

# Washington State Commission on African American Affairs

## Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2009-2011

### Commission Summary

The Commission on African American Affairs was established by RCW 43.113 in 1992. It is administered by an executive director who is appointed by the Governor. Nine volunteer commission board members also are appointed by the Governor. From among those volunteer board members, the Governor also selects a chair person. The volunteer board elects the vice chairperson.

### Agency Mission and Statutory Authority

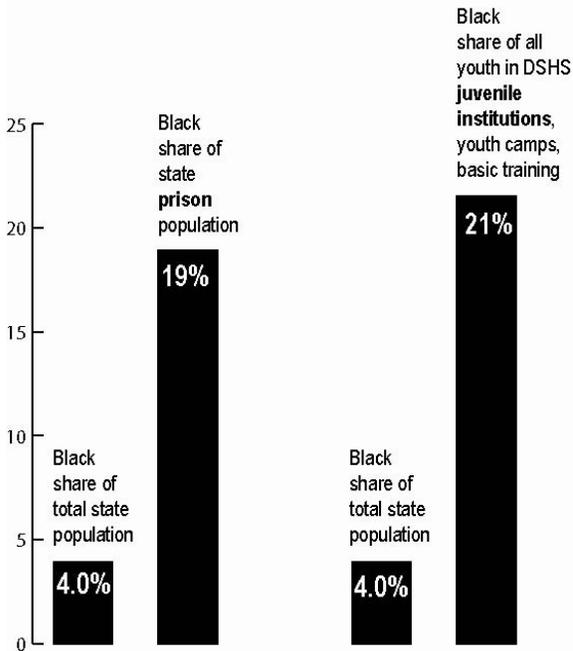
Our agency exists under RCW 43.113 which requires us to:

- (1) Examine and define issues pertaining to the rights and needs of African-Americans, and make recommendations to the governor and state agencies for changes in programs and laws.
- (2) Advise the governor and state agencies on the development and implementation of policies, plans, and programs that relate to the special needs of African-Americans.
- (3) Acting in concert with the governor, advise the legislature on issues of concern to the African-American community.
- (4) Establish relationships with state agencies, local governments, and private sector organizations that promote equal opportunity and benefits for African-Americans.
- (5) Receive gifts, grants, and endowments from public or private sources that are made for the use or benefit of the commission and expend, without appropriation, the same or any income from the gifts, grants, or endowments according to their terms.

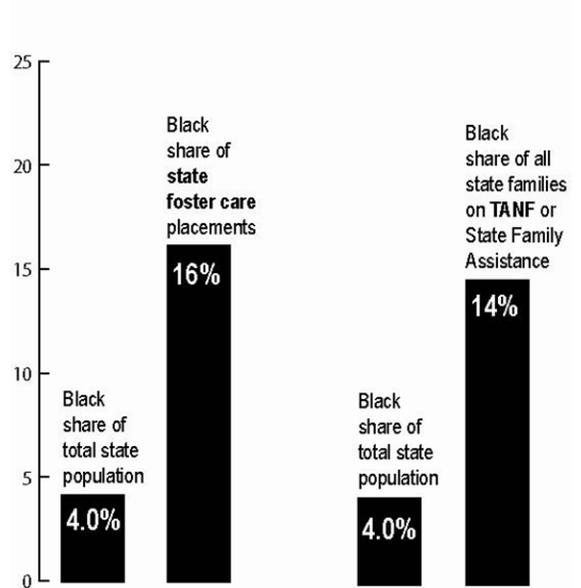
# The Big Picture for African Americans in Washington

African Americans constitute roughly 4 percent of our state’s total population. This small percentage understates the Black community’s significance to public policy development and service delivery in state government. This is true because African Americans represent a disproportionately large share of citizens who are struggling in public schools, confined in prison or juvenile confinement, and/or are eligible for various state services for those in need.

