

Meeting Minutes: Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council

Date: February 21, 2025

Minutes prepared by: DHS Community Relations Staff

Location: WebEx and International Institute of MN (Hybrid)

Attendance

- **CECLC Members:** Shawn Sorrell, Philip Gaye-Bai, Manuel Zuniga, Liz Banini, Nelly Torori, Josefina Geronimo, Alex Abraha, Lolita Davis-Carter, Kimetha Johnson, Paul Slack, Craté Darden, Tonia Lofton, Chris Renville, Angela Fields, Micaela Schuneman, Makram El-Amin, Nina Vongpheth
- **DHS & DCYF Staff:** Helen Ghebre, Cate Dymit, Steven Wilson, Dr. Karen McKinney, Nikki Farago, Elyse Bailey, Hli Vang, Kelly Barnebey, Stacy Wells, Micah Tran, Gaosheng Thao, De Anna Conover
- **Public Attendees:** Angela Reed, Beth Chaplin, Nathan Charles, Dr. Tolulope Ola, Dr. Richard Oni

Agenda

12:00	Lunch and Community Networking / WebEx Opens
1:00	Open Public Meeting and Land Acknowledgement
1:05	Introductions and Welcome
1:20	Review and Approve Meeting Agenda and Minutes
1:25	Community Celebrations and Shoutouts
1:35	DHS Legislative Update and Discussion
1:50	Workgroup Updates & Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislative Workgroup• Topics & Issues Workgroup• Equitable Outcomes Workgroup
	Administrative Updates
2:30	Break
2:40	Discussion on funding concerns for Meals on Wheels Program with Makram El-Amin
3:00	CECLC Strategic Planning Retreat Subcommittee Announcement
3:10	Revisit CECLC Learning & Development Opportunities
4:00	Adjourn Full Council Meeting

Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, and Introductions

Shawn Sorrell called the meeting to order. He led the council through a land acknowledgement and introductions.

Shawn plans to visit co-chair Chris Green in hopes of holding a future council meeting outside the metro, closer to where Chris lives.

Decisions Made

Review and approve January minutes and meeting agenda:

- Motion to approve meeting agenda and January minutes: Paul Slack
- Second: Micaela Schuneman
- The motion passed

Community Celebrations and Shoutouts

Shawn Sorrell opened the floor for members to share.

- Shawn recognized the February observances on the agenda: Black History Month, Heart Health Month, and National Cancer Prevention Month. He gave a shoutout to DHS for a recent event sponsored by its Men of African Heritage and Black Women Employee Resource Groups.
- Manuel Zuniga will send information regarding input on child protection, child welfare, and foster care to Community Relations to be included in the post-meeting email update.
- Hli Vang shared the Olmstead Implementation office is hiring consultants with lived experience. Please share with your respective networks. Also, the DHS Office of Equity & Inclusion (OEI) has upcoming training sessions. Please check its [calendar](#) and feel free to register. Hli acknowledged Dr. Karen McKinney's contribution and service to DHS and the CECLC. She will be retiring from DHS after serving as chief equity officer for the past five years. Her last day will be Friday, February 28. With that, Shawn Sorrell presented Dr. McKinney with a certificate of appreciation to which she expressed deep gratitude and reflected on her time with the council. Among her many accomplishments as chief equity officer, she stood up the Strategic Antiracism Team (StART) at DHS, established OEI, initiated an agencywide learning and development plan grounded in equity and antiracism, and oversaw a systematic effort to assess the agency's interpersonal cultural development.
- Angele Reed announced legislation that is currently being heard by the State Senate's Judiciary and Public Safety Committees under [Senate File 1416](#). This bill would establish a new right for residential tenants in Minnesota to house a youth aged 25 years or younger for up to 60 days without facing eviction or retaliation from their landlord.

DHS Legislative Update and Discussion

In the House of Representatives, the GOP has a slim majority until the March special election. Committee chairs lead the agendas and choose which bills to move forward. In the Senate, the DFL has maintained the majority. The Governor's budget was released, and hearings are underway. The budget proposes reductions in disability services, primarily in waiver services.

DHS budget fact sheets: <https://mn.gov/dhs/media/fact-sheets/2025-session-fact-sheets.jsp>.

Included this year:

- Human Services budget aims to stop fraud, strengthen program integrity, and reduce spending growth
- Protecting public dollars in human services programs
- Strengthening oversight of autism programs
- Improving support and program integrity for substance use disorder treatment programs
- Reducing growth to preserve access to disability services
- Continuing access to care via audio-only telehealth services
- Continuing oversight, capturing prescription drug savings

It was asked what measures DHS already has in place to prevent and mitigate fraud. Elyse Bailey, DHS Budget Director, replied DHS has an existing robust structure in place. One business area is responsible for provider vetting and enrollment. Another business area is the [Office of Inspector General \(OIG\)](#) which provides accountability and comprehensive oversight of services and funds. In addition, DHS partners with the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) which investigates criminal aspects of fraud cases. DHS seeks to increase its number of investigators on staff and their capacity.

