



Cuyahoga County Citizens' Advisory Council on Equity

Monday, September 28th, 2026

1:00pm-3:00pm

I. Call to Order

Chair Habeebah Grimes called the meeting to order at 1:10pm

II. Roll Call

A quorum was present.

In attendance (in-person): Chair Habeebah Grimes, Glen Shumate
Ronnie Cannon, Dr. Heidi Gullet, Councilwoman Yvonne Conwell, ,
LaRaun Clayton

Online attendees: Mayor Annette Blackwell, Melaak Rashid, Sheila
Wright

Excused absences: Dr. Reverend Kenneth Chalker, Colleen Cotter,
Yanela Sims, Jenice Contreras, Dr. Charles Modlin,

III. Public Comment

One public comment was submitted via email to equity@cuyahogacounty.us.

Clerk Byrd read the comment to the membership.

There were no requests for in-person public comment.

IV. Moment of Silence/Reflection

Clerk Byrd offered a moment of reflection on the importance of every person exercising their right to vote.

V. Message from the County Executive

Chair Grimes recognized County Executive Chris Ronayne for comments. Executive Ronayne thanked and acknowledged CACE Member Glen Shumate on his 40 years of service to Cuyahoga County. He also thanked CACE for hosting presentations from Director Kevin Gowan and Board of Elections Manager Mike West.

Executive Ronayne provided an update on Issue 11, the Health and Human Services Levy. He explained that reductions in federal and state funding have affected SNAP, senior services, children's services, juvenile court, and JFS navigators. The proposed levy would increase from 4.7 mills to 7.2 mills. He also announced that the Glick Recovery Center officially opened as a 24/7 walk-in facility for mental health and addiction services. He noted ongoing expansion of the County's behavioral-health co-response program and shared that diversion and treatment services remain a priority. A behavioral care center is planned as part of the new County Central Services campus in Garfield Heights.

Member Shumate asked how the County determines the levy size. Chief of Staff Erik Janas explained that the calculation is based on community needs, affordability, and feedback from partner organizations. He added

that Councilwoman Conwell is drafting legislation to ensure sufficient reserves, given rising costs and flat revenue.

Councilwoman Conwell expressed concern for homeowners facing financial pressures and emphasized responsible stewardship of HHS funds. She noted that previous administrations placed levies on the ballot without the current financial constraints and stated that this would be the first ordinance focused specifically on stretching and leveraging HHS dollars. She also stressed the need to plan prudently amid ongoing discussions about future levies and uncertainty in federal and state actions.

Chief Janas clarified that any mention of a second levy simply describes an option for future leaders and is not an immediate plan, and that the current levy is expected to sustain services for its full term.

Member Ronnie Cannon emphasized the importance of evaluating the performance of new facilities such as the Glick Center six months to a year after opening, ensuring transparency about service outcomes. Chief Janas responded that construction was funded by opioid settlement dollars and County Council will soon consider supporting operating costs. He also reiterated that performance measurement is expected for all investments.

VI. Update/Message from the CACE Chair

Chair Grimes acknowledged Suicide Prevention Month and discussed how policy decisions can either support or harm vulnerable communities. She referenced the recent death of a young Haitian immigrant and noted that transgender individuals and other marginalized groups are also experiencing the effects of hostile policies. She emphasized the real mental-health consequences these environments create.

She expressed gratitude for the dedication and resilience of CACE members. She acknowledged that she personally feels discouraged at

times, especially when thinking about the sacrifices of her parents, but said the work and presence of those around the table continually restore her sense of purpose and optimism.

Chair Grimes also recognized Member Shumate for 40 years of service to Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, Member Blackwell on her recent Ohio Capital Journal feature, and members Modlin and Contreras for receiving Greater Cleveland Activism Awards. She also honored former member Phyllis Harris for her advocacy and recognized Member Wright and Angela Bennett for their national feature in Black Enterprise Magazine.

