

# **Poverty Committee Report**

Report by  
Juanita Maestas, Chair  
Drayton Jackson, Co-chair

Date: January 7, 2019



We hope everyone had a wonderful holiday and new year.

I want to thank all you that voted for me to represent our committee as co-chair. I thank you for your confidence and I pray I perform the job well and to your expectations.



Juanita and I understand that what we say and express is not coming from us as individuals. We are not just representing this committee either; we represent the community of struggling people receiving assistance in Washington state.

The last meeting of the year was at the Washington Women's Correctional Center in Gig Harbor, Washington. Meeting at that location enabled us to get a clear understanding of what women experience in their personal lives that lead to incarceration.

## Therapy Program Panelist

The women in this facility participate in a high-level therapy-training program for incarcerated women. The focus of the therapy program is to deal with women who experienced abuse and now abusing others in prison.

Three women participated as a panel. The therapy program panelist acknowledges the fact that women in society are "shamed" for leaving their children to go work and the program realizes that mothers in prison leave their children in the care of family members or foster system are labeled as "bad mothers" for serving time in prison as well.

Their stories as young women affected the group as they told. One of the panelist said she was introduced to drugs in high school and with no support from school counselors was labeled as a "bad and troubled" student.

The second panelist lost her parents and expressed her tragic experience through drug use.

The third panelist grew up with privileges and still experienced drug use that got her into trouble.

These three panelist asked several questions, however, their main concern was the job market for individuals released from prison.

One of the panelist shared her job experience as a housekeeper and now, having a criminal record, is going to limited her employment options. Another panelist shared she had no job experience and earned money in “other ways” because she feels people judge here without getting a second chance due to their criminal background.



All three have a desire to work and gain their education. One conveyed that she would like to attend college to obtain her associates; another received job training and received her pilot license in prison.

The demographics ratio of women in the Washington Women’s Correctional Center in Gig Harbor, Washington is

- 71% Caucasian
- 8% African American
- All other populations are represented for their race in Washington

We believe this information was very important and needed to be shared.

## Equity Training

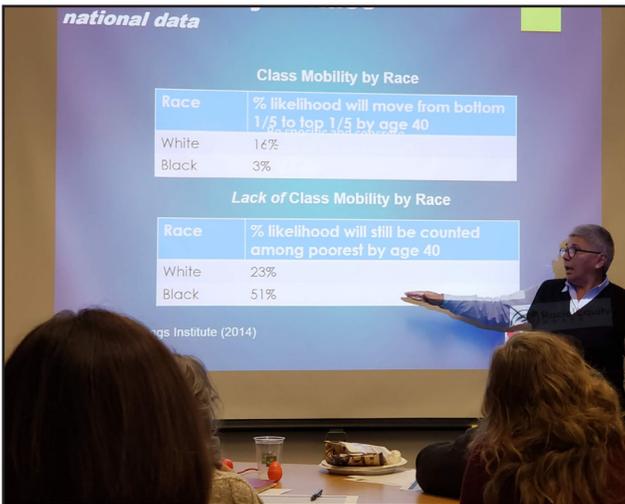
The majority of our meeting was reviewing Equity Training and understanding racism as a whole and how it affects people in poverty and impact on society.

Juanita shared a personal story of when she requested assistance and was turned away from services because of not paying rent or living in her own home. She placed an emotional telephone call to the Department of Health and Services and was denied assistance because of rules and policies. Her story was heart wrenching moving everyone in the room to tears.

## The Committee

There was discussion regarding our committees' positions regarding input and direction. The mediator seem to understand why we have the power to say yes based on the committee recommendations.

Marcy shared in private conversation she believes the commentator lacked all the information and considers us as consultants instead of a major component of what the governor and his committee is requesting.



Juanita and I validate our committee's existence and that we have the full support from a larger body who is ensuring that our voices are heard and our votes are counted in the proposal that is sent to the governor office.

However, a question was asked that we believe should be proposed to all:

**“Does this committee represent all aspects of people living in poverty?”**

Juanita and I are requesting an answered at the next meeting. This is to ensure that the people in the community, receiving assistance and surviving, are represented in our decisions.

We thank you for your commitment to this fight and the opportunity to help people going through the same thing that we are going through in our lives are given a voices be heard and a seat at the table to make changes.

Sincerely,  
Juanita Maestras, Chair  
Drayton Jackson, Co-chair