

# 2023 Freedom Fund President's Speech

Welcome to one and all here at the Saint Anselm Institute of Politics and watching us online. It is a joy to be back here again in this place where history is made regularly, much of it portrayed in the life-sized photos on the walls of this room and throughout this building.

This event is our largest fundraiser of the year. Thus, I want to thank the Freedom Fund Committee for all their hard work in putting this event together. Shaunte & Carola, please stand up so we can thank you.

Thank you, also, to all of the sponsors of tonight's event. Without your support, this event and the work of the organization would not be possible. And just to remind you what that work is, our mission is to the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons. It is a mission that is more relevant now than ever as evidenced by the divisiveness in our society, recent NH State Department of Education actions around politicizing our educational system, and recent court decisions that threaten our progress to a just and equitable society.

This event is, also, our organization's Annual Meeting. Our By-Laws require that during this Annual Meeting I, as your President, report to you the status of the organization. It is, also, traditional during such meetings for the President to share highlights of what the organization has done throughout the past year and what the organization plans to do in the upcoming year.

As many of you know, I'm not a terribly outgoing guy. My father used to say that I didn't brag enough about my accomplishments. Tonight, if you'll indulge me, I want brag a bit about what the Manchester NAACP has done.

First, I am happy to say that the state of the organization is healthy. With a solid foundation built by former officers and members, we have remained an

organization to whom people look to understand the needs of people of color and to address discrimination in the Greater Manchester area. Speaking of former officers and members, this year I launched an effort to document the history of the Branch. If you have stories about the Branch, please share them with me.

Our Treasurer, Carola Beasley-Topliffe, wave Carola, indicates we have a healthy balance in our bank accounts. Thanks to Carola for all your efforts on the Branch's behalf.

We have become even more visible with an influx of new members. Our current count is 100 active members. Our contact list is now well over 400 people. With the help our membership and communications team – Kathy Urie, Anne-Marie Tessier, Tim Denby, Kathi Corrigan, and Barbara Keshen we continue to reach out to organizations about membership and activism. We have been visible in events such as the Greater Manchester MLK Celebration, the Manchester Juneteenth Celebration, the annual Fredrick Douglas Reading of “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”, the Arts Nabe event, and the We Are One Festival.

## **Education**

The NAACP Education Committee has focused on addressing emerging policy challenges that have been occurring both locally and nationally. Over the last year, we have joined and participated in the NAACP New England Area Conference Education Committee to provide greater inside into what is happening New England-wide and to better position us to address state-level issues.

We have begun the process of establishing a New Hampshire statewide network of NAACP Education committees to better coordinate education policy issues that occur at the state level. Outreach has been made to the Nashua NAACP and the Seacoast NAACP to establish a periodic check-in regarding both progress and problems related to education in our respective areas.

The Manchester NAACP participation in policy level discussions have included ongoing meetings with education policy advocates from throughout New Hampshire. Issues addressed include the promulgation of the rules for the minimum standards for public school education and the implementation of Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) Learn Everywhere program.

The committee has also reached out to several community-based out of school youth programs regarding participation in the Discovery for the Culture Program. Plans are in process for the restart of program sessions.

I want to thank Woullard Lett and Sarah Robinson for continuing the push on the Education Committee. They are meeting with the new Manchester School Board and holding their feet to the fire to live into the 2014 Resolution as a result of the DOE finding against the Manchester District. District Chief Equity Officer, Tina Phillobotte (who is here -tonight) has done a fantastic job of moving the district toward equitable and inclusive education. She recently reported that the district had addressed 3 of the 4 findings from the 2015 DOE findings.

We have turned up the pressure on the district by attending Manchester Board of School meetings to let our presence be felt. And it has made a difference as Board members have said that our presence and testimony changed their minds. And I want to give a special welcome to youth who are here tonight from the district. Those who spoke at the Board of School meeting on deleveling - Brea Hampton, Serenity Newton, and other Central SAC members supported by their advisor Catherine Cabala and Mackenzie ? and others from West High School who created the Black Student Union supported by Richella Simard- are any of you here? Please stand and be recognized.

These are the youth who we are supporting by our presence and helping to create an educational system that will benefit all. We need you all to show up as well. We need your help to continue to attend meetings and make sure the district keeps its focus on providing an equitable education for all its students. Please see Woullard if you are interested in getting involved.

# **Criminal Justice/Legal Redress**

Because of our by-laws, in many cases, there is nothing we can do legally in these matters as we cannot provide a lawyer to help those impacted. But many have told us that just knowing we are here and listening to them is of great value to them. And we can bring public pressure to bear as we did with the recent case at John Stark High School in Weare where a student wrote a death threat against an African American student on the bathroom wall. At the request of the student's parents, Eric and Sharon Hould, we reached out to the district and the Attorney General's office about the situation. We spoke at School Board meetings and got visibility for the case on NH PBS' The State We're In. This resulted in the district hiring NH Listens and creating a special Task Force to develop policies on how to address discrimination going forward.