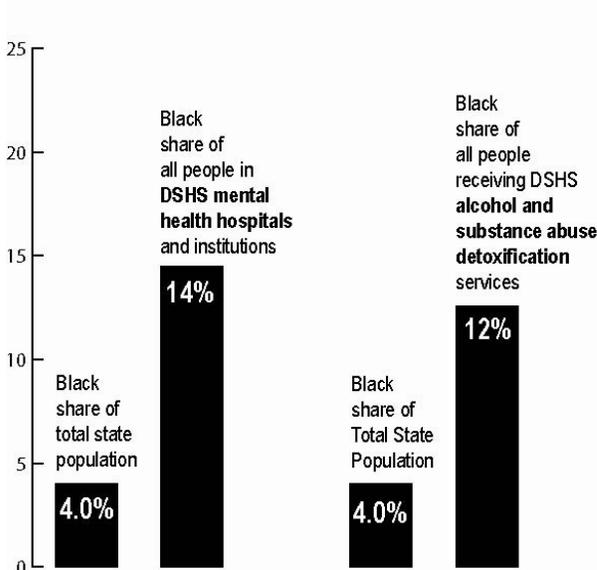
## More of us are locked up



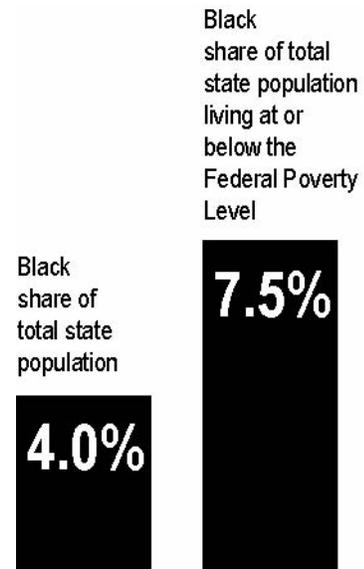
## More of our children and families need state assistance to survive



## More of us have mental health and substance abuse problems



## More of us are living in poverty



### **We are less likely to be employed**

The statewide annual average rate of unemployment among civilian Black workers was 9.3 percent in 2007. This compares to a 4.6 percent unemployment rate for comparable White workers during the same time period.

### **We are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases and to suffer premature death**

Black Washingtonians suffer from the following at higher rates than their White and Asian neighbors:

- Diabetes
- Heart Disease, including Stroke
- High Blood Pressure
- Kidney Disease
- HIV/AIDS
- Infant mortality
- Obesity
- Low-birth weight
- Premature death
- African Americans also suffer from higher rates of tobacco use and associated illness than their White and Asian neighbors.

### **We are less likely to graduate from high school or excel while in school**

Roughly 7 percent of Black students statewide drop out each year during grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. This compares to an annual dropout rate of 4.4 percent for White students and 3.3 percent for Asian students in the same grades.

In addition, a stubborn “achievement/opportunity gap” exists when assessment test scores of Black students are compared to those of White and Asian students. This is true across all grades and subject areas. This gap has remained, and in some instances widened, even as scores for all students have risen in recent years.

### **We are less likely to own a business with paid employees**

U.S. Census estimates for 2002 show a total of 135,614 businesses with employees in Washington State. Of that total, 112,951 businesses had White owners, 8,147 had Asian owners, and 1,138 had Black owners. This equated to less than one percent of businesses with employees being owned by African Americans and roughly 6 percent being owned by Asians. In 2002, the estimated Black population of Washington State was 3.3 percent and the estimated Asian population was 6.0 percent.

Granted, these figures are dated and Black business ownership has grown since 2002. Even so, these figures indicate that Black business ownership was disproportionately low in 2002 and there’s no reason to believe that the proportions have shifted substantially since then.

## **Where the Ethnic Commissions Fit in this Picture**

As is true for all of the ethnic commissions, the Commission on African American Affairs exists to recommend policies and programs to the Governor and the Legislature related to our community's special needs. As a practical matter, this is difficult task, given the limited role of the ethnic commissions in the policymaking process and the limited resources available to the commissions.

As a result, policy is made routinely in all branches of state government, and in nearly all state program areas, without consultation with any of the ethnic commissions. This is true even when the populations affected by the policies and programs are predominately people of color.

