

**Howard County
Council
Racial Equity Task Force**



**Racial Equity Task Force Issues Joint Statement
on March 4, 2021 Public Hearing**

March 9, 2021

The Racial Equity Task Force was formed on October 5th, 2020. The County Council voted to approve CR 142-2020, which through legislation, established the first Racial Equity Task Force for Howard County. The Task Force is charged with recommending legislation to the County Council to address racial disparities and inequities in Howard County. There are six different subgroups to the task force to look at these disparities. They are Economic and Workforce Development, Education, Public Health and Environmental Policy, Land Use and Housing Policies, Legislative Process and Personal and Public Safety. All six subgroups are looking at many areas of inequities and disparities in Howard County.

On March 4, 2021, during a public hearing for the Racial Equity Task Force, a member of the community called in to testify. During his testimony, he made hateful, racist remarks targeting immigrants, including Asian, and Latinx members of our community. These comments are unacceptable and do not reflect the values of this Task Force. We stand together, and with immigrants, including Asian, and Latinx communities, to unequivocally denounce and condemn this, and all, hateful rhetoric.

This particular public hearing created a limited forum for the public to express their views regarding racial equity in Howard County directly to the Task Force. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the Task Force from discriminating against a speaker based on their viewpoints, even if these viewpoints are offensive to us. Every person who signed up to testify at the public hearing was allotted three minutes to speak on the topic of racial equity in Howard County without comment or questions by the Chairs or the County Council staff. The Task Force meets regularly and the public is encouraged to attend these meetings. It is in these subgroup meetings where the members of the Task Force often express their own views regarding racial disparities in this county.

There have been some negative comments on social media regarding Mr. Michael Harris, a Council staff member who was monitoring the time allotted to the public at the hearing. We urge every member of our community to watch the *entire* hearing before passing any judgment on any Task Force member or staff. At the public hearing, Mr. Harris treated every

3430 Court House Dr., Ellicott City, MD 21043 ▪ 410-313-2001

racialequitytf@howardcountymd.gov ▪ FAX 410 313-3297

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Racial-Equity-Task-Force](https://cc.howardcountymd.gov/About-Us/Commissions-Task-Forces-and-Special-Reports/Racial-Equity-Task-Force)

person the same and would often give a thumbs up to a participant to indicate that the person could be heard or that the person stayed within their allotted time. Many times, one of us would thank a participant for sharing without any comment on whether or not we agreed with the statements made.

On a personal level, Mr. Harris has worked with each of us since this Task Force was formed. He is a consummate professional--a person who treats all people with respect. We know that Mr. Harris has dedicated significant time and energy to the success of this Task Force and to a better, more equitable Howard County. We are grateful for Mr. Harris's continued participation in this Task Force and, we do not believe it was his intention to hurt anyone. We do, however, acknowledge that community members have been hurt. Without the full context of the meeting, his thumbs up may have been viewed as an endorsement of the hateful comments.

Community dialogue is so important as we work through difficult, hurtful situations. In the essence of inclusion and transparency, we would like to suggest a meeting with Councilman Dr. Jones, Mr. Harris, the additional four Councilpersons, the Chinese American Parent Association of Howard County (CAPA-HC), and other members of our community who were affected by what happened at the hearing.

We also encourage community members to join this important public dialogue by participating in the next hearing. You may find the meeting schedule here:

<https://cc.howardcountymd.gov/About-Us/Commissions-Task-Forces-and-Special-Reports/Racial-Equity-Task-Force>. You may also contact us at racialequitytf@howardcountymd.gov.

Thank you,

Chairpersons, Howard County Racial Equity Task Force