

# **A Community Forum to Explore Race Relations in St. Petersburg, Florida**

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Executive Summary of a Community Forum  
Held December 3-4, 1996, St. Petersburg, FL  
by the Florida Advisory Committee to the  
United State Commission on Civil Rights

## **The United States Commission on Civil Rights**

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, first created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and reestablished by the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the Federal Government. By the terms of the 1983 act, as amended by the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the laws based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice: investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study and collection of information relating to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; maintenance of a national clearinghouse for information respecting discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections; and preparation and issuance of public service announcements and advertising campaigns to discourage discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

## **The State Advisory Committees**

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105(c) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and section 3(d) of the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994. The Advisory Committees are made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to: advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission on matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Advisory Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission upon matters in which the Commission shall request the assistance of the State Advisory Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference that the Commission may hold within the State.

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**FLORIDA ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

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**Mr. Kee Juen Eng**  
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**Ms. Ida R. Reynolds**  
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## Introduction

On October 24, 1996, St. Petersburg, FL was in the midst of civil unrest following the shooting of an African American motorist, TyRon Lewis, by a white police officer. After the unrest, Mayor David Fischer asked the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to come and assess the situation. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Chairperson Mary Frances Berry, Commissioner Carl Anderson, and Southern Regional Office Director Bobby Doctor met with the Mayor, members of the City Council, and the community on October 31, 1996. On November 13, 1996, a second civil disturbance erupted stemming from the grand jury's decision not to indict the officer.

The Florida Advisory Committee<sup>1</sup> promptly responded to the second disturbance by designing a community forum in St. Petersburg that would allow members of the community, Federal, State, and local officials an opportunity to discuss the underlying issues that ignited the unrest. Open invitations to the public to observe the forum were sent to the St. Petersburg and Tampa communities through press announcements which appeared in both the *St. Petersburg Tribune* and the *Tampa Tribune* newspapers. The community forum was held at the City Council Chambers in City Hall on December 3-4, 1996. U.S. Commission Chairperson Mary Frances Berry, Commissioner Yvonne Y. Lee and the Florida Advisory Committee heard from the following specifically invited participants on Tuesday, December 3, 1996.

- James Muhammad, Minister, Nation of Islam Tampa/St. Petersburg
- James Simmons, President, St. Petersburg Urban League
- Reverend Joseph Lowery, President, National Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- H. Roy Kaplan, Executive Director, National Conference
- Kinara Zima, President, National UHURU Peoples Movement
- Leon Russell, President, Florida State NAACP
- Reverend Wayne Thompson, First Baptist Institutional Church
- Sevelle Brown, III, President, St. Petersburg Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- Theresa Lassiter, Representative, Coalition of African Americans
- Marva Dennard, Community Activist, St. Petersburg
- Sheila Turner, Attorney-at-Law, St. Petersburg

On December 4, 1996, the Advisory Committee heard from the following specifically invited participants:

- Charles R. Wilson, U.S. Attorney, U.S. Attorney's Office, Tampa, FL

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<sup>1</sup> The State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights do not have subpoena power. When a community forum is held, the Advisory Committee invites individuals representing differing points of view on an issue. Since the Advisory Committee cannot compel participation, persons invited to present information may not appear. At the conclusion of such forums, members of the audience who wish to present a statement on the topic of the forum are permitted to do so.

- Peter Wubbenhorst, Special Counsel, FBI, Tampa, FL
- Nancy Hawkins, Regional Director, Officer of Job Training Programs, Atlanta, GA
- George Milburn, Area Coordinator, U.S. Housing and Urban Development, Tampa, FL
- Gregory Durden, Civil Rights Chief, Attorney General's Office, Hollywood, FL
- Rudolph Bradley, State Representative, D-District 55, Manatee-Pinellas Counties
- Ronald McElrath, Director, Florida Commission on Human Relations
- Mayor David J. Fischer, St. Petersburg
- Connie Kone, Councilwoman, St. Petersburg City Council
- Edward Cole, Chairperson, St. Petersburg City Council
- Larry Williams, Councilman, St. Petersburg City Council
- David Welch, Councilman, St. Petersburg City Council
- Ernest Fillyau, Councilman, St. Petersburg City Council
- Beatrice Griswold, Councilwoman, St. Petersburg City Council
- Leslie Curran, Councilwoman, St. Petersburg City Council
- Chief Darrel W. Stephens, St. Petersburg Police Department
- Debra Bynum, Coordinator, Police Citizens Review Board
- J.W. "Jack" Soule, President, St. Petersburg Police Labor Union
- Russ Sloan, President, St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Howard Hinesley, Superintendent, Pinellas County Schools
- Corrine Freeman, Chair, Pinellas County School Board