Fear of violating Initiative-200, prior "bad acts" by former commission staff, fear of perceived "racial favoritism," and institutional racism are all factors that constrain the roles of the ethnic commissions. Stronger leadership and an inclusive, goal-oriented Governor raised the profile of the ethnic commissions to new heights last biennium. Even so, political history and operational routine still confine the commissions to the fringes of the policy debate. The hardships facing people of color clearly drive state caseload growth while diminishing our contributions to our state's prosperity. There is an important role for the ethnic commissions in this context.

## **Challenges Facing the Commission on African American Affairs**

*History* -- The public policy issues affecting the Black community are some of the most complex, politically charged, and long-standing in our state's history. Among the ethnic/migrant groups in our state, ours is the only group to carry the legacy and stigma of slavery. We also are burdened by the widespread belief in the broader community that our lagging condition is caused by character flaws and inferior genetics, not the legacy of slavery and racism. This troubled history presents unique challenges to the Commission on African American Affairs.

*Present* -- In addition to this history, we face an increasingly culturally complex present. Our community now also includes many migrants from dozens of nations on the African continent, from the Caribbean, and from Central and South America, including Latinos with African ancestry. This includes a substantial and as yet uncounted influx of African refugees and migrants who have arrived in the last 10 years and located primarily in King County. Estimates of their number range from 30,000 to 100,000 people, but no accurate census has been done.

Among these migrants are people from many nations who speak various languages, practice various religions, and come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. As the Commission increases its engagement of these communities, we are encountering the challenges of language and cultural diversity already facing the other ethnic commissions.

*Future* -- The emergence of new “mixed race” categories in the US Census titles has resulted in new complexities for African Americans in Washington State. For example, the growth curve of the school-age African American population appears to be leveling off while the mixed-race population is rising much more steeply. This may be because students with at least one African American parent are now being counted as mixed-race. We are unsure of the implications of this new trend, but we know it adds to the complexity of our work and is likely to accelerate as mixed-race births increase.

### **Our Limited Resources**

Despite the breadth and depth of our mission, the Commission on African American Affairs has only two full-time staff people and nine volunteer commissioners. All of our commissioners have disparate interests and all have other vocations and avocations.

Our two staff people are responsible for meeting all of the purchasing, contracting, reporting, and information technology compliance rules associated with any free-standing state agency. Compliance consumes significant staff time. We also are required by statute to plan and host six Commission meetings a year around the state.

For practical reasons, we also must:

- Manage interagency/intergovernmental requests for information and referral to resources in the African American community
- Direct requests from the public for advice and referral to state services
- Perform ceremonial and public relations duties for the Governor’s Office
- Appear at public events and make speeches by constituent request
- Convene advisory groups to provide subject-matter expertise
- Raise private funds to support advisory group activities and events
- Plan, coordinate, raise funds for and make logistical arrangements for African American Legislative Day
- Coordinate with the commissioners to plan and execute board work
- Refer and support Commissioner participation in meetings and work sessions with state agencies, local governments, and other entities by constituent request
- Conduct basic public outreach, primarily via email and our website
- Update and maintain the agency website and constituent databases
- Coordinate all contracts for support services, including web content development, other IT services, topical research related to public policy, and other services

### **Our Constrained Authorizing Environment**

State law requires us to engage the Legislature, the Governor’s Office, and state agencies on matters of policy, procedure, and programs affecting our community.

Meanwhile, no state law, rule, or traditional practice exists to encourage or require the Legislature, the Office of Financial Management, or state agencies to engage the Commission on matters of policy, procedure, or program affecting Black people. This is a frustrating and limiting conundrum in state law that the Commission cannot resolve.

## **Our Finances**

A functional review of our agency spending patterns for FY 2007 revealed that our state funding was allocated and spent as follows:

- 59% for salaries
- 13% for accounting services and personnel fees
- 7% for facilities and Capitol Campus fees
- 4% for all utilities, phone, and web services
- 16% for all other costs,

Clearly, there is little room for excess or discretionary investments in our budget.

