



Buffalo/Erie County Safe Neighborhoods Initiative Committee
Tuesday, October 8, 2013 at 3 p.m.
Merriweather Library, 1324 Jefferson Ave., Buffalo

I. Welcome/Announcements

Chair Jeff Conrad called the meeting to order at 3:12 p.m.

Present:

Assemblymember Sean Ryan
Legislator Betty Jean Grant
Jeff Conrad
John Glascott
Victoria Ross
Lesley Haynes
Dave Bradley
Ted Hampton
Linwood Roberts
Paulette Woods
Dwayne Ferguson
William Marx
Beverly Newkirk
Averl Anderson
Shavin Fung
Antwan Diggs
Umar Adeyola
Soloman Jackson II
Sharon Spaker

II. Presentation by Assemblymember Sean Ryan

- There is a lot of reentry work going on on the state level.
- Sean Ryan is an attorney by trade and managed Prisoners Legal Services. While he was there, he did a study that shows that we spend a lot on corrections and not reentry. We're pushing the programs on state level. Governor Cuomo has understanding of this. For the first time, we've closed prisons in NYS. For 12 years under Pataki, we didn't close any prisons. Closing a prison requires legislative approval and Senate Republicans want to keep prisons because of jobs.
- Work for Success program: the Governor is reshuffling existing programs to make them work better. There is an impressive Executive Committee with the Buffalo Urban League, locally represented.
- It's a good step along with closing prisons. The Governor clearly said in his State of the State last year: our children will not be used as employment opportunities for upstate

prisons.

III. Chair Jeff Conrad: Discussion on Youth & Education

Conrad: To work on the report to submit after the first of the year, I will ask a series of questions and limit each speaker to three minutes. This week's topic will be youth and education.

Question 1: What do you see as three main challenges that youth face in Buffalo and Erie County today?

Dave Bradley: Have to have jobs in order to keep paying school debts. The high school graduates and non-graduates don't get jobs. This is why young black males don't graduate because they don't think they'll get a job, let alone a good paying job. This is a spin-off from the Great Recession because there is no economic demand to hire workers. If you don't create jobs for working class people, especially high school graduates, you're in a whole world of trouble.

Victoria Ross: Kids don't have the skills or the example and the desire to peacefully resolve their conflicts. Look at our foreign policy and entertainment where there's a lot of violence. Peaceful conflict resolution in schools is necessary. The other thing is they don't have the support they need, especially when parents are working hard. We need schools, community centers or houses of worship with people staffed who can help. These are community schools where kids can learn extra skills. Porousness of the schools, keeping them open longer hours. There's a siege mentality during the day, we can let the community in the schools during the day.

Shavin Fung: Lack of academic enrichment for especially in math and science especially for minorities. That area is where employment is.

Ted Hampton: Before we can get there, we must educate parents. We have children out there who refuse to go to school and parents aren't at home motivating them to go. I work for Urban League and we go into the home and speak to parent to find out the issues. If we can find out parent issues, we can start working on the children.

Pastor James Giles: One is family, infrastructure has greatly dissolved. We want to address youth that are creating so much havoc. Serious disconnect between parental guidance and the child. There's no respect or regard for family values. Other part is community involvement in that problem. Families are having a difficult time keeping their children under control. Educational system is not designed to support individuals with learning barriers. The system itself has pushed them out to the street.

Paulette: Woods: In Probation, we have a program called Thinking for a Change. Kids have the wrong values, wrong role models. You have to start with changing their minds and changing their values so that the way to survive isn't killing. It takes a whole community to raise a child. Community music programs are working. Learning an instrument takes discipline and there are male role models and the parents have to be involved.

Linwood Roberts: Access, education and support. Support for families in terms of going into homes and community support. Education is a major problem and the system operates as one

size fits all and kids aren't set to the side so you can go at your own pace. Access is job opportunities. That will lead to hopelessness and you fall into a doldrum. The positive is that there are a lot of great programs in existence, but unfortunately the schools aren't allowing the programs into the schools.

Dwayne Ferguson: We need more men in our schools. We have mentoring program where 8-10 men are in group and we do home visits. We have to meet our kids day to day so they can get through the day. A lot of times kids come into school with a problem from outside. Community centers are key and you have to have the right people there who care. Parents must be responsible as well.

