



**EAST ORANGE BOARD OF HEALTH  
REGULAR MEETING  
East Orange Department of Health & Human Services  
143 New Street  
East Orange, New Jersey 07017  
October 20, 2020  
MEETING MINUTES**

**Meeting Call to Order – 5:35 PM**

Board President Christine Harris read the following **Sunshine Law**: This meeting, which conforms to the provisions of the Open Public Meeting Act, Chapter **231**, and Public Law of **1975** is a regular meeting of the City of East Orange Board of Health. Notices have been filed with our official newspaper, with the City Clerk, and posted on regular bulletin boards. The public is permitted to participate at this meeting.

Zoom Telecommunication ID: 898 4256 9008

After the roll call, it was determined there was a quorum to convene the meeting.

**Board Members Present:**

Christine Harris, President  
Horace H. Henry  
Tobbia M. Corbitt  
Deanna Phillips  
Angela Jones-Williams  
Dr. Tonya X. Cook

**Council Liaison:**

Leneus Bergson - Absent

**Board of Health Counsel:**

Joseph Campbell, Attorney assigned to the Board of Health

**Health Department Staff:**

Dr. Griffith, HHS Director  
Victor Kuteyi, Health Officer  
Iman Johnson, Health Educator

**Mayoral Staff:**

None

**Public in attendance:**

None

**Approval of September 15, 2020, Meeting Minutes:**

Approved Unanimously



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**Announcements President Harris:**

1. President Harris welcomed our newest BOH member Dr. Tonya X. Cook. Dr. Cook introduced herself and shared her background. Dr. Cook expressed her enthusiasm for serving as a member of the EO BOH.
2. President Harris shared they did not receive the Council Resolution on Mask Wearing and Smoking Ordinance for Electronic Cigarettes for BOH review. The documents will be reviewed at the next BOH meeting.
3. President Harris relayed new State protocols regarding license renewals for Health Officers & REHS. The COVID-19 Executive Order enacted by Governor Murphy has implemented a waiver for continuing education credits for 2021. President Harris disseminated the information to the BOH & the Health Department
4. President Harris noted the BOH did not receive any feedback regarding Congress continuing waivers for WIC programs nationally, that will allow them to operate remotely.
5. President Harris shared she received an invitation to speak at the League of Municipalities, annual conference. Commissioner Persichilli will be addressing the topic of Public Health in NJ. The conference will be held virtually this year, which grants everyone an opportunity to access a multitude of lectures and informational materials. President Harris will represent the State Board of Local Health by delivering a 5-minute speech discussing how we have assisted during this pandemic. President Harris expressed her appreciation for Dr. Griffith, Mrs. & Mr. Corbitt's attendance at last year's conference & encouraged participation for meeting attendees.

**Dr. Griffith Updates:**

**BOH's Feedback on Mercantile Ordinance**

Dr. Griffith shared we have not been able to incorporate the feedback provided by the BOH & provide it to Legal. Dr. Griffith made Dr. Cook aware of the reasoning feedback was needed from the BOH referencing Hair, Nail Salons & Barbershops, and their relation to the Mercantile Ordinance. Dr. Griffith anticipates providing Legal with the BOH's feedback within the coming weeks.

**Medical Student Rotation**

Dr. Griffith thanked Attorney Campbell for his efforts as the MOU between the Health Department and University Hospital/UMDNJ providing medical student rotation, was established and executed. UMDNJ has an emergency medicine rotation for their residents, so we have an opportunity to partner and receive approximately 6-8, second-year medical residents who will provide support within the community. This increases our capacity in managing all pandemic-related issues. Dr. Griffith received the formal schedule and we anticipate the first student rotation working with the Health Department in November. The residents will fulfill a two-week rotation to satisfy their community requirements. The goal will be to partner with our senior buildings and other community partners to provide



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community health education. They will also be partnering with Ms. Iman and other divisions to ensure they are adequately engaging the community.