In FY 2007 the 16% budget slice discretionary budget “slice” amounted to about \$36,000.00 to cover all other costs including, travel, printing, postage, advertising, research events, meetings and any miscellaneous needs. To stretch these dollars, we deeply trimmed lodging costs by redesigning our meeting schedule and locations and controlling travel modes and options. We also disconnected agency cell phones in 2005 and continue to operate without that expense. We discontinued purchasing of small and attractive electronics. We continue to run a lean operation and we completed an audit in 2007 with no findings, no management letters, and very few minor suggestions for improving our record keeping procedures. This contrasts markedly with past audits.

## **Maximizing Grants and Gifts**

Our financial condition has been greatly improved by our fundraising efforts. We understand the political constraints on additional state funding. Therefore, we have focused on leveraging grants and gifts to support our events and our advisory groups. We increased fundraising from \$5,200 in FY 2004; to \$15,000 in FY2005; to \$28,000 in FY 2006, and to roughly \$35,000 in FY 2007, and to roughly \$50,000 in FY 2008. We hope to continue growing our private fundraising results, although we expect some challenges due to current economic conditions.

## **Our New Model for Action**

Despite our structural, operating environment, and resource challenges, we remain undaunted. We have successfully engaged policymakers on one notable occasion. We view this one notable success as the model on which we might build future successes – provided we can secure the resources and organizational access we need.

The Commission decided in 2006 that the challenges facing Black children in public schools would be primary focus for action during Gov. Gregoire's first term. In particular, we were concerned about the achievement gap and hoped to raise interest in it in the course of Washington Learns.

Since there were no K-12 educators serving on the Commission at that time, we formed the Black Education Strategy Roundtable as an advisory group to the Commission. We recruited subject-matter experts, including, parents, advocates, teachers, school administrators, college instructors, academicians in the education field, researchers, and key community leaders. ***This advisory group model was described in a pictorial strategic plan presented with our strategic plan narrative for the 2007-09 Biennium. We continue to build the structure shown in that diagram and it is attached to this document for reference.***

### **Education Roundtable increases our Capacity and Efficacy**

We successfully recruited nearly 130 education subject-matter experts who participated regularly and repeatedly in a series of 12 work sessions between May 2006 and May 2008. Members of the Commission on African American Affairs regularly joined the group and actively supported its work. Commission staff organized the sessions.

The Roundtable formed its own six-member steering team, selected two co-chairs, and published a document of findings and recommendations entitled "Key Messages for Policy Makers" in September 2006. These messages were presented by Roundtable members to legislative leaders, Gov. Gregoire, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Washington Learns subcommittees. They also were circulated to various leaders and advocates in the Black community for comment and to generate awareness about the unmet needs of Black students in public schools.

### **Policy Makers are Effectively Engaged**

In December 2007, Rep. Eric Pettigrew approached the Roundtable and offered to prime-sponsor legislation to address the academic achievement gap affecting African American students. With Rep. Pettigrew's leadership and with support from the Roundtable steering team and membership, House Bill 2722 passed both the House and Senate unanimously, received funding in the budget, and was signed into law by Gov. Gregoire on April 1, 2008.

Roundtable steering team members helped to draft this bill, testified before the Legislature to support it, and engaged the Governor's policy advisors about it. Dr. Terry Bergeson also testified in support of the bill. At the time of this writing, a statutory advisory committee formed by HB 2722 is developing budget and policy recommendations to be considered by the Legislature, the P-20 Council, the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction in December 2008.

### **All Ethnic Communities/Commissions Join the Push**

The Roundtable's strong push for this legislation prompted action that resulted in all of the ethnic communities receiving funding for achievement gap work. The Commissions on Asian Pacific American Affairs, the Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs all received funding in the 2008 session for achievement gap work that also is ongoing at the time of this writing.

### **A Model to do Real Policy Advisory and Advocacy Work**

The Commission's/Roundtable's push for action on the achievement gap represents the ideal level, scope, and quality of work that the ethnic commissions can do in partnership with our communities. This approach leveraged the Commission structure and leveraged our limited resources, allowing our community to partner with us in doing "real" policy advisement work.

