

Berkshire County NAACP Social Justice Action Committee Report

August 2019

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

Strengthening and diversifying the Pittsfield Police Force

- After learning that civil service procedures are an obstacle to both the number and the diversity of candidates for vacancies, we gathered information about the nature of those obstacles by talking with North Adams Mayor Bernard and Police Chief Wood. We also learned about the success of their first two efforts at recruiting new officers after North Adams removed itself from Civil Service.
- We met with Mayor Tyler and Chief Wynn on May 30, 2019 to determine their level of support for taking the police out of Civil Service. We learned that the two police unions are quite opposed to such a step and that in order for it to happen a “grassroots” persuasion effort is needed. We were encouraged to meet with representatives of the two police unions.
- We met with union representatives on June 21, 2019 and had a wide-ranging conversation with them about their work, including their concerns about leaving Civil Service.
- We have 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. They have accepted our invitation.

Businesses Against Bigotry Campaign

- We had a follow-up meeting with Cheryl Mirer, Executive Director of Downtown Pittsfield, on July 12, 2019. She suggested we make a presentation at one of the “gatherings” (their preferred term for meetings) of members. We discussed strategies for promoting interest in attending a gathering on this topic, as well as content and logistics, including the materials that are available on the American Independent Business Association website. We are planning for a fall gathering and hope to have a confirmed date soon.