Beverly Newkirk: Challenges, choices and changes. We have to embrace and engage people. We have to enhance their talents. We have to enrich and energize them and educate them. We have to empower them then. If we don't meet them at their brokenness, they're going to be in the same place. Yes, it does take a village.

Antwan Diggs: There is a whole population of children who are waking up to no hope. We can't just say let's allocate funds to downtown and West Side. The prison population is primarily black men from these areas. When you're not presented with positive opportunity, you think you need to survive. In the educational system, we have to allow teachers to teach them real skills that will be utilized after high school: sewing, shop class, interview skills. One of the root causes is poverty. We have to end segregation in Buffalo, we have isolated pockets of haves and have nots.

Sharon Spaker: The big problem with education is it isn't relevant to people's lives. You don't see what those skills will bring you as far as a paycheck or a roof over your head. The curriculum, the teacher-student ratio is irrelevant to these kids.

Paulette Woods: Parenting should be a class in school. Kids don't have safe havens.

Lesley Haynes: I just spent four days in court at a gang member trial, listening to evidence and circumstances. It was a ritual to get into a gang. These boys are being encouraged to get into a gang and not go to school. Mentorship programs succeed. Once they're in prison, we need mentors who are peers, faith-based or whoever. Also, groups to educate parents. Not all teenage mothers are hopeless. We have to tell our young people that they have value.

Jeff Conrad: Education has come up. What are we looking for BPS to do?

Umar Adeyola: Buffalo is in need of increased cultural accountability. The fact remains that we have a system that doesn't graduate black males. We as a community and legislators need to push BPS to do a better job of educating youth. The system itself is dismal. These programs are great, but the system is broken. Now we have a community of silence, at what point are we going to charge people who are elected to do better for us?

Antwan Diggs: We have to see change and not become afraid of it. We've made dysfunction normal. We have to show them alternatives. We're propping system up.

Assemblymember Sean Ryan: The media is developing a narrative that education is a failure. If you look at poverty and graduation rates nationwide, NYS exceeds the national rate. BPS graduation rates are same as Rochester, Syracuse, Utica and Albany. Some of the leaders of the community are the same leaders who never want to talk about poverty and raising the minimum wage. The narrative might lead to defunding public education. We need to take a step back from the narrative. We need to look at how we educate children in poverty whether it's Buffalo, Lackawanna or North Collins.

Legislator Betty Jean Grant: People at Kleinhans showed that it's not the children, but the test. Can you speak about the Open Buffalo meeting we attended? Buffalo is a tale of two cities. East Side is watching the parade go by. What can we do to work together to empower youth?

Assemblymember Sean Ryan: Open Buffalo is a grant from George Soros Foundation, a national grant. Three of five cities will get money over 10 years. It's a very broad grant to address segregation, employment opportunities. It will be a game changer.

Pastor James Giles: On the board for the grant. \$10 million over 10 years is significant in terms of leveraging that for other grants. We're very confident. What we're hoping to do is to bring people out of these silos. There's a lot of activity, but everybody's on treadmills. If you build up capacity with existing organizations, we can pool resources.

Linwood Roberts: BPS is part of the problem. My stats are the people I mentor. Who's doing the embracing? You have to find motivation as to why individuals are coming to our community to effectuate change. If you're out here putting your life at risk, it's insanity to me that some groups are funding and others aren't. These kids want to be embraced.

Dave Bradley: 25 years ago there were 40,000 more manufacturing jobs in Buffalo. These jobs weren't the best, but that was the source of Buffalo's wealth. Easy 5,000 jobs for the city is to grow our vegetables that we import now.

Umar Adeyola: Try to find dollars to assist building capacity. Agencies have capacity, but they don't have demonstrated ability of fiscal management.

Assemblymember Sean Ryan: Especially in age of consolidation. There isn't enough room for smaller organizations.

Pastor James Giles: In spite of what's going on across the country, we're concerned about Erie County and Buffalo. We have an adult-centric system. We are pushing to make it student-centric so that we don't have problems. At the meeting at Kleinhans, there weren't enough people from the inner city there. We have to also take a vested interest in what's going on. VOICE Buffalo is coming to public meeting on October 24 at Holy Cross, 7th and Maryland, pushing restorative justice but public education. We believe education is a reality of what we're experiencing.

IV. Closing Remarks

Jeff Conrad: This is one of our best conversations we've had. We covered all four questions.