It is important to note, however, that the Roundtable sessions were funded with private funds raised by the Commission. Our state funding was and is insufficient to convene such a group and support its work. Also, Roundtable members provided direct funding to support some aspects of the group's work. This further supplemented the staff support and limited public resources available through the Commission.

Meanwhile, we continued regular Commission business, including our full schedule of regular and special meetings, receptions, Legislative Day, and all other routine work WHILE supporting the Roundtable. Commission staff, several Roundtable members, and several Commissioners worked through many evenings and weekends in 2007 and early 2008 to keep work flowing. This level of effort is barely sustainable with only one advisory Roundtable in operation. Yet, our goal is to sustain the Education Roundtable and organize two new advisory Roundtables to address health care and employment in the 2009-11 Biennium.

## **Our Vision for 2009-2011**

### **Areas of Focus**

The Washington State Commission on African American Affairs has agreed to continue advancing Education as its primary focus area for action. This means that the Commission will continue, until further notice, convening and supporting the Black Education Strategy Roundtable.

In addition, the Commission will begin new work to advance health and employment issues.

### **Action Plan**

The Commission will recruit appropriate subject-matter experts and convene two new advisory Roundtables, one on Health Equity and one on Employment. Key features:

- These new Roundtables will be modeled on the existing Black Education Strategy Roundtable
- Private funds will be raised to provide contracted staff support and logistical support to these groups
- Members of the Commission will participate in forming and facilitating these groups in accord with their own expertise and personal interests
- Whenever possible, these new Roundtable groups will coordinate with the relevant state agencies, commissions, councils, or other groups with relevant and/or similar missions

## **Goals and Objectives for the 2009-2011 Biennium**

Through the activities of the Commission board and staff and through advisory the activities of the Roundtables convened by the Commission, we will continue to:

**Goal** -- Help the Black community make its needs known to policy makers

### ***Associated Objective***

- Increasing attendance at African American Legislative Day to reach total attendance of 2,500 people 2010 (1,500 attended in 2008 and 2,000 attended in 2007 and 1,000 attended in 2006)
- Expand online training and information resources to help lay people more effectively engage legislators and other policy makers to include increasing traffic to this training to 500 visitors in FY 2009 and 1,000 in FY 2010 (the training will be implemented on or before January 1, 2009)

**Goal** – Make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on changes in programs and laws affecting the Black community

***Associated Objectives***

- Expanding and refining the annual “Commission Legislative Agenda” before session in partnership with community leaders, legislators and the Governor’s Office
- Distributing this agenda to at least 10,000 people in 2009 and 15,000 people in 2010 (as compared to 6,000 people in 2008)

**Goals**

- Involve valued stakeholders and community representatives to guide the positions taken by the Commission
- Deliver public policy research, positions, and recommendations to improve the lives of African Americans in our state

***Associated Objectives***

- Convening two new advisory Roundtables during the new biennium to focus on narrowing the “health gap” and increasing number of Black people in “high skills/high wage employment – one will be formed in FY 2009 and the other in FY 2010
- Continuing to support our statutory roles in implementation of HB 2722 and the Governor’s Interagency Council on Health Disparities

**Goal** -- Enhance our online presence to offer more timely material to our communities

***Associated Objectives***

- Expand our broadcast email capacity from 6,000 records now to 12,00 records by the end of the 2009-11 Biennium
- Creating and mailing 40,000 hardcopy newsletters to reach people who do not have Internet access and/or for whom we have no email addresses (private funds will be raised to support this new initiative)
- Increase the frequency of updates to our website to ensure that new material is posted on the homepage and each major topic tab homepage at least once per month

**Goal** -- Enhance ties within and among the Black/African migrant/refugee communities

***Associated Objectives***

- Continue supporting and facilitating meetings among leaders of various African migrant communities
- Support community-based efforts to craft a budget and policy proposal for an African Migrant Youth Center in King County

# Pictorial Strategic Plan