Dr. Griffith shared the MOU is renewable for 5-years or more which will allow us an opportunity to partner greatly, create cultural sensitivity, and allow the student residents to develop a greater sense of our community needs. President Harris asked how many residents we will receive at one time. Dr. Griffith stated she needs to review the schedule; however, the plan is to have at least two residents working with us at one time. President Harris asked if specific health-related topics can be broadcast similarly to the weekly townhalls beyond the pandemic. Dr. Griffith stated Ms. Iman will be navigating those broad community communications going forward. It was noted that the pandemic made us aware there are many ways to share information and reach the community where they are. Dr. Griffith shared she and Ms. Iman are constantly discussing opportunities and ideas for the future. Iman expressed the need to explore other avenues of disseminating information to the community, especially post-COVID-19.

#### Community Outreach to Senior Residents

Dr. Griffith stated we are in constant communication with all the senior buildings. It was noted during the pandemic we partnered with all the senior buildings to provide testing. We've been receiving feedback from seniors residing in certain senior buildings that there has been a lack of adherence to sanitary guidelines that were set forth by the Department. HO Kuteyi along with the REHS inspectors have been going out and continuing to follow-up with the buildings. The Division of Senior Services is also working to ensure we remain in constant contact with the seniors. The missing link would be the case managers and social workers within the buildings because there seems to be a question of whether their roles are being adequately fulfilled. We are working to ensure as we enter the second wave, we are truly able to engage the seniors. We in the final stages of implementing a virtual system, similar to other municipalities, so that our seniors can remain engaged even if they are not coming into the senior center. The virtual system will allow seniors to participate in activities and join chat rooms to keep in communication with each other. President Harris asked if the resident students will be involved in the contact process. Dr. Griffith shared they will assist Senior Services with conducting wellness checks. Depending on the number of residents we have and the current climate we will be establishing priorities. The residents will not only be able to assist in engagement with our senior buildings via appointments. President Harris asked if senior residents who do not reside in a senior building will be a part of the rotation. Dr. Griffith stated it is more difficult to engage residents who live outside of senior buildings as going to the buildings allows us to capture a larger audience, however, if the seniors would like to communicate with the resident students, based on the database Senior Services maintains they would be able to connect with the residents.

Dr. Cook asked how we will engage seniors who are not tech-savvy. Dr. Griffith stated they have considered this and the initial roll-out will be a pilot. Several seniors have smartphones and while the senior buildings may not have a uniform system of assisting their residents now



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that the community centers are shut down, we may need to advise those with smart devices how to connect. Some entities are offering seniors smartphones and devices for a few dollars. The goal is to initiate the pilot program with the involvement of some seniors to allow the kinks to be worked out and then roll-out the program broadly and partner seniors with agencies such as Verizon or T-Mobile. President Harris asked if we would be publicizing this information during the weekly townhalls. Dr. Griffith stated once we solidify the details this is one way to publicize the information in addition to contact from seniors who are members of the Senior Center. Trustee Corbitt shared AARP offers smartphones to seniors and stated maybe we can contact them to assist in our endeavor. Vice-President Henry asked what the number of senior residents is. Dr. Griffith shared there are approximately 13 senior buildings which grants us access to over 1,000 seniors within those buildings. Trustee Corbitt suggested we reach out to seniors residing in private residences with flyers for the virtual activities. Dr. Griffith concurred stating in addition to disseminating the information via the town hall & social media, flyers and phone calls will also be distributed to senior individuals residing in private homes. We would need to make sure our divisions that are public facing, i.e., our clinics have reopened before continuing the internship program. Dr. Griffith also noted the accomplishments of the Health Department are a testament to the hard work that each of the divisions has exhibited.