Over the year, we received 20 reports of discrimination. Eryne Jenkins (here tonight) did a fantastic job of spearheading our efforts to address those reports of discrimination while studying for a Masters in Public Health at my alma mater Dartmouth. Eryne has decided she needs to focus on preparing for the next chapter of her life. I am so appreciative of her efforts and we wish her well in her future endeavors. Though I am sad to see Eryne go, I am we are happy to share that Chisirine Wellington, who has experience in doing this work when she was in Boston agreed to pick up the baton. Thank you, Christine! And I need to acknowledge that our long-serving Legal Redress Committee Chair, Donna Brown, has announced that she needs to step down as she needs to focus on her court duties. Thank You, Donna, for your steadfast leadership in this area.

# **Environmental Justice**

"The Environmental & Climate Justice Committee had another productive year of collaboration & deepening connections within the state, helping to bring an equity lens to the work of traditional environmental groups & non-profits. The committee engaged with the City of Manchester, the Manchester Health Department, the Department of Public Works, the Parks Department on several

different topics related to the improvement of environmental & climate issues for ALL of Manchester's residents, especially those most at risk for harm. In the coming weeks and months, the committee looks forward to continuing its work on the air quality monitoring project we received funding for earlier this year, thanks to a generous grant from The Nature Conservancy."

Because our work with The Nature Conservancy is so appreciated, just this Thursday I accepted a Conservation Partner award from them.

Thanks to Committee Chair Chris Kelly (who, BTW, along with his wife Jill just had their first child, Caleb) and Arnold for all your efforts.

## **Economic Justice**

The Economic Justice Committee has been very active in providing opportunities for individuals and businesses to grow. Our NH Minority Owned Business list has grown to over 177 businesses a 16% increase over last year.

We now have a map of those businesses developed in conjunction with the NH Business Alliance for People of Color and with funding from Citizen's Bank. (show the map?) Please let minority businesses you know of know that our list exists and that we want them on it.

Our unique Community-Driven Economic Empowerment (C-DEE) program in partnership with the NH Community Loan Fund and the Center for Women and Enterprise has had great success in assisting Black and Brown-owned businesses with technical assistance and capital. This past year we received applications from and assisted 26 entrepreneurs. We awarded just over \$52,586 covering the cost of computers, software, and business services. Under the leadership of Carlos Rincon, this program has received national attention. With this success, we are looking to broaden the scope of the program to support businesses state-wide.

In addition to all this, we have held and will continue to hold Financial Literacy workshops translated into different languages. Thanks to Heidi Edwards-Dunn for her efforts before stepping down as Chair of the Committee and Colin Rugg for stepping in to carry on this great work.

## Health

In the Health space we've had somewhere between 60 and 70 attend our workshops, another 15 or 20 at community events for us to get input on health needs, many go visit our tables at festivals for Medicaid wind-down help, talked with people at the various festivals handing out 400 + postcards for the Healing Circles Program we recently launched in conjunction with the groundbreaking Therapists of Color New England formed by Nicole Sublette (also a C-DEE awardee). Nicole recognized the need for therapists of color in the state and we were so pleased to receive a grant from Point32 Health Foundation to fund this effort. The circles will have monthly meetings for adults and teens who have experienced racism directly or indirectly. We will host a workshop entitled "Race-Based Traumatic Stress and Steps for Healing" soon.

The Health Committee provided online workshops on Heart Health and managing Flu and Cold Season.

We continued to work with the Manchester Community Action Coalition in vaccine outreach and community conversations on health. We worked with the Federal Offices of Medicare and Medicaid and state agencies to help people retain Medicaid coverage following the Medicaid "wind down." We collaborated with the NH Office of Health Equity, NH Equity Task Force, Welcoming NH. Hospice Help Foundation, and other organizations. We also collaborated with the Endowment for Health on a project to develop a Health Equity Landscape Analysis for NH to identify those in the state who also do this work.

And to take this all to another level, Dr. Tracy (your MC) has gotten us invited to join in the design of a Health Equity policy for the city of Manchester as a result of our efforts to gain a declaration of Racism As a Public Health Crisis as has been done in several other communities around the country to great effect. We urge your support to this effort by letting your elected official know you support this. Thanks, Tracy for all your efforts.

Our Secretary Curt Smith and Assistant Secretary Cindy Encarnacion, have done a fantastic job of keeping track of our new members and the challenges of dealing with record-keeping in a local organization that is, basically, a franchise of a national organization. General meetings still take place monthly on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday at 6:30. We have had many speakers on topics such as obtaining funding to keep businesses running and people in their homes, Voting, and the Census. Thank you, Curt and Cindy for keeping us all going.

There are other people and other activities I could mention like collaborations with the NH Black Heritage trail, meetings with Mayor Joyce Craig, and Police Chief Allen Aldenberg. But, I don't have time to mention them all here. Let me close by acknowledging that none of what I have mentioned would be possible without your help and support. So, Thank You all for your efforts over the year. And Thank You for what you are going to do in the upcoming year – kicked off by this event with the theme Thriving Together. My hope is that tonight's event will fire you up to help us make sure our community becomes a better place for us to all not just survive but thrive.

Thank You!