#### **The Forum at St. Petersburg, FL - December 3, 1996**

Commission Chairperson Mary Frances Berry welcomed participants to the forum. Dr. Berry complimented the Florida Advisory Committee for its diligent response to the crisis in St. Petersburg, its work on the report "Racial and Ethnic Tensions in Florida", and for work on past reports on police community relations in Tampa and Miami.

Dr. Berry noted there were two challenges to be addressed at this community forum: (1) underlying racial tensions; and, (2) police-community issues. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, she noted, has examined racial and ethnic tensions around the country. Civil unrest, she said, tends to erupt where there is mistrust of the police. Dr. Berry offered words of encouragement to those in St. Petersburg and at the Federal level who have begun to discuss healing measures. She applauded the Mayor's interest in resolving tensions. The allocation of the assistance package from the Federal government will hopefully address the underlying issues, said Dr. Berry. Before turning over the proceedings to Florida SAC Chairperson Rabbi Solomon Agin, Dr. Berry stated that following the release of the transcript, the Commission, along with the Florida Advisory Committee will continue to monitor the situation in St. Petersburg.

Rabbi Agin of Fort Myers, FL, asked members of the Advisory Committee to introduce themselves. The members present were: Kenneth Clarkson of Miami; Robert Brake of Coral Gables; June Littler of Gainesville; Ernest Duffie of Jacksonville; Robert Ingram of Jacksonville; Dr. Bradford Brown of Miami; Kee Eng of Ft. Lauderdale; Ida Reynolds of Gainesville; Napoleon



Ford of Orlando; and, Linda Garcia of Temple Terrace. Bobby Doctor, Southern Regional Director of the USCCR, also introduced himself. SAC Chair Rabbi Agin read a poem into the record entitled, "To Hold On" after which he introduced the first participant of the evening, Minister James Muhammad of the Tampa/St. Petersburg Nation of Islam.

Minister Muhammad described what he regards as a legacy of inhumane treatment of blacks in this culture and cited recent examples of young African American men killed by white police officers. He added that in each instance, the white officers' actions were ruled as justifiable homicide. Minister Muhammad noted an outpouring of public response when properties are set afire, but a lack of interest regarding underlying causes of racial tensions. Racial tensions in St. Petersburg, he concluded, arise from the schools' failure to incorporate the contributions of Africans and their descendants, a biased media, and divided leadership among African Americans.

The Advisory Committee asked several questions of Minister Muhammad. Dr. Brown and Rabbi Agin raised questions about local school boards' accountability in addressing the incorporation of African civilization into the curriculum. Minister Muhammad stated that he believed that there is legislation that requires such teaching but that it is not practiced by schools. Rabbi Agin suggested that the community raise its concerns with the Commission of Education, which requires the school board to adhere to the guidelines of the Florida Department of Education.

The Florida Advisory Committee next heard from James Simmons, President of the St. Petersburg Urban League. Mr. Simmons told the Advisory Committee that it was important that the community remain optimistic and work within the system. It was his hope that city officials, business leaders and the community unite to address issues affecting the city. Mr. Simmons added that problems affecting African American communities are the lack of appropriate funding, the failure to enforce housing codes against absentee landlords, and the inability to weed out "bad cops" from the police force. He closed by noting that the Criminal Justice Institute in St. Petersburg can provide additional training to police officers.

Responding to questions from the Florida Advisory Committee, Mr. Simmons said the \$20 million of Federal assistance which had been announced by the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros is seed money that would attract other funds and opportunities for employment and development in South St. Petersburg. Dr. Berry asked if Mr. Simmons knew of complaints against the Housing Department and their response. Mr. Simmons did not know the exact number of existing housing code violations but he was aware of five violations, all in South St. Petersburg. He added that he has heard landlords say that they would prefer to demolish the property than make the necessary repairs.

