 5% vacancy rate is considered viable). MHP notes this <5% figure pre-pandemic (2019). Pandemic-era eviction moratoria have undoubtedly reduced affected rental unit turnover in the short term.

Second, the BIPOC labor force has experienced greater wage stagnation compared to the white labor force.

Third, according to Princeton University's Eviction Lab, statewide evictions are up 73% compared to pre-pandemic levels. With most of these filings occurring in Hennepin County with its majority-BIPOC renter base, to quote Commissioner Conley, "We're in trouble."

These three factors drive inequities in rent burdens and location choice – perpetuating historic systems of segregation and predation.

Information shared by the nonprofit HOMELine (August 2022) paints a picture depicting imbalanced impacts with most precarious renters seeking aid identifying as BIPOC (57%) females (66%) with low to extremely-low incomes (88%), and the leading concern being evictions or notices to vacate (47%), sometimes referred to as "passive-evictions." In the past, maintenance issues were a primary concern versus evictions or notices to vacate. Partnerships with nonprofits and data points like this are important to help Hennepin County staff to calibrate responses. It is likely the increase in evictions and notices to vacate will contribute to job loss and further reliance on other county services.

Echoing the trend of many regions nationally, the majority of contributors to Minnesota's population growth are likely to continue to come from the international community, and by approximately 2040 — essentially one generation from today — the "natural change" rate (the sum of local births and deaths) will be eclipsed by new arrivals (Allen, 2017). Hennepin County, containing labor, transport, and social service resources, will continue to be a destination for these arriving Minnesotans. It is incumbent, therefore, that the county embraces a multi-pronged approach to providing a robust rental housing resource.

Summary

Through interviews and research we identified the following themes: 1) Need for more local ordinances or state law to protect tenant rights and well-being; 2) Incomes of low- and very low-income tenants simply are not keeping pace with raising rents and financial supports are still inadequate; 3) The complexity of braiding together a patchwork of supports to stabilize households is a barrier, and 4) The need to explore more transformational or structural shifts to impact how the housing market functions. There was no clarity on all the specific actions to remedy the problems and structural shortcomings, but it was clear that there is more in our power to do.

There was positive feedback regarding ordinances. Just-cause evictions and eviction notifications are very helpful in the legal process and respected by judges. The following communities were referenced: St. Louis Park, Minneapolis, and Brooklyn Center (Housing Committee Interviews, 2022). We will need to voice our support for state bills like those sponsored by Senator Dziedzic and Representatives Hassan

and Her which aim to strengthen weak tenant protections (A bill for an act...amending Minnesota Statutes 2020, sections 504B.135; 504B.321. SF766, 92nd Leg., 2022).

Economic assistance in the form of rental assistance was also discussed. It was noted that there were improvements in the process that were appreciated. It was still noted that the lag time of distributing funds was too long to prevent eviction for many. Also, the documentation requirements for likely qualifying tenants added to the delay or failure to secure resources. The documentation burden was simply too much for some households, especially those already in crisis.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen rental assistance process:** Further adjustments to the rental assistance program to address the following two concerns: a) Rental assistance fund distribution needs to be expedited, and b) efforts need to be made to reduce the documentation burden. Although an individual or family may qualify for rental assistance, the processing time combined with the challenge of assembling documentation may not be fast enough to resolve the eviction.
2. **Build capacity of local jurisdictions:** Additional efforts should be made to encourage and support local jurisdictions to adopt provisions to protect rights of renters, address the housing shortage, respond to the affordability crisis and address the ownership gap. Cities in Hennepin County often lack the legal and staff capacity to do the research and legal review of potential changes. Hennepin County relies and benefits from local jurisdictions to take proactive steps. Capacity building could take place in the form of convenings, training or grants to offset the costs of policy development and initial implementation.
3. **Expanded advocacy:** Local communities are important in piloting and testing policies and strategies. However, stronger state laws regarding tenant rights or opportunity-to-purchase provisions are necessary.
4. **Evaluation of Adult Representation Services:** The expansion to housing is promising. It is important that there is adequate support to ensure quality evaluation and data tracking that is not burdensome to staff. The findings can inform program improvements but may also give insights into other trends or shared challenges experienced by tenants that Hennepin County can respond to or that can be shared with community partners and other stakeholders that work with tenants. It is important that to the extent possible, we are able to desegregate the information so we are able to tailor responses to specific cultural communities.
5. **Coordinated services focused on renters:** The broader REAC Council also felt it important that existing programs are connected to tenants. This may already be happening in some form, but there might be additional targeted venues to be considered and integrated into county support efforts. The following programs were discussed: Stable Homes Stable Schools, Homework Starts with Home, and the Office of Broadband and Digital Equity were a few the group considered.