**Response to Scheduled Appointments within Our Clinical Divisions**

Dr. Griffith shared all our clinics have successfully reopened and are housed within the lower level of our main building. Initially, the Nursing & HIV Divisions were operating remotely by offering testing within the community to ensure key services were not interrupted. Dr. Griffith highlighted the response has been great both when we were operating within the community and now that we are operating via appointment within the main building. The dental clinic was the last to reopen as we needed to make sure the dentists had the proper equipment to operate safely. The clinics are not only managing and implementing COVID precautions but are also impacted by virtual learning. The dental clinic has been impacted the most as we have individuals who are out of the office due to virtual learning. President Harris asked if there was a way to incorporate psychological services within our clinics due to being impacted by isolation that can occur as a result of distance learning. Dr. Griffith stated that she has thought of bringing such services to the Department. To provide effective psychological services, a new division would need to be created and we do not have the capacity for that at this time. Dr. Griffith shared we are in the process of exploring a partnership with Rainbows, a Chicago-based company that has currently been offering training within the community. They recently partnered with the Newark school district and we have an opportunity to partner with them as well. Rainbows offers training to the community by teaching them the process of facilitating peer groups especially within our youth demographic, as they have been severely impacted by numerous changes during the pandemic. Rainbows will train roughly 10 peer facilitators who are then able to host an infinite number of groups. Dr. Griffith shared she and Iman are working to identify community partners who can work with the peer facilitators and address different age groups from elementary school-aged and up. Once the peer facilitators have been trained an MOU



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can be established to outline the partnership with Rainbows. We will utilize the first run as a pilot to determine if we should continue and to add more community partners so more children can benefit. President Harris asked if the peer groups were exclusively virtual and the age groups for the peer trainers. Dr. Griffith stated the peer sessions are all virtual and the trainers must be 18 and older. President Harris asked if younger children will benefit from the program. Dr. Griffith stated absolutely, as the curriculum varies based on the age groups. President Harris asked if the organization was recently established due to COVID-19. Dr. Griffith shared Rainbows is a non-profit organization that has been offering peer training pertaining to issues such as domestic violence, divorce, and other issues that impact youth for quite some time, they extended their focus because of COVID. Dr. Griffith shared the owner as well as several of their staff have backgrounds in Public Health and understood the need for support.

**Success in Offering Free Flu Shots to Children & Adults**

Dr. Griffith stated we are trying to educate the populace on the importance of obtaining flu shots especially during the pandemic, however, there has been some fear-based resistance. When we discuss the flu shot many individuals are saying they don't consent. This reaction mirrors Tuskegee in which we must educate individuals by emphatically stating this is the flu shot and not a COVID vaccine. Dr. Griffith stated that we have been successful in administering multiple flu shots by partnering with senior buildings, employees, and generally into the community. Dr. Griffith sharing continued education is a key aspect in creating a greater understanding of the importance of vaccinations. Trustee Corbitt asked if we are offering the pneumonia shot, especially to our senior population as it can usually be found in individuals who have contracted COVID-19. Dr. Griffith stated we do not currently offer a pneumonia shot, but we have been encouraging residents to speak with their primary care physicians who may be offering such services.

**Nature Conservancy of Rutgers School of Public Health**

Dr. Griffith shared the Nature Conservancy is interested in conducting focus groups within the City of East Orange and other urban municipalities. There is an interest in developing an understanding of the impact of COVID on urban communities. The Health Department will serve as the liaison between the Nature Conservancy, Rutgers, and the community. Dr. Griffith expressed interest in connecting them directly with the BOH as its membership is comprised of residents who can speak to the impact COVID has had on the community from a personal standpoint or from those they know who have been impacted. Based on the conversations had with the Conservancy, BOH members would decide on whether they would like to join the group. Dr. Griffith shared that Rutgers is creating something complementary to the Mask Up EO Campaign Ms. Iman created because they want to tell stories of the individuals who have navigated COVID. President Harris remarked the campaign seems similar to those groups that want to understand how has COVID altered your behavior. Dr. Griffith explained Rutgers wants to develop this effort to drive policy. Based on what was shared with Dr. Griffith, she believes this could be a very good opportunity to participate. President Harris asked the BOH if they are interested in participation, to which they all agreed.