Dr. Berry asked Mr. Simmons to react to initiatives implemented since the shooting death of TyRon Lewis. Mr. Simmons applauded the Mayor's effort to organize a commission to review underlying tensions and added that the community's voice must be heard. He added there has been ongoing discussions with members of the private sector to invest in the area, particularly regarding a supermarket in South St. Petersburg.

When asked by Mr. Ingram if the Urban League has worked with the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Simmons replied that he was a member of the Chamber and added that the Chamber has done little to attract markets to the south side of St. Petersburg. There is, he said, a belief in the African American community that the city is attempting to remove all the public housing projects. Mr. Simmons also said there are no places for recreational activities on the south side of St. Petersburg.

Reverend Joseph Lowery, President of the National Southern Christian Leadership Conference, next addressed the Advisory Committee. When an African American is stopped by a police officer, Reverend Lowery advised that "he pray; follow the officers instructions to the letter; make no sudden moves; keep hands in clear sight; speak calmly; comply with the officer's wishes; and pray some more". In 1991, a series of hearings sponsored by the SCLC in American cities, including St. Petersburg, found four recurring themes: (1) Widespread distrust of the police by African Americans; (2) Hampered community relations resulting from a high level of distrust; (3) Lack of expressed indignation by the white community when police officers shoot African American suspects; and, (4) Civil unrest resulting from police action against a person of color.

Reverend Lowery said two issues continue to polarize and alienate the races - economic uncertainty and the criminal justice system. Several questions must be answered to overcome existing polarities: (1) Can police officers be effectively trained to arrest unarmed suspects without having to shoot them?; (2) Are police officers releasing their fears and frustrations on black males?; (3) Are politicians pinning the fears of economic uncertainties on outcast groups?; and (4) Is the larger white society condoning police brutality by relieving officers of liability when they are involved in questionable shootings? Reverend Lowery said effective leadership is needed from business and religious communities. He listed 10 initial steps:

- (1) The problem of police brutality must be understood to affect all the communities, not just African Americans.
- (2) Economic inequities in the community must be addressed with job training, housing, health care, education, and entrepreneurship.
- (3) Police officers must be fairly compensated for their difficult job.
- (4) Break the code of silence among officers who witness or fail to stop acts of brutality under color of law.
- (5) The police department should look like the community at all levels.
- (6) Maintain a consistent record of complaints against officers with patterns of brutality.
- (7) Establish community policing.
- (8) Police officers and other public servants must receive some form of community education.
- (9) A civilian review board with a staff, and subpoena power should be established.
- (10) Support for Federal legislation which would hold officers financially liable where their illegal acts result in costly lawsuits against the department.

When asked by Ms. Garcia if any of his 10 recommendations have been implemented in St. Petersburg, Reverend Lowery said he has met with some members of the City Council and felt they want to do what is right. Many leaders, he explained, are afraid to take the first step because

of fears of being ostracized. In response to Mr. Eng's question, Reverend Lowery agreed that it was necessary for all ethnic groups to work together to improve their circumstances.

Next, the Advisory Committee heard from H. Roy Kaplan, Executive Director of The National Conference<sup>2</sup>, Tampa-St. Petersburg. Mr. Kaplan said overt racism and anti-Semitism is evidenced by the existence of supremacist groups and racist radio and cable television shows. Blacks and whites have different perspectives of race relations, he said. Mr. Kaplan pointed out there is always an outpouring of response just after civil unrest but no sustained support for healing in the long run. He concluded by highlighting positive initiatives such as youth dialogue and community dialogue on the issue of race.

Ms. Garcia asked for suggestions on sustaining the dialogues. Mr. Kaplan said people have to address their own fears, bigotry, and stereotypes. Mr. Kaplan told the Advisory Committee that the National Conference meets regularly in Tampa with the support of the County Commission. He stressed there is a need for Federal assistance in pushing for anti-prejudice exhibits.