## **Keynote**

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie is the new President/General Secretary of the National Council of Churches (NCC). She provides executive leadership to 37 communions (denominations) representing 100,000 churches and 30 million people. She is the first African-American woman to hold both positions.

Bishop McKenzie is also the 117th elected and consecrated bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first female elected to episcopal office in the more than the two-century-old AME Church. She is the first female to serve as President of the Council of Bishops and President of the General Board.

Bishop McKenzie established two nonprofits that raised funds outside of tithes and offerings for church and community projects in two of her districts.

She has been the visionary behind five documentaries, four of them in The Anvil series, of the Council of Bishops serving as producer, executive producer, and senior editor.

She is the author of six books including Not Without a Struggle and Journey to the Well.

She was appointed in 2009 by President Barack Obama to be on the inaugural White House Commission of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnership. This group worked on behalf of Americans committed to improving their communities, no matter their religious or political beliefs. She was named by the Huffington Post in 2014 as one of the 50 Most Powerful Women Religious Leaders in the World.

There is much more about her in your program booklet which I will not read. I will say that I was introduced to Bishop McKenzie at the NAACP National Convention this past July. Her remarks at the Convention from which the theme for this Dinner came, seemed to me to eloquently explain the challenges we face as a nation and the hope that we can and should have in creating a more just and equitable society. She is a busy woman speaking all over the country and we are so fortunate to have her here. It is my distinct honor and privilege to introduce to you - Bishop Vashti Murphy-McKenzie.

## **Awards**

### **Social Justice Champion - Aloyo “Lidia” Yen**

Lidia Yen wears many hats. From community organizing to supporting small business owners, she is a dedicated and multi-talented individual who continually strives to make a positive impact in her community and the lives of those she serves. Lidia holds a degree in business management with a healthcare focus and is currently enrolled in a Master's in Accounting program, showcasing her commitment to financial expertise.

She has a track record of leadership, having led 'Change for Concord' for two years with a strong focus on achieving equity in public education. Her passion for helping Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in her community is unwavering. Lidia served as one of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Community Listeners, researching the barriers to resources in New Hampshire, and was a member of the disability advisory board for Planned Parenthood.

Lidia is currently a member of the American Friends Service Support Committee. She advocates for people's needs and connects them to vital resources, making a tangible difference in their lives. Apart from her

community involvement, Lidia also serves as a Program Coordinator at the SNHU Center for New Americans, where she dedicates her time to assisting immigrant children in an after-school program and their families who visit.

Looking ahead, Lidia's aspirations include completing her Accounting degree and focusing on her own business endeavors, all while maintaining her active engagement in the community. In her free time, she enjoys playing tennis during the summer and takes pride in being a business owner.

I have known Lidia for several years. She is so dedicated to the community that she shows up everywhere.

It is my great pleasure to recognize Lydia with this 2023 Social Justice Champion Award.

## **Criminal Justice Champion - Ronelle Tshiela**

Ronelle Tshiela is a Cofounder of Black Lives Matter New Hampshire. She helped orchestrate the march in Manchester in 2020 after the murders of George Floyd, Broeanna Taylor, and Ahmad Aubrey.

In 2020, she was appointed by Governor Sununu to serve on the NH Commission on Law Enforcement Accountability, Community, and Transparency on which I also served. She made her mark by asking tough questions and bringing the perspective of the experience of youth of color in schools that the Committee would not have otherwise heard.

Last year, she was named to NH Business Review's biennial list of the state's most influential business leaders. Ronelle is passionate about maternal health, and is a board member of the Reproductive Freedom Fund of New Hampshire. She is currently in her last year at UNH School of Law, where she serves as President of the Women's Law Student Association. She hopes to focus her career on Civil Rights and social justice.

A number of us in the social justice space here in New Hampshire are so looking forward to her joining the legal field professionally. She already has and we know she will continue to have a huge impact on the world.

It is with great pleasure that I recognize Ronelle Tshiela as our 2023 Criminal Justice Champion.

## **Excellence in Journalism - Mark Hayward**

Mark Hayward has worked as a reporter for the New Hampshire Union Leader from 1997 until his retirement this July. From 2012 until July, he started writing the weekly column City Matters, which focused on the personalities, issues, potential and problems associated with the state's largest city. His writing as a columnist and a news reporter has won several first-place awards from press associations in New Hampshire and New England.

Mark was graduated from The Ohio State University in 1983. Before landing in Manchester, Mark wrote for newspapers in Keene; Lewiston, Maine; and the Piedmont area of North Carolina. He now writes part-time for several publications in the region and coordinates mobilization and outreach activities for the New Hampshire NewsGuild. During his career, Mark abided by the notion of a journalist, coined in 1902 by humorist Finley Peter Dunne, who said that a newspaper's job is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

I have known Mark for many years and am so grateful for his coverage of issues of social justice. His easygoing style and dedication to finding the truth have made it a pleasure to work with him. I was sorry to he told me about his retirement but am glad to see that he is not going quietly into that goodnight.

It is my great pleasure to recognize him with this 2023 Freedom Fund Excellence in Journalist Award.