

Civil Rights Commission to Hold April 1 Public Forum at U-M Dearborn on the State of Civil Rights Education in Michigan

LANSING – The Michigan Department of Civil Rights today announced that the Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) and the University of Michigan Dearborn will host a public forum on Diversity Dialogue and Civil Rights Education on Wednesday, April 1, from 5:30 to 7:30 at U-M Dearborn.

The forum is free and open to the public. Teachers, school administrators and students are encouraged to attend.

Panelists will hear from the Michigan Youth Civil Rights Academy, an organization of high school students assembled by University of Michigan Professor Barry Checkoway that actively advocates for expanding civil rights education and diversity learning in schools throughout Michigan.

In November and January, the Youth Academy appeared before the MCRC and called for expanding the study of civil rights in Michigan schools and providing training in diversity for school personnel. The MCRC unanimously adopted a resolution, drafted by the U-M School of Social Work Youth Dialogues Policy Leaders and echoing the Youth Academy students' recommendations, in January of 2015.

The resolution is a call to action for schools, school districts, and school boards to strengthen diversity training and civil rights education in Michigan schools. The efforts of MCRC to expand and improve civil rights education come in response to the state receiving a failing grade in teaching civil rights from the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Leaders scheduled to take part in the Forum include:

- Federal Judge and former Michigan Department of Civil Rights Executive Director Linda Parker
- Michigan Chronicle senior editor Bankole Thompson
- University of Michigan Regent Mark Bernstein
- Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act co-sponsor Mel Larsen
- Michigan Civil Rights Commission Executive Council members Arthur Horwitz, Rasha Demashkieh and Agustin Arbulu.

Michigan Civil Rights Commission Resolution:

Whereas, Michigan's students should be provided educational opportunities that equip them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will prepare them to become the next generation of community leaders; and

Whereas, Michigan's schools should prepare students to effectively participate in a multicultural society and global economy that is more democratic, equitable and just; and

Whereas, Michigan's students should be educated on their social identity and that of others to effectively enable them to replace prejudice, bias, and stereotypes with acceptance, understanding and unity; and

*Whereas, Michigan's schools, teachers, and students should have ready access to civil rights and social justice learning opportunities to better themselves, their institutions, and their communities; and
Whereas, Michigan's students who have learned about social justice foster environments that promote engagement, celebrate diversity, strengthen equal opportunity for all, eliminate inequities, and confront discrimination; and*

Whereas, Michigan's students should understand their right to assemble, protest, and/or organize community action projects, empowering students to protect themselves and others from injustices and to be able to rectify said injustices; and

Whereas, Schools that lack the resources, including qualified and experienced staff and educators, or otherwise fail to address race-sensitive issues through education and dialogue, ultimately undermine students' development and their ability to recognize, understand, avoid, and respond to stereotypes, bigotry, racism, sexism and gender, religious, and other inequalities; it is therefore

Resolved, That the Michigan Civil Rights Commission will continue to promote civil rights education and diversity learning through public forums and youth dialogues; and

Resolved, That the Michigan Civil Rights Commission encourages schools, school districts, and school boards to adopt policies and practices that promote an understanding and appreciation of diversity; and

Resolved, That the Michigan Civil Rights Commission encourages schools, school districts, and school boards to provide civil rights education to students through courses, workshops, or other methods; and

Resolved, That the Michigan Civil Rights Commission encourages schools, school districts, and school boards to implement best practices that promote the ability of all students to constructively exercise their first amendment rights and to speak on the policy issues that concern them, through public forums, student representation on school boards, and other civic engagement programs; and it is finally

Resolved, That the Michigan Civil Rights Commission encourages schools, school districts, and school boards to educate and train school faculty to recognize and nurture sensitive situations involving social justice and civil rights issues and secure third-party experts where appropriate.

Adopted on the 26th day of January 2015, by the MICHIGAN CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION