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County Board approves resolution setting framework for Kenosha County Racial and Ethnic Equity Commission

KENOSHA — The establishment of Kenosha County’s Racial and Ethnic Equity Commission will move forward after the County Board’s approval Tuesday night of a resolution outlining the group’s structure and responsibilities.

As stated in the resolution, the commission’s mission will be to realize greater racial equity and dismantle racism in Kenosha County through research, education and ongoing review of current policies and procedures, as to implement transformative ideas born of research, collaboration and community engagement.

The commission will be comprised of nine members: Two County Board supervisors to be appointed by the board chair with the approval of the board, and seven to be appointed by the county executive with the approval of the board.

County Executive Jim Kreuser applauded the enactment of the commission, which was called for in the 2021 budget that he presented to the County Board last fall.

“All along, we have heard calls for public input in the process of tackling systemic racism in our county,” Kreuser said. “This commission will provide a vehicle through which citizens can listen to their fellow community members and engage in meaningful dialog about the systems, ordinances, policies and procedures that are presently in place, and make recommendations of changes aimed at battling systemic racism and racial inequities.”

The resolution approved Tuesday was crafted by a workgroup of community members and County Board supervisors, led by Supervisor Jerry Gulley.

Gulley, too, expressed optimism about the new commission’s potential to effect positive change.

“More than once this past year, Kenosha found itself in headlines across the globe,” Gulley said. “Tonight, we brought to the board an opportunity to write a different headline — not one of destruction, not one of violence, but one of moving forward together.”

Commission appointments are to be made from a pool of applicants or nominees. Individuals may apply themselves or be nominated by other individuals or organizations. As part of any application or nomination, a statement indicating why the individual would be a valuable addition to the commission must be submitted.

The resolution states that the makeup of the commission should, at a minimum, reflect the diverse racial and ethnic makeup of Kenosha County as determined by the most recent U.S. Census information, with five of the seven non-County Board commissioners representing racial and ethnic minorities in Kenosha County.

The commission will be overseen by the County Board’s Executive Committee and will be required to perform outreach and hold at least one annual listening session with Kenosha County residents, including community members, local and state elected officials, law enforcement, educators, mental health professionals, social workers, people impacted by systemic racism, and others with expertise in various aspects of racial and ethnic equity.

Under the resolution, the commission is to begin its study of issues of racial and ethnic equity with a focus on policing and law enforcement before expanding the work to other systemic problems determined by the commission.

An initial report to the County Board — detailing assessments, recommendations and any proposals for further Racial and Ethnic Equity Commission work — is to be submitted within a year of the commission’s first meeting. Subsequent reports are due within six months after the first report and within one year of the second report. Presentations of these reports are to be given to the public in open forums allowing for discussion and questions.

County Board Chairman John O’Day praised the efforts of Supervisors Gulley, Sharon Pomaville, Zach Rodriguez and the entire workgroup that crafted the resolution that passed the board Tuesday on a 21-0 vote.

“This group did all of the legwork to put us in a position to forge ahead with positive results,” O’Day said. “They came to the board with a very good resolution that is very focused on what the issue is, what the needs are, and how we can move forward as a community.”

Shelby Jantz, a senior at Bradford High School, is a Kenosha County Youth In Governance member who was selected to represent the youth perspective in the workgroup. She said the commission was structured strategically to ensure that it includes participation by historically underrepresented populations.

“I really hope that citizens take this commission seriously and get involved, because that’s how it’s going to work — if citizens come to meetings, listen to each other, read the eventual reports and become educated about these issues,” Jantz said. “I think education is the most important part of the process on the way to reaching equality and equity, and I’m hopeful that the commission’s work will help to open people’s eyes and open up a dialog about racial equity.”

The full resolution creating the commission may be viewed at <https://www.kenoshacounty.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/18943?fileID=19073>.

Application/nomination documents will be made available to the public in the coming days.

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