

NC Commission on Inclusion

2021-2022 Annual Report

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Report completed by Jordan Hanna, Program & Policy Coordinator, on behalf of the Commission on Inclusion

2021 & 2022 NC Commission on Inclusion Members

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Secretary, Department of Administration, Chairperson

Jenny Black*

President, Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Region

Glenda Farrell

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Executive, Bank of America & Member, LGBT Executive Council

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Professor of Law, NC Central University

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Henry Cruz Reyes+

Student, UNC Chapel Hill

Barbara Rimer, Dr.Ph

Retired Dean UNC Chapel Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health

R. Andrew Spainhour

SVP & General Counsel, Replacements Inc.

Cecelia Surratt

Chair, Morganton Human Relations Council & CEO, Select 2000

Emily Turner*

Attorney, NC Justice Center

Fred Yates+

Mayor, Town of Winfall

*Stepped down in 2021

+Term ended or stepped down in 2022

Introduction

On October 18, 2017, Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order No. 24, charging the Secretary of the Department of Administration (DOA) with creating and staffing the North Carolina Commission on Inclusion (COI) with members from state government, private businesses, and non-profit organizations.

[Executive Order No. 24](#)¹ addresses the policies and procedures prohibiting discrimination, harassment, and retaliation in state employment services and contracts under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Governor. The protective measures within this executive order reference Prohibited Grounds which include (but are not limited to) race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, sex, pregnancy, religion, National Guard or veteran status, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

The duties of the Commission on Inclusion are to help DOA and the Office of State Human Resources (OSHR) identify additional policies and measures that would promote inclusion and address discrimination, harassment, and retaliation based on Prohibited Grounds. DOA is charged with adopting rules and policies necessary to further the Commission's goals and objectives.

The Commission's goal is to leverage diversity and foster inclusion to deliver the best public service for the residents of North Carolina.

Objectives of the Commission include:

- Identifying and sharing best practices with state government.
- Providing strategies that promote economic efficiency and accountability, and attracting, growing and retaining an excellent workforce.
- Identifying trends and actions that create a competitive advantage for North Carolinians.
- Raising awareness for the importance of diversity and inclusion.

The North Carolina Commission on Inclusion respectfully submits this report which highlights work completed by the Commission since the submission of the 2020 Report.

¹ NC Executive Order 24, Policies Prohibiting Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation in State Employment, Services, and Contracts under the Jurisdiction of the Office of the Governor, <https://ncadmin.nc.gov/documents/files/executive-order-24-0/open> (2017).

Overview of Meetings

2021

The North Carolina Commission on Inclusion met three times in 2021: on February 17, October 07, and December 15. During those quarterly meetings members heard a variety of topics related to the charge of the Commission, completed training, and discussed a variety of topics such as unconscious bias. The quarterly Commission on Inclusion meetings provided the opportunity for members to hear from key partners and leaders in diversity and inclusion, including:

- Nancy Astrike- *Director of Diversity & Workforce Services, NC OSHR*
- David Elliott- *Deputy Secretary of DEI & Advocacy, NC DOA*
- Evin Grant- *Policy Director, NC DOA*
- Bailey Recktenwald- *Policy Development Analyst, NC DOA*
- Emily Roach- *Policy Analyst, NC DOA*
- Erin Conner- *MSW & Social Services Programs Coordinator, LINKS Foster Care Program for Successful Transitions to Adulthood (A Division of Social Services)*
- Catherine Rivera- *Boards & Commissions Coordinator, NC DOA*

2022

The North Carolina Commission on Inclusion met five times in 2022: on February 16, March 16, April 20, and June 15. On December 13, the Commission held its first in-person/hybrid meeting since the onset of the pandemic at Durham Technical Community.

In 2022, the Commission transitioned seven membership positions, including filling two vacancies. The members no longer serving on the Commission are Michelle Fullerton, Pat Martinez, Christy L. Smith Foster, Fred Yates, and Henry Cruz Reyes. Newly appointed members include Cristina España, Shae Albrecht, Delores Ali, Chauncy Barnhill, Nancy Astrike, Austin Hansen, and Dr. Charrise Hollingsworth. Further, R. Andrew Spainhour was appointed to the newly restructured Andrea Harris Equity Task Force as the representative for the Commission on Inclusion. The quarterly Commission on Inclusion meetings provided the opportunity for Commission members to hear from key partners and leaders in diversity and inclusion, including:

