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## HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

### 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

#### Purpose

Since 1963, the St. Mary's County Human Relations Commission (HRC) has been empowered to promote understanding and harmony of relationships between the people of the county and to use its influence and persuasion to direct the community's efforts to the solution of problems that cause racial and other tensions stemming from acts of discrimination within the county.

#### Activities

The HRC supports the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Prayer Breakfast held at St. Mary's College of Maryland by contributing to planning meetings for the virtual event and assisting with public relations.

The HRC continues to work with St. Mary's College, as well as St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS), in their diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. SMCPS provided a presentation to the HRC regarding their equitable education efforts, particularly in the Social Studies curriculum and efforts to recruit and employ more people of color as teachers, administrators and mentors.

The HRC sought ways to increase its community outreach efforts in light of the ongoing pandemic. New for 2021, the Commission, with the support of Human Services staff, initiated a Facebook page. The page is an effective way to convey the mission and activities of the HRC, as well as show support for other community events and organizations committed to the ideals of civil rights and equity.

The HRC requested the Local Government Article 29-106(b)(2)—(St. Mary's County Human Relations Council) be amended to include "sexual orientation and gender identity" within the protected classes of people per federal law. The Commissioners of St. Mary's County supported the request, however, it did not

pass with the General Assembly. HRC members requested the Commissioners re-submit during the 2022 Fall session of the General Assembly.

The HRC participated in a meeting with members of the Gap Analysis Task Force and the director and key staff of the Department of Land Use and Growth Management to discuss the importance of equitable representation in citizen groups providing community input for updating the Comprehensive Plan. The HRC and Gap Analysis Task Force strongly advocated that the discussion groups need to be representative of the St. Mary's County citizenry in terms of ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic and educational background.

### Challenges

The membership continues to struggle with ways to accomplish its goals of advocating for human/civil rights and cultural diversity during the restrictions of COVID-19. Like many organizations, the HRC is limited to virtual meetings and social media to convey their mission. In 2020, the HRC set a goal to establish a Facebook page in order to increase its community presence and outreach. That goal was achieved in 2021. The focus for 2022 will be to make the best use of this tool by submitting timely and relevant information on human rights and social justice matters.

In 2020, the Commission also discussed plans to invite the Chairs of the various affinity groups in the county (Commission on People with Disabilities, NAACP, CFW, etc.) to educate one another on their missions and discuss mutual challenges and opportunities for collaboration. That remains a goal moving forward in 2022.

### Plans

The following are ideas that were discussed as potential ways the HRC can serve the community:

1. Observe direction from the State regarding human relations matters and research best practices from other jurisdictions.
2. Partner with other human services organizations to convene public conversations regarding human relations and conflict resolution.
3. Assist with the coordination of a multi-cultural event that celebrates the diversity in St. Mary's County.

The HRC will be investigating the feasibility of these ideas over the course of the upcoming year.

#### Membership as of December 31, 2021

Joshua Brewster, Co-Chair (2<sup>nd</sup> Term ends June 2021)  
Vante Burkes, Co-Chair (2<sup>nd</sup> Term ends June 2022)  
Joanna Colvin (2<sup>nd</sup> Term ends June 2022)  
Jesus Godinez (2<sup>nd</sup> Term ends December 2022)  
Steve Hall (1<sup>st</sup> full Term ends Dec. 2022)  
Tara Cruz (1<sup>st</sup> Term ends December 2022)  
Gabrielle Lawrence (1<sup>st</sup> Term ends December 2022)  
Cheremie Frisby-Spencer (1<sup>st</sup> Term ends June 30, 2021)  
Adrienne Dillahunt (1<sup>st</sup> Term ends June 30, 2022)  
Ashley Raley (Partial Term- June 30, 2022)  
Amy Davis (Partial Term- June 30, 2022)  
Sean Wicker (1<sup>st</sup> Term- December 31, 2023)