Conclusion

The Housing Committee encourages Hennepin County to see housing as a core human right. Our current efforts are laudable, but inadequate, in creating needed affordable units and preservation existing naturally occurring affordable housing or addressing the unsustainable rent burdens. Housing disparities also contribute to other disparities in health, income and education attainment. Our inability to address the housing crisis undermines other racial equity efforts and a cohesive community. The failure to address the marketplace or sufficiently protect tenant rights adds further demands on the social safety net provided by Hennepin County and taxpayers. We recognize and respect the good work underway and continue to encourage additional action to protect tenant rights, provide needed resources to mitigate harm and ensure our investments are directly benefiting tenants.

References

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Justice domain report

Committee chair: Johnathon McClellan

Primary report contributor: Johnathon McClellan

Executive summary

The Justice Committee within the REAC Council focused on several different areas when we began meeting. Our focus was to address changes in the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, probation, expungements, victim rights, cash bail, and services. We have several specific recommendations with the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, and Hennepin County Probation Office, and with establishing better care for dealing with opioid services. These recommendations were outlined in our first-year report. One of the primary recommendations was to open up dialogue between the REAC committee and specific government agencies within Hennepin County. Our goal has been to establish a mutual partnership that opens dialogue and provides a positive change in our community. It is important for all of us to have open lines of communication with people in other offices and agencies. We want to be able to address issues in real time and make sure we are all on the same page. Unfortunately, we have been dealing with pushback with newly assigned county staff, and it is our hope that by addressing the pushback here we can move forward with our work.

Committee overview

In March 2022, we sought to have a meeting with two Hennepin County commissioners, and Hennepin County staff failed to facilitate those meetings and have kept us from progressing forward with our agenda for the Justice committee. In one particular REAC council meeting, the full REAC went out of our way to have a discussion on our by-laws and priorities in hopes that Hennepin County staff would understand that we are an advisory committee to the board of commissioners and that we set our own priorities as a council based on what we feel is best for Hennepin County, as voices connected to the community.

In our 2021 report, there were a number of areas we wanted to work on with Hennepin County, which are included below.

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

The Hennepin County Attorney's Office has also incorporated initiatives that create a more diverse and inclusive workplace. They have developed a broader hiring pool by expanding their recruitment efforts to the broader community. They consciously promote those who show true leadership skills. Of its 10 most senior managers, seven are women and four are people of color.

1. REAC would like information on embedded practices that ensure that this will be ongoing and not just a reaction to the recent community uprising.

2. African Americans and American Indians are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and we would like to see the County Attorney's Office staff reflect the community it serves.
3. Develop a robust recruitment pool by creating new paid pathways into employment for people of color and develop a non-traditional, creative, and inclusive recruitment strategy. People of diverse backgrounds and experiences have to be part of the solution.
4. REAC would like more detailed information about the composition of the staff at different levels and salaries at different bands. The information received was incomplete.
5. While this is a good statistic, information on the hiring rate from this pool would be beneficial.

Probation and practices for race equity

What information does the County Attorney's Office share with the public to determine when an offender is rehabilitated?

1. What does the relationship between the County Attorney's Office and probation office look like?
2. What is the policy and procedure when a law enforcement official, probation officer, or County Attorney's Office worker is involved in a crime? Is it handled differently than a regular citizen involved in a crime?

Expungements

1. This committee would like data that confirms that the County Attorney's Office is working with agencies and is engaged in the process of addressing expungements. The purpose is to ensure that the collateral sanctions of a criminal record are not hurting people who had their records expunged in finding employment housing and licensure.
2. We recommend that the County Attorney's Office form partnerships and make legal advice available as Minneapolis does, using pro bono legal assistance.

Victim rights

Discussion on Marcy's law.

- Marcy's law would ensure that victims of crime have rights equal to that of the defendant who committed the crimes against them.

Overall recommendations for the Hennepin County Attorney's Office

The County Attorney's Office needs to be transparent and timely with the Justice Committee, allowing an opportunity to coordinate our efforts and a commitment to ensure the county as a whole is being served with good information. Provide access to the data and information requested by the Justice Committee.

1. Arrange a meeting with the new Hennepin County Diversity and Inclusion director and discuss ways we can implement best practices together.

2. Have interactions between the County Attorney's Office and the REAC Justice Committee to understand further what REAC does and how we can collaborate.
3. Provide access to resources for families who lose loved ones to police violence.

Hennepin County Sheriff's Office

In the past year, the Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR), the courts, the HCSO, and many others worked on disparity reduction goals, particularly probation reform. It would be helpful to see how this has been working, especially in Black and Indigenous communities which are disproportionately represented on probation and in our correctional system.

1. REAC needs data to assess the impact and success of these efforts.
2. This committee would like information on changes being made to implement the Hardel Sherrell Act in Hennepin County.
3. The focus must be on transparency and accountability for the people taking care of someone in custody. We would like information on how this is being done.