Mayor Blackwell shared that her department has experienced three consecutive months of suicide losses among officers, including the recent death of a 34-year-old field training officer. She described the profound grief affecting the department, despite ongoing support from counselors, and reflected on her own feelings of sadness. She emphasized that officers, like many people, often carry deep pain that is not visible to others and thanked Chair Grimes for acknowledging the broader struggles behind these tragedies.

VII. New Business

a. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the July 8, 2026 meeting were approved.

b. Presentation from Director of Job and Family Services, Kevin Gowan regarding changes to Medicaid/SNAP.

Director Kevin Gowan gave a presentation on upcoming SNAP and Medicaid changes, including expanded work requirements, changes to eligibility and exemptions, funding reductions, and changes to renewal and retroactive coverage periods.

c. Presentation from Cuyahoga County Board of Elections Manager, Mike West on voting and non-partisan community information.

Cuyahoga County Board of Elections Manager, Mike West presented an overview of voter education and outreach efforts for the upcoming election, emphasizing the importance of reducing voter confusion and ensuring residents understand the voting process.

Mr. West encouraged voters to verify that they are registered and their current address is accurate. He also advised folks to determine whether they plan to vote by mail, during early in-person voting, or on Election Day.

d. Update on the Community Survey

CACE Member Glen Shumate provided an update on the Community Survey, including delays related to funding for participant incentives and the Institutional Review Board's approval process.

Discussion was held regarding pursuing funding and County grant-writing assistance for the \$2,500 needed for incentives. Members discussed the need to identify different locations to administer the survey. January was identified as a potential implementation month.

Chair Grimes reflected on the shifting environment over the past 18 months and noted that the committee often feels stalled as it tries to determine its proper role. She questioned what the "right work" is for an advisory body, how the committee should define it, and how to provide meaningful recommendations. She acknowledged that some of the 2020 report's recommendations were implemented while others were not.

Clerk Byrd confirmed that several key recommendations from the 2020 report were enacted, including creation of the DEI Department, countywide equity training, signing of executive orders, and implementing recommendations from the Disparity Study. She emphasized the significant work that comprised the report, which included more than 70 internal interviews and approximately 25–30 external interviews.

Member Sheila Wright also highlighted the extensive effort behind the 2020 recommendations and suggested revisiting the report and the recommendations. She noted that the current collaboration with the Executive and County Council provides an opportunity for greater impact and emphasized the need for clarity despite political and resource challenges.

Dr. Heidi Gullett described the committee's work as spanning immediate issues and long-term structural change. She highlighted the ongoing challenge of defining the committee's advisory role, balancing ambition with limited capacity, and remaining pragmatic while responding to emerging issues. She noted that changes in context over the past 18 months have made it harder to define success.

County Councilman Pernell Jones thanked the committee for its work and reminded members they advise both the Executive and the County Council. He encouraged stronger communication with Council, explaining that advisory input is most effective when aligned with ongoing policy efforts. He referenced the Disparity Study as an example of advisory work influencing long-term policy and urged the committee to identify touchpoints within both branches of government.

Member Conwell suggested CACE present its data to County Council's standing committees, such as Economic Development, Health, and Public Safety. She asked what the next steps would be after such presentations, emphasizing the need for a clear process that defines how information will be used, what actions County Council might take, and how funding constraints factor

into follow-through. Her central question focused on what County Council is expected to do after receiving the committee's findings and how the process continues beyond the presentation.

Member Shumate responded that each of the four pillars provides a platform for membership engagement. He said that next steps, goals, messaging, and desired outcomes should be defined within each pillar based on the members' collective input.

Before adjournment, Member Conwell provided an update on the work of the Women's Health Committee and announced an upcoming Domestic Violence Educational Series.

VIII. Update from the Department of Human Resources

An update from Director Sarah Nemastil and the Department of Human Resources was emailed to the CACE on October 8th, 2026.

IX. Update from the Department of Equity and Inclusion

An update from Director Lenora Lockett and the Department of Equity and Inclusion was emailed to the CACE on September 29th, 2026.

X. Next Meeting

A date for the next CACE meeting has not yet been determined.

XI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:15pm.