

## **Berkshire County NAACP Social Justice Action Committee Report**

### **September 2019**

The Committee continues to work on two issues to foster a more just and inclusive community:

#### **Strengthening and diversifying the Pittsfield Police Force**

- Following up on our conversations with Mayor Tyer, Chief Wynn and two police officers representing the union, we decided the next step was to have an information meeting with branch members and friends about the challenges of hiring police officers within the Civil Service system. To that end we invited Mayor Bernard and Chief Wood from North Adams to speak at our general meeting on Sept. 4, 2019 to share their experiences about moving out of the Civil Service system and using an in-house police assessment system.
- At the September 4<sup>th</sup> meeting Mayor Bernard outlined the steps that were necessary to take the North Adams Police out of Civil Service. Chief Wood spoke about the assessment process they used to recruit and hire officers and the improvements they received. They both answered many questions from those in attendance.
- In addition to speaking about the Civil Service issue, Mayor Bernard and Chief Wood spoke about the recent hate crime incident in North Adams that has been in the press and that our Redress Committee has been engaged with. The ensuing conversation was wide-ranging and frank about the challenges that people of color living in the Berkshires face on a daily basis.

#### **Collaboration with the Redress Committee**

Committee members have worked with the Redress Committee on two incidents in North Adams to assist people of color: a hate crime incident and a tenant/landlord incident. The tenant/landlord incident happened after the September meeting with Mayor Bernard and Chief Wood and, perhaps as a result, was handled with respect and appropriate attention by two police officers and attended by a public health official.

#### **Businesses Against Bigotry Campaign**

- We are changing course on how to proceed with this campaign. Cheryl Mirer, Executive Director of Downtown Pittsfield, reported to us in mid-August that her “gatherings” of members were dwindling in size and interest so using that forum

to generate support no longer seemed like the right step. Instead we decided we would approach individual business persons to assess the level of support and get suggestions for how to proceed. Cheryl's participation will be minimal as she will be out on extended medical leave in the fall. She provided us with a list of Downtown Pittsfield members that she thought would be receptive as a starting point. Our first meeting with one of these members has been scheduled.

- In addition to the American Independent Business Alliance, we have identified a second organization whose purpose is to promote nondiscrimination. Open To All is a national organization that seeks members from government, and service organizations as well as business. Both these organizations have "tool kits" available to assist local campaigns.

#### Social Justice Action Committee

Drew Herzig, co-chair

Rebecca Thompson, co-chair

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