Opioid services

1. REAC would like to be able to speak with the social worker and collaborate on best practices.
2. Allow meetings between REAC and the HCSO race and equity contacts.
3. Allow this committee opportunities to interact with people in the HCSO to exchange information on what the REAC's Justice Committee does and how we can collaborate.
4. Transparency and timely response to requests for data and information from the Justice Committee will allow us to collaborate and move towards equity in systems.
5. The treatment for an individual struggling with opioid addiction should be individualized, strength-based, and trauma-informed, and allow the client to decide if medication or treatment is the best option for them to choose. Basic medical services must be provided to all individuals in custody. This should include access to a doctor or nurse practitioner and the ability to get a physical and meet with an eye doctor, dentist, and mental health professional(s) for evaluation.
6. Expand access to opiate disorder medication for those waiting in jail for treatment spots to open. Community solutions that allow people to be close to their families and social support system can be more effective and have better outcomes. Further, the risk of overdose for individuals leaving jail is incredibly high. To ensure these individuals receive proper care transitions and linkage to community providers who prescribe medications for opioid use disorder, the number of jail discharge coordinators to facilitate these care transitions should be increased.
7. It is important we explore the current list of contractors that the jail and/or workhouse is using for medical needs. We would benefit from talking and learning ways to improve the process for the individuals who are in the custody of the HCSO.

Hennepin County Defender's Office

Hennepin County could collaborate with other metro counties to review public defender caseloads and wages to ensure parity with other public legal employees. This is a race equity issue since low-income people in the justice system who depend on the Public Defender's Office are predominantly Black and Indigenous.

This remains our priority today and requires support from the Hennepin County staff so we can facilitate these conversations to exchange ideas.

Cash bail

We believe that our criminal justice system, like many other systems in our society, was designed to maintain and uphold white supremacy while prioritizing the wealth, power, and influence of the few at the expense of the many. It is long past due to abolish these systems so that together we can create a more inclusive, just, and equitable society. The use of bail to criminalize, incarcerate, and preemptively punish people who lack wealth is not only counter to the intention behind the cash bail system but also to our federal and state constitutions that protect people from pretrial incarceration based on race and wealth. We should be working to reduce these unjust system, not reinforce them.

There are extreme racial disparities in the pretrial detention system. Black people are 7% of the state population, but 31% of the jail population, and Indigenous people are 1% of the state population but 8% of the jail population. In a 2017 report, the ACLU of Minnesota found that these disparities are growing, not shrinking, over time. Research also tells us that crime is not caused by charitable bail; it is caused by the poverty, desperation, hopelessness, addiction, and mental illness that have followed economic disinvestment from Black, brown, and Indigenous communities. Jails and localities rely on secured bail money as revenue, creating a perverse incentive for police to make arrests. However, communities pay for the consequences of pretrial incarceration in many ways. Reevaluating the cash bail system would significantly allow state and local policymakers to address structural racism.

Recommendation

Review our current cash bail system to reflect and/or exceed that of Ramsey County and other counties that have done away with pre-trial detention and cash bail.

Overall recommendations

- Our recommendation is to continue to follow the goals and direction laid out in our first-year report.
- To meet with our counterparts in different respective agencies and meet with commissioners when there is a specific issue needing to be addressed.
- That the commissioners address areas of red tape and obstacles by Hennepin County staff preventing communication between the Justice Committee of the REAC council, commissioners, and county departments. It is important that we have a bright line that allows us to do our work in communicating as a counsel and committee with the commissioners, and county departments.

Progress on previous recommendations

We spoke with a representative from the Minnesota Freedom Fund and we discussed some of the challenges that people face trying to come up with cash to bail an individual out of jail. Other states have eliminated cash bail. The takeaway was that disinformation has turned an issue like “cash bail” into a political position. It has been reported that some courts are aware of the cash bail being manipulated and have raised bail fully understanding the constraints of the program making it a challenge for poor people to come up with the funds to bail out.

We also attempted to have more conversations with different departments and counterparts in other agencies within Hennepin County. Any attempt at having a dialogue with agencies and commissioners was met with pushback from the county staff. When these situations arise, the results include people’s loss of time and this deflates morale.

Conclusion

We are doing the work the county board is requesting us to do and the things we are required to do are asking us to be bold, intentional, and meaningful while representing the voices around Hennepin County. We are not supposed to be political or give the appearance that things are happening when they are not. In order to solve the problems and challenges in front of us, we must approach them with a natural lens; this involves work that we have welcomed. Despite the disconnect with the Hennepin County staff we want to do this work. It is our hope that the Hennepin County commissioners can help us in creating a more just and equitable future for the people of Hennepin County. The REAC council members are not paid staff, we are community members with experience and able to add valuable insight. Through that insight, I believe it is all of our hope that we can create a better tomorrow.

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