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Community Connect Day Event

Dr. Griffith expressed much gratitude for the BOH's support during the event. Dr. Griffith shared we were able to service over 400 individuals across the three-day event. We had multiple individuals take advantage of the mobile laundry services and hygiene products. In addition to these features, we also had voter registration, health screenings, food resources, etc. Individuals were so grateful to receive the services and participate in the clothing boutique multiple times. Participants shared that they were challenged to find methods of washing their laundry or obtaining coats. We had one individual who came back three times looking for shoes and we were able to link him with resources. The plan is to hold this event twice next year, once in April and again in October. Dr. Griffith stated many individuals require varying resources and we want to do our part to provide support.

**Health Officer Kuteyi Updates:**

COVID-19 Updates

NJ has reported approximately 1200-1300 new cases of COVID-19 within the various counties. East Orange has reported 9 new cases this week with none of them resulting in any fatalities. There was a cluster within one family, and we were able to conduct contact tracing and had them isolate in their home. The property manager of the building was contacted, and we ensured that the safety of all the residents is protected by hourly sanitation and disinfecting of the building especially the common areas. Currently, there haven't been any reports of COVID cases stemming from super spreader events such as excessive congregating, parties, weddings, etc. President Harris asked if we were aware of how the cluster was initiated and what activity sparked the cluster. HO Kuteyi shared it was spread by one individual who accidentally infected her family members living in the same residence. HO Kuteyi contacted her place of work and discovered that the individual had already made their workplace aware of their positive status. Through contact tracing, we were able to determine how many individuals she had been in contact with and quarantine if needed. The situation has been addressed and all the data involving this case has been entered into the CDRSS & ComCares. HO Kuteyi shared there are new guidelines for celebrating Halloween post-COVID-19, which they anticipate distributing to residents so they may observe the holiday safely.

President Harris inquired how many of the new COVID cases, required hospitalizations. Dr. Griffith shared that while our numbers have increased our hospitalizations and deaths have not. President Harris suggested we are seeing small pockets of herd immunity. Dr. Griffith stated she is not sure if we are experiencing this but noted we are monitoring flu & COVID spikes as we are generally lag behind NY by a couple of weeks. President Harris asked if drugstores provide the City data reflecting the number of flu shots given to residents or positive COVID cases and is wise to obtain this information if not readily supplied. Dr. Griffith stated we do not as the communications are between the pharmacies and the State and there is not currently a mechanism in place to receive the data. Vice-President Henry shared if the information is shared the State will disseminate it locally to the Municipality.



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**New Ordinance Regarding Violations & Fees Associated with Mask-Wearing**

HO Kuteyi stated that he has not yet seen a copy posted on our City website addressing this ordinance, which makes it difficult to move forward. Dr. Griffith received confirmation the resolution was passed by Councilman Leneus & Councilman Awe. Dr. Griffith stated the ordinance was disseminated to the BOH but should be recirculated to provide everyone an opportunity to review its contents. received approval from the nursing homes to establish a set of protocols to assist residents and staff with managing a possible COVID-19 resurgence during the flu season. HO Kuteyi is working with Ms. Iman to coordinate this initiative. President Harris asked if we received any clarification as to who is tasked with inspecting the nursing homes. HO Kuteyi stated he investigated whether the Governor's office declared the responsibility of inspecting nursing homes should be shared with the Municipalities but did not find official statements supporting this.

**WIC Waivers**

President Harris inquired whether the USDA extended waivers for WIC programs to continue working remotely. HO Kuteyi shared remote operations have been extended until February 2021 he was unable to reach Ms. Blue to obtain an answer. The WIC has remained open during the pandemic with a few alterations such as plexiglass shields and space configurations to ensure the safety of staff and clientele.

**Bodegas**

HO Kuteyi shared the Environmental Team has issued warnings to local bodegas and retail food establishments in the Dodd & Prospect Street area, who were observed not adhering to mask-wearing, social distancing, and other COVID-19 safety protocols. These establishments were warned if they are found to be in violation they will be shut down. Trustee Corbitt detailed her experience with those establishments allowing staff and clientele to ignore the COVID-19 safety protocols. She stressed the importance of individuals wearing masks to cover their oral and nasal passageways and encouraged REHS inspectors to share this information when visiting these establishments.

HO Kuteyi noted the establishments are on written notice so it is just a matter of enforcing this during the next visit. Dr. Griffith reiterated the numbers are increasing locally so you will hear us taking a sterner approach in communicating it because we do have many residents who are complying but we have stubborn areas such as our food establishments and individuals who are fatigued. We want to impress upon everyone the importance of continuing to wear their masks properly and the consequences of not adhering to them because this is a serious matter. Dr. Griffith shared this will be a topic of discussion on the next Townhall which will feature the County Health Officer, Maya Lordo. Dr. Griffith stated there will be other initiatives that come out related to the assessment of our food establishments. We have partnered with Code Enforcement to go into the residential buildings in addition to what HO Kuteyi and the Health Inspectors are doing to stay ahead of this second wave.



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President Harris asked if installing HVAC systems within establishments would be effective in minimizing the virus within the community. HO Kuteyi stated it could have a positive impact, however, the building would have to be designed to support an HVAC system. He also noted if social distancing and mask-wearing is not adhered to you still run the risk of contracting COVID even if an HVAC system is installed. Trustee Corbitt asked if there were any testing sites that do not require EO residency. Dr. Griffith stated the only testing site that requires EO residency is the Municipal testing site that we do twice a month. All other testing sites are privately run and are open to anyone.

**Ms. Iman Johnson Updates:**

Ms. Johnson discussed the Mayor's Wellness Campaign kick-off will begin the following Thursday. The first initiative will be "Get-Up & Walk", an employee-centered campaign to promote implementing movement and activity into the workday. Trustee Corbitt thanked Ms. Johnson for extending the opportunity to herself and Mr. Corbitt for their participation in the Mask-Up campaign.

**Open Discussion:**

Trustee Corbitt asked our efforts to acknowledge domestic abuse and breast cancer awareness amidst the pandemic. Trustee Corbitt shared her interest in this response as the domestic abuse numbers are extremely high due to the people remaining in their homes during the pandemic. Ms. Iman shared endeavors such as Pink & Denim Day to spread cancer awareness amongst employees and solicit donations to the American Cancer Society. As a part of the Wellness Wednesday series we recently recorded a session addressing domestic violence with the City's Domestic Violence Coordinator and shared additional domestic violence information on the City's Facebook page. The hope is that the session will provide residents with what resources are available to them should they find themselves in a domestic violence situation. Dr. Griffith announced the EOPD is continuing its efforts to address domestic violence which complements the work of Iman.

Trustee Jones-Williams stated her contacts at Sterling House revealed difficulty in getting the residents with special needs to understand the importance and remain wearing their masks. President Harris asked if this was a closed community where residents are not allowed to leave the facility. Trustee Jones-Williams stated pre-COVID residents would visit mental health facilities during the day, but many are now closed so they are not confined to the homes. President Harris asked if five days is the normal turn-around time for receiving COVID-19 test results. Dr. Griffith shared that is the average, however, there are entities throughout the City that are offering rapid testing with a 24-48-hour turnaround for results. Dr. Griffith also shared she is aware of the challenges associated with the homes and that we are monitoring them as well, but they also have behavioral support and clinical components which is where their internal education comes into play. We will also continue to have conversations with the State to discuss needed support especially with the partial programs being closed.



***City of East Orange***

**NEW JERSEY**



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At the conclusion of Board business, President Harris adjourned the meeting at 7:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jo-Ann Mills  
Board Clerk