- Nancy Astrike- *Director of Diversity & Workforce Services, NC OSHR*
- Dr. Charrise Hollingsworth- *Director of DEI, Office of Public Engagement & Inclusion*
- Evin Grant- *Policy Director, NC DOA*
- David O'Neal- *Division Director, Purchase & Contracts NC DOA*
- Tawanda Foster Artis- *General Counsel, Legal Affairs Department N.C. Community College System*
- Darryl Bass- *Senior Associate VP for Equity, Engagement, and Employee Relations University of North Carolina System's Human Resources Division*
- Cristina España- *Deputy Director for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, Office of the Governor*
- Dr. Leah Cox- *Vice Provost of Diversity & Inclusion, Office of Diversity & Inclusion UNC Chapel Hill*
- Kristin Siemek- *State Talent Acquisition Manager, NC OSHR*

Key Priorities

The Commission on Inclusion members developed the following key priorities for 2021:

- (i) Fostering care for the needs of LGBTQ+ communities.
- (ii) Supporting inclusive practices and benefits for transgender employees and the transgender community.

To accomplish the 2021 key priorities, the Commission on Inclusion established the following goals:

- (i) Continue advocacy and guidance to protect the rights and equal opportunities for LGBTQ+ community members.
- (ii) Focus on addressing racial and economic disparities within North Carolina state government and its partners.
- (iii) Identify new areas the Commission can focus on to improve and implement diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within state entities.
- (iv) Reevaluate current subcommittees and breakout session logistics to ensure all members are provided the opportunity to focus on major Commission projects.

The Commission on Inclusion members developed the following key priorities for 2022:

- (i) Ensuring state employees are aware of the benefits available to them.
- (ii) Ensuring individuals are trained to support diversity and inclusive practices in schools and the workplace.

To accomplish the 2022 key priorities, the Commission on Inclusion established the following goals:

- (i) Advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion guidance and rights protection for state employees, including supporting minority groups in the workplace.
- (ii) Proactively reach out to engage interested parties, including youth participating in job, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities within state entities.
- (iii) Closely partner with OSHR to develop and change policies relating to discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.
- (iv) Identify gaps in recruitment, hiring practices, onboarding, and employee retention efforts to foster equity in state job opportunities for all North Carolinians.
- (v) Focus heavily on the work of Commission subcommittees.

Focus Areas

To advance the work of the Commission on Inclusion, the members are divided into various subcommittees focusing their efforts on the following areas:

2021

Unconscious Bias

The Commission learned about unconscious biases and implicit associations by completing an interactive exercise called Creating the Pathway for Best Practices and discussing unconscious bias training for state workers.

Commission on Inclusion Survey

Commission members completed an anonymous survey to provide feedback and reflection on the state of the Commission and its work. The survey allowed members to reevaluate priorities and the composition of the subcommittees. A few key results from the survey included:

- Members are split on the subcommittee structure and supported modifying the subcommittees.
- Race, gender identity & expression, and ethnicity are the highest priority issues for the Commission.
- The Commission should consider efforts to support immigrants and refugees in North Carolina.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

The Commission focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts primarily within the North Carolina Office of State Human Resources and within Governor Cooper's administration.

During commission meetings, the members discussed:

- Changes to state job applications and in the recruitment process to create a more equitable hiring environment for interested applicants.
- Updates to state employee training on diversity, equity and inclusion matters.
- Providing additional leave time to assist state employees in need, for example, giving state employees safe days if they are victims of domestic violence.
- The Governor's Office's reporting efforts on DEI initiatives throughout state government that are furthering equity in government operations that affect North Carolina's communities.
- DEI and protection efforts relating directly to the LGBTQ+ communities of North Carolina.
- Current legislation in the NC General Assembly prioritizing equal work opportunities for persons from varied backgrounds.

2022

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

The Commission focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts primarily in the North Carolina higher education systems and institutions. Members identified and discussed:

- The difficulty in having conversations on diversity, equity, and inclusion as a result of the current political climate.

- The need for a public-facing dashboard on DEI initiatives and progress within the NC Community College System and the UNC System.
- The importance of demographics tracking to identify gaps in equity and inclusion measures within academic institutions and systems.

Purchasing & Contracts Directives

The Commission learned about newly enacted measures in state procurement procedures that address equitable opportunities for historically underutilized businesses. In addition, members identified and inquired into issues within the realm of discrimination and the reporting of discrimination in procurement procedures.