Workgroup Updates

Legislative and Policy Workgroup

Shawn Sorrell mentioned [House File 10](#) which does not allow state funding to anyone who does not have legal status and makes them ineligible for MinnesotaCare and the North Star Promise scholarship program. HF10 has been met with a lot of opposition and may not gain any traction in the Senate. Council members are encouraged to contact their representatives if they are concerned about HF10.

The workgroup has a legislative subcommittee for those who are interested in championing the council's legislative priorities, including strengthening their advocacy skills and partnering with appropriate DHS staff. The workgroup now convenes on the first Thursday of each month at 12:00-1:00 pm.

The CECLC Legislative Meet & Greet has been rescheduled to Wednesday, April 16 from 12:30-4:30 pm. A subcommittee has reconvened to resume planning. Community Relations will send information and a link to RSVP.

Topics and Issues Workgroup

The workgroup continues its work with Ebenezer Community Church. There are other external groups that are interested in participating, and the workgroup is deciding how to proceed.

Equitable Outcomes Workgroup

The workgroup remains focused on DHS equity and inclusion policies and hiring practices. At its last meeting, it discussed challenges that arise in hiring and retention.

Administrative Update

Deputy Commissioner Nikki Farago shared [Shireen Gandhi](#) has been appointed Temporary Commissioner and provided some of Shireen's background. She is unable to join today's meeting but plans to attend in the near future.

Discussion on Funding Concerns for Meals on Wheels Program with Makram El-Amin

Makram El-Amin sits on the board of Metro Meals on Wheels. He brought forward a proposed policy change that could negatively impact metro Meals on Wheels recipients.

What's Changing?

Under Title III Admin & Financial, Section 9, AAA Grants and Contracts with Service Providers, Policy 5, the MN Board on Aging proposes to prohibit the current contracting relationship between Metro Meals on Wheels and its member organizations. Instead, if eligible, each provider must contract directly with an Area Agency on Aging.

Effective Date

This change would go into effect on October 1, 2025.

Impact on Service Delivery and Vulnerable Seniors

- Subcontractor Disruption
 - Affected Programs: 19 programs across 4 counties (All of Anoka, Hennepin, and Ramsey counties, plus the Burnsville area in Dakota).
 - Current Reach: In 2024, these programs collectively served 222,745 meals to 1,750 seniors.
- Vulnerable Senior Demographics
 - Economic Vulnerability
 - 1,335 seniors (90% of income reporters) live below 200% of the poverty level.
 - 610 seniors (41% of income reporters) live below 100% of the poverty level.
 - Social Isolation
 - 66% of the seniors served live alone.
 - Age Profile
 - Average age is 75; with 364 seniors over 80 and 156 seniors over 90.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Considerations

- Culturally Specific Services
Metro Meals on Wheels has expanded services geographically and culturally through subcontracting, offering menus that include:
 - Halal options.
 - Hmong, Latino-inspired, East African, and soul food choices.
- BIPOC Provider Involvement
 - Al Maa 'uun: Primarily African American/Black clientele.
 - SEWA: Primarily Asian (South Asian) clientele.
 - Community Emergency Services: 37% African American/Black clientele.
 - Other programs serve less than 10% BIPOC.
- Efficiency and Federal Funding
 - Subcontracting Benefits:
 - 93% of grant dollars go directly to meal providers.
 - Centralized functions (monitoring, compliance, data collection, accounting, and grant management) allow providers to focus on serving seniors.
 - Risk of Service Gaps:
 - Without this structure, many small, local providers may be unable to manage complex administrative tasks, risking withdrawal from the program and leaving high-need communities underserved.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The proposed policy change directly contradicts CECLC's priorities by undermining:

- Equitable investments in marginalized communities,
- Intentional racial equity advancement, and
- Support for community partners' equity initiatives.

Changing the current contracting model will disrupt a proven system that reaches vulnerable seniors with culturally tailored meals and critical support. This is not merely an administrative shift – it is a matter of diversity, equity, and inclusion that will disproportionately harm seniors who are already at high risk. Makram asked the council to consider advocating against this change to protect seniors and uphold our commitment to equity and community support.

The council discussed leveraging DHS's relationship with the MN Board on Aging to present a case. For next steps, DHS Community Relations will identify staff who can lead an initial conversation and advocate the council's concerns. It is unlikely the Board has done an equity analysis, as it is not required to use DHS's Equity Analysis Toolkit. As a partner with DHS, however, it was proposed to have the Board pause on executing its policy change until an equity analysis can be conducted.

CECLC Strategic Planning Retreat Subcommittee Announcement

An email will be sent to the CECLC following today's meeting regarding a subcommittee to plan the Strategic Planning Retreat. Timeline will be a consideration, given reappointments that occur in autumn 2025.

Revisit CECLC Learning & Development Opportunities

Craté Darden emphasized the Office of Employee Culture is available to provide learning and development opportunities to the council. There will likely be further discussion about this at the retreat.

Meeting adjourned at 3:53 PM