



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE BELLO, MAYOR WARREN, CO-CHAIRS ANNOUNCE THE SELECTION OF THE 21 COMMISSION MEMBERS ON RASE

(Monday, August 10, 2020) — The Co-Chairs of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity (RASE) alongside Mayor Lovely A. Warren and County Executive Adam J. Bello announced today the selection of the commissioners who will serve on the 21-member body.

“We are both excited and thankful for this groundbreaking opportunity to fundamentally modify and strengthen every level of our government, so that we can provide a more equitable future for our families and children,” said Mayor Warren. “There is no better time to dig deep into our policies, practices and procedures that may implicitly or explicitly impede the advancement of select groups of our community, particularly Black and Brown people. Having a fully functioning Commission on Racial and Structural Equity will undoubtedly improve our efforts to create more jobs, safer and more vibrant neighborhoods and better educational opportunities for our residents, for generations to come.”

“This commission comes at a pivotal time for our community,” said County Executive Bello. “This work is long overdue and we are committed to leading the way for equity for all. I am confident that with the help and guidance of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity, we can make effective and lasting changes to our policies, procedures and practices. We will eliminate barriers that unfairly hold people back and create disproportionate outcomes for our Black and Brown citizens. Together with the commission, we will create an environment of diversity, of respect and inclusion. Monroe County and Rochester will set the standard for equitable communities.”

The Commission received 225 applications to which 21 commissioner members have been chosen. Of the 21 members, eight were selected by the Mayor and County Executive. The remaining 13 positions were filled through a community selection process that included representatives from organizations, community groups, and residents. The individuals that were involved in the selection process represent a vast array of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints in Rochester and Monroe County.

Applicants who were not selected to serve on the Commission will have the opportunity to participate in other Commission activities. There will be numerous ways to become involved with

the Commission through participation in the nine Working Groups. Staff and consultants will provide technical assistance as the Working Groups review the identified areas of policing, human and social services, job creation, business development, housing, education, healthcare, mental health and addiction services, and equitable treatment in the criminal justice system.

The creation of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity (RASE) was announced as a joint County-City venture in June by Mayor Lovely A. Warren and County Executive Adam J. Bello. RASE has been empowered to examine and develop policies and legislation to overcome systemic and institutional inequities, as well as racism, in Rochester and Monroe County. The Commission will have six months from formation to report back to the community.

Former Mayor William A. Johnson, Jr., Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, Executive Director of the Hickey Center of Interfaith Studies and Dialogue at Nazareth College and Arline Santiago, Esq., Senior Vice President and General Counsel at ESL Federal Credit Union serve as co-chairs to the Commission.

Commissioners chosen by Selection Committee:

Catherine Thomas of Rochester. Ms. Thomas is a native Rochesterian who has worked and administered important human services program. She is currently the Director of the Children's Detention Center, where she has gained deep experience with the juvenile justice system. Ms. Thomas also serves as a member of the RMAP Community Advisory Council. *"I am honored to be a part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because of my lived, personal and professional experiences. This includes my responsibilities with reviewing and writing policies aligned with local, state and federal regulations. These areas position me to be well informed to move the goals established by the Commission."*

Danielle D. Ponder of Rochester. Ms. Ponder is a musician and an attorney with the Monroe County Public Defender's Office, where she also serves as the Diversity and Inclusion Officer. She previously served on the board of Teen Empowerment, and worked as an adjunct professor at SUNY Brockport. *"I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because I believe we are at a pivotal moment in history where we are being called to enact radical change in order to dismantle the institutions that hold up white supremacy and perpetuate economic inequality in the Black and Brown communities. At this moment, we have the power of the people and we must now match the movement's efforts with resources and political will."*

Denishea R. Ortiz of Irondequoit. Ms. Ortiz is the Director of Strategic Marketing and Retail Development at the Rochester Institute of Technology. In addition to her strong marketing and community engagement backgrounds, she has served on the board of Causewave Community Partners, the Rochester Area Community Foundation (RACF), the RIT Saunders Alumni Board, and Sigma Lambda Upsilon. *"I am most excited to be a part of RASE to learn how to identify the hidden language in policies and laws that influence and encourage racism and work with dedicated individuals to create and propose language designed to eradicate racism and inequity in our region. My hope is that the work from this commission flourishes into greater community efforts and Rochester becomes a beacon proving that a city can be more equitable driven by"*

thought leaders, organizations of various sizes, and structure, as we work to dismantle inequities together.”

Luis E. Ormaechea of Penfield. Mr. Ormaechea is a staff attorney with the Consumer Financing and Housing Unit at the Empire Justice Center. He previously served on the board of the Rochester Hispanic Business Association and the Rochester Intellectual Property Law Association. *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because this appointment offers me the opportunity to work with a team to help dismantle unjust structural and systemic barriers that have allowed extreme disparities to persist in our community.”*

Kim T. Nghiem of Brighton. Ms. Nghiem is Vietnamese refugee who was raised and educated in Rochester, and is now a practicing clinical psychologist. She has served as the Wellness Ambassador for Asian Women for Health, the Director of Asian Mental Health at the Cambridge Health Alliance, and as well the Human Rights Commissioner with the City of Cambridge (MA).

