

Commission on African Affairs Meeting

AGENDA- January 27, 2021

I. Opening – Call to Order by Hellen Fissahaie at 6:10pm EST

II. MOAA Updates and Announcements

Executive Director (ED) Aly Kaba introduces and welcomes the attendees. He thanks COAA and MOAA teams for their contributions.

ED Kaba describes MOAA Mission which is to ensure that the District's African community has the resources it needs, and they represent the goals and mission of the Mayor to the Diaspora. Currently, due to the difficulties faced by the community because of Covid-19 and make them a vulnerable community. MOAA conducted a needs assessment in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 of 2020. As a result, the following three were identified as the greatest challenges faced by the African community in the D.C. area.

- 1) **Language barrier:** D.C. has over 14K people in the African Diaspora community, it is the fastest growing immigrant group and 25% are limited English proficiency, Lack of Health insurance, 20% of African immigrants live in English linguistic limited households and lack access to resources
- 2) **Transition to tele-services and limited access to internet has limited access to health care** for the African Diaspora in the city. Many members of the community lack access to internet, at home computers, and due to language barriers can no longer access medical care.
- 3) **Negative Rhetoric and actions of former President Trump and his administration has put fear and pressure on the community leading to government mistrust.** As a result, many have dealt with mental health issues, fears related to immigration, customs, separation of families, etc. This has led to a further distrust of the American governments thus is challenge in trusting advise of administration.

In response to the above challenges, the MOAA has worked to respond to community needs through the following programmatic tools:

- **MOAA Newsletter:** provide news access to over 9K subscribers
- **Direct Phone Calls:** MOAA staff called over 2K people to educate them on resources, ask about status and needs, and answer community questions directly
- **Referrals to DC resources:** through calls, newsletter, and language translated materials, staff provided referrals to community members for a variety of DC resources
- **Directly collaborating with DC Agencies:** the office has worked with 20 major DC agencies to support internal agency needs and external community needs
- **Sponsored Events:** MOAA has co-sponsored over 30 plus events to promote a wide range of initiatives and resources centered on addressing community needs
- **Language Translations:** Language team translated covid19 materials for distribution etc.

- **Direct Resource Support:** The office has provided direct resource support in the form of PPEs and food
- **Direct & Indirect Support:** Overall support has been provided to over 10K community members and a variety of local organizational partners through funding, referrals, and advisory support
- **Culture Celebrations:** As part of a variety of heritage months (Africa month and African American History month), the office leverages and creates events to celebrate heritage while promoting city initiatives

ED Kaba highlighted the 2021 Strategic Plan for MOAA

The following are priority areas of focus to move MOAA in supporting and advocating for the African Diaspora:

- Continue to provide technical support to DC agencies to implement language access plan as part of the Language ACT of 2004 – cultural company transitions for agency employees
- Encourage DC agencies to hire more language proficient leaders
- Utilize fiscally responsible strategies and priorities
- Partner with community organizations and agencies
- Continue tailored outreach to business owners
- Engage with diverse ethnic groups (Amharic and French speaking groups)

III. Chair Announcements

Hellen Fissihaie: Asks Thierry Tchenko, Deputy Director at MOAA introduces self and introduce staff on the call. ED Kaba introduces staff and thanks them.

- **Gelila Getaneh**
- **Yared Mengistu**
- **Semhal Hagos**
- **Sosina Baruda**

Hellen Fissihaie: Thanks everyone for their attendance and ED Kaba for the overview on MOAA and the work, as well as staff. She provides the following overviews:

- Role of COAA
- Relationship to MOAA
- Overall Goals of COAA members

She asks all the Commissioners to introduce themselves, country of origin, and share what they do.

Introductions made include:

- **Hellen Fissihaie-** CEO at F3 Global Advisory Group, LLC
- **Yodit Shibru-** DC SBDC and Entrepreneur
- **Carmen Eliam-** Behavior Health Specialist for D.C. homeless

- **Theodore Ngatchou**- Renaissance Center for culture and education
- **Etayenesh Ty Asfaw**- works in Arlington county in PM
- **Sannido Depouk**- student and Master of Science, teaching assist at UDC and owner of small business in DC since 2016
- **Ify Bozimo**- attorney and work in the district in the bank, project finance for world bank and business woman

IV. Public Comments

Hellen Fissihaie: Encouraged guests to introduce themselves and country of origin.

- **Elisabeth Ngatchou** – Co-founder at the Renaissance Center (Cameroon)
- **Mary Ange**- (Kenya and Rwanda)- International development consultant and French teacher

Hellen Fissihaie: Invited everyone to openly discuss challenges they are facing or resource needs. She first started the conversation by stating that she been contacted by a number of small businesses seeking resources for their businesses.

Yodit Shibru: Recommends PPP for 2nd round for small businesses and she can connect them to other lenders. States that language barrier is the biggest challenges for small business owners as they navigate resources for their businesses.

Etayenesh Ty Asfaw: States that there has been increase in break-ins DC and robberies. She discusses that the Police cultural liaison group is a great resource to support stores and community members.

Elisabeth Ngatchou: States that there have been budget cuts for organizations likes hers and what can COAA do to support advocacy for them?

ED Kaba: Responded and states that MOAA has submitted a budget enhancement during budget season- so far successful and have had 2 new roles for Yared and Sosina-full time under MOAA). Members of this community can easily advocate their local politicians and ask for greater resources and support for the African community.

Hellen Fissihaie: In response to ED Kaba, we as a community need to define what Civic-engagement- looks like and what does it look in the era of covid-19 and how does COAA engage?

Hellen Fissihaie: In response to Elisabeth’s questions, she responds with the need to first collectivize and advocate at key city hearings such as budget hearings and secondary be large and present for when it’s time to engage with city officials. Let your voices be heard and articulate needs collectively.

Yodit Shibru: Points out, that we should be mindful how our community lives day to day. Not all community members are available during office hours as they work nor available in evenings given the nature of their work.

Theodore Ngatchou: Asks the collective guests to focus on moving forward and identifying ways to collaborate.

Marie-Ange: Ask how many African diaspora have internet coverage in the community?

ED Kaba: Not clear on the number just yet in response to internet coverage.

Yared Mengistu: needs to be a joint effort where all African communities can join and help them out. Turn challenges into opportunities. The way we think should alter and find ways to get things done and get solutions out.

V. Adjournment (7:30pm Est)

ED Kaba: Thanks guests for attendance.

Hellen Fissahaie: Thanks guests, informs guests know when the next COAA meetings will be in March 2020.