State Employee-Specific Initiatives

The Commission discussed the following:

- Updates to the Paid Parental Leave policy by OSHR, including reviewing the 2021 Paid Parental Leave Report.
 - Members discussed and identified the severity of the resignation rates of North Carolina state employees, and brainstormed ideas for retention efforts.
- The newly created Personal Observance Leave under [Executive Order No. 262](#).
- State salaries and issues that arise due to a lack of livable wages for current employees.
- Several OSHR policy, compliance, and education updates including:
 - The addition of sexual orientation, gender identity, and National Guard status to the Prohibited Grounds.
 - The Accommodation Policy is updated to include protecting pregnant employees.
 - Removing questions about salary history on state job applications.
 - The [Employment First](#)² effort to support those with disabilities.
 - Implementing voluntary self-identification application questions for applicants and employees with disabilities.
 - The continued implementation of [EO 158 Furthering Fair Chance Policies in State Government Employment](#)³.
 - OSHR's internal dispute resolution procedures.
 - Updates to education programming and training for employees to include training on unconscious biases and Equal Employment Opportunity & Diversity Fundamentals.
- The OSHR state hiring process after having a high-level overview of the procedures for hiring and opportunities for interested applicants. The discussion included the following:
 - The role of OSHR in providing guidance and best practices to state agencies considering each agency posts its own jobs, recruits applicants, and hires employees directly.

² NC Executive Order 92, Employment First for North Carolinians with Disabilities, <https://governor.nc.gov/documents/files/executive-order-no-92-employment-first-north-carolinians-disabilities/open> (2019).

³ NC Executive Order 158, Furthering Fair Chance Policies in State Government Employment, <https://governor.nc.gov/documents/files/executive-order-no-158/open> (2020).

- The career expo opportunities, both in-person and virtual, for a variety of interested individuals, along with internships and apprenticeships available in state agencies.

Gaps in Hiring, Retention, Training, and Communications

The Commission identified several gaps within hiring, retaining, training, and communicating with employees, applicants, and stakeholders. These gaps included:

- Retention efforts for state positions must be a priority, and agencies need to become creative in promoting and marketing opportunities.
- Employees, especially those from historically excluded and underrepresented groups, should be made aware of all available resources and benefits.
- The need for additional training to encourage employees to support diversity and inclusion efforts within the workplace and in schools.
- The lack of statewide tracking for initiatives furthering diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- The unavailability of public-facing information on statewide DEI efforts.
- In Western North Carolina, a lack of training, developing, and promoting diverse leadership, makes it challenging to communicate with diverse communities.

Policy Recommendations

With the OSHR Chief Deputy and Director of Diversity and Workforce Services serving as members of the COI, the NC Office of State Human Resources works closely with the Commission on Inclusion to identify opportunities to develop policies and measures that promote inclusion and address discrimination, harassment, and retaliation based on Prohibited Grounds. Utilizing discussions on the above focus areas, OSHR developed several initiatives that address the COI's work. Some of the initiatives include:

- Creating and updating policies such as:
 - Parental Leave Policy
 - Telework Policy
 - Personal Observance Leave Time Policy
 - Grievance Policy
 - Nondiscrimination Policy
 - Policies dealing with obtaining references for external and internal candidates
- Improving the State compensation system to be more competitive with market salaries while creating opportunities for agencies to give employees retention and sign-on bonuses.
- Improving training opportunities for state employees on DEI efforts and biases.
- Holding career expos throughout the state to engage underrepresented communities and populations while also working to offer trainee positions for candidates to gain on-the-job experience.
- Working to offer application assistance for interested candidates and removing questions regarding previous salaries on job applications.
- Focusing on supporting pregnant women in the workplace by creating more accommodating professional environments.
- Supporting the LGBTQ+ community and employees through partnerships, awareness efforts, and Pride Month collaborations.

- Establishing the Military Spouse Transition Network to support employees whose families may need to relocate due to military service and obligations.
- Establishing the Ed2NC program to proactively engage students in state government internships.

In 2023, the COI will focus on advancing EO 24 objectives through the work of the following committees:

- DEI Guidance & Rights Protection
- Policy Development
- Recruitment, Hiring, & Retention

2023 Planned Meeting Dates

April 5, 2023

July 12, 2023

October 11, 2023

December 6, 2023



NC★DOA
 Department of Administration