Karen L. Elam of Rochester. Ms. Elam is the Director of the Levine Center to end hate at the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester, whose mission is to overcome hate through education, dialogue, and positive action. She has served on the board of the Healthy Baby Network, is a member of Shades of Sisterhood and an alumna of the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI). *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because I believe recent events in our country offer us a rare opportunity to move our society in a wholly new direction that is equitable for all, and I am grateful to be joining my fellow Commission members as we embark on the crucial work ahead.”*

Logan X. Brown of Rochester. Mr. Brown is a recent graduate of McQuaid Jesuit High School, where he served in leadership positions with the Mosaic Club and as well the Black Student Union. He as well has participated in the National Speech and Debate Association, where he ranked number one in the nation for his respective event.

Damond Wilson of Brighton. Mr. Wilson currently works as a program and case manager for Spiritus Christi prison outreach, and is an administrative officer and volunteer with Beyond the Sanctuary. He recently received his master’s in Divinity in 2019, and was the President of the Black Student Caucus at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because I believe that this committee has an opportunity not only to address systemic issues that plague this nation as a whole but to serve as a standard for racial equality and structural justice.”*

Eric Caine of Rochester. Mr. Caine is former faculty member of the URMC Psychiatry and Neurology Department, and led the Department of Psychiatry from 1993-2017. He recently retired to part-time work to devote more time to teaching, mentoring, and consulting with the Center for Disease Control’s Suicide Prevention Team. *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity. It challenges us to assure that all Americans can achieve their dreams—based on their talents, their ideas, their creativity and their hard work—without unjust barriers, in law and in our culture, which have destroyed those dreams and limited opportunities while depriving persons, families, and communities of their health and well-being.”*

Aaron Anandarajah of Pittsford. Mr. Anandarajah is a 2020 honors graduate of Pittsford Mendon High School, who will enroll as a member of the class of 2024 at the University of Pennsylvania. He has served as a student advisor with the Pittsford Superintendent Advisory Council and as a student member with the Rochester Academy of Medicine. *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because it provides me with the opportunity to give back to the community that has provided me with an abundance of resources in many aspects of my personal growth and provide a unique perspective as a youth to reach fully comprehensive solutions to issues that plague our community.”*

Sady Fischer of Henrietta. Ms. Fischer serves as the Corporate Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion with Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, and holds positions with the YWCA Racial Equity Program and NCBI Rochester, Inc. Ms. Fischer as well has worked in leadership positions with the FR=EE Annual Community Summit on Race Education Committee, and the United Way Latino Leadership Development Program Executive Steering Committee. *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because I want to be a part of the solution. I am raising my children in Monroe County and I want to contribute to creating a future for them and others that will be equitable, anti-racist, queer-affirming, accessible, inclusive - a future that celebrates diversity instead of fearing it. Change is a process and the formation of the RASE Commission is part of that process.”*

Stephanie Townsend of Pittsford. Ms. Townsend is the Director of Research and Analytics at the Children’s Agenda/ROC the Future. She is a current member of the Pittsford Town Board, the Women’s Club of Pittsford, and serves on the systems integration team with the Systems Integration Project. *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because no one municipality can do this work alone. Together, the city, county, town and village governments can transform inequities in our policies and practices to better serve all residents.”*

Marcus Dunn of Rochester. Mr. Dunn is a product manager at Five Star Bank, and has held positions with other financial institutions. He currently serves as a volunteer and instructor with Leading Ladies, the treasurer of Metro Justice, and is the director of the board of EnCompass Resources for Learning. *“I am honored to be part of the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity because it gives me an opportunity to make a lasting impact that will create a better community for those that come after me.”*

Commission members selected by Mayor Lovely Warren and County Executive Adam Bello:

Monroe County Sheriff Todd Baxter, Monroe County Legislature Majority Leader Steve Brew, City Councilman Mitch Gruber, Monroe County Legislator Frank Keophetlasy, City Council vice-President Willie Lightfoot, Rochester Police Locust Club President Michael Mazzeo, Rochester Police Chief La’Ron Singletary, and Monroe County Director of Public Safety Richard Tantalo.

For more information on the RASE commissioners or the Commission itself, visit the Commission website at www.rocrase.com, or visit the new Facebook page at Commission on Racial and Structural Equity – RASE.

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Media Contacts:

Steve Barz
O| (585) 753-1064 C| (585) 410-0935
SteveBarz@MonroeCounty.gov

Patrick Flanigan
O| (585) 737-0125
Patrick.Flanigan@CityofRochester.gov