Kinara Zima, President of the National People's Democratic Uhuru Movement, St. Petersburg, was next to address the Florida Advisory Committee. Ms. Zima described Uhuru as an organization of volunteers who represent the African American working class and "protect(s) and defend(s) the democratic rights of the black community".

Ms. Zima alleged the St. Petersburg police force has used its authority to deny African Americans their constitutional rights by placing them under arrest, framing them, jailing them, beating them, murdering them, denying them access to public parks, and restricting their right to assemble and distribute leaflets. Since the October 24<sup>th</sup> shooting, police officers have monitored the African American sections of St. Petersburg such as Bethel Heights and Jordan Park, she said. An investigating state attorney, said Ms. Zima, labeled Uhuru as incitors of the riot and threatened to prosecute the group's members.

Martial law is how Ms. Zima described the night following the Lewis shooting. She alleged that police officers declared October 25<sup>th</sup> "white night" and proceeded to beat African American children, imprison Uhuru members, and restrict the movement of African Americans. In response to the shooting, Ms. Zima said the Uhuru group held a "trial" whereby the evidence presented supported a guilty verdict for the police officers and the city of St. Petersburg.

On the night of the grand jury's decision, Ms. Zima said total chaos followed. Uhuru members were pepper sprayed and tear gassed, a Uhuru member was arrested, and 27 members of the "green team" raided the Uhuru building and harassed the members, alleged Ms. Zima. (The green team was later described as a group of police officers dressed in green who allegedly terrorize African Americans in St. Petersburg.) Ms. Zima said police officers barricaded the street, blocked access to the Uhuru building, dissuaded people from attending the Wednesday night meeting, and declared the meeting an unlawful assembly. Police demanded evacuation of the Uhuru building in five minutes but began tear gassing the structure within 30 seconds, she

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<sup>2</sup> The National Conference was founded as the National Conference on Christians and Jews in 1927.

added. According to Ms. Zima, African Americans in St. Petersburg have been living under martial law, since October 24<sup>th</sup>.

The Advisory Committee also heard instances of Uhuru members receiving crank calls traced to the Pinellas County Sheriff's Department, a radio contest urging listeners to send in cartoons caricaturing the shooting of TyRon Lewis, and the *St. Petersburg Times* editorial criticizing African American religious leaders for taking a stand with Uhuru. Ms. Zima criticized the Mayor's task force as being in conflict with the African American coalition. She said reconciliation will occur only if amnesty is granted to those arrested and if the officers involved in the shooting are arrested for murder.

The Advisory Committee asked a number of questions. Ms. Zima said the Mayor should be investigated for ordering the harassment of Uhuru and the arrest of its members for passing out leaflets. When Mr. Ford asked Ms. Zima her opinion of Chief of Police Darrel Stephens, she responded that he was "responsible for most of the attacks" on the community. Believing, "our lives are in danger everyday", she said the coalition would gladly meet with Justice Department officials. When asked if Uhuru tried to get legal assistance, she said the group is pressing on with a class action suit.

In response to Mr. Ingram's question, Ms. Zima remarked the African American community cannot gather in public parks. Ms. Zima stated that the community demands are as follows:

- (1) the officers involved in the shooting be arrested and convicted;
- (2) the police officer who drew a cartoon of the shooting be fired;
- (3) reparation be provided to the family of TyRon Lewis; and,
- (4) amnesty be given to those arrested on the two nights of civil disorder.

When Dr. Berry asked if there were any possible justification for a "preemptive strike" by the police department, Ms. Zima said no. She said she could not see any reason for attacking a center full of women and children. Regarding the Uhuru trial, Ms. Zima rejected the term "mock trial" and declared it to be the people's court with 49 witnesses. The trial ended with a guilty verdict for murder and genocide and punishment by the state's electric chair. Responding to Dr. Brown's questions regarding a Justice Department investigation, Ms. Zima said she has not been contacted nor is she aware of an investigation. Ms. Zima closed by saying that Uhuru's funds were being depleted by having to bail so many of its members out of jail.

The next participant, Leon W. Russell, President of the Florida State Conference of Branches of the NAACP, pledged to assist victims of police brutality and help them to get legal counsel. The following must be recognized by St. Petersburg officials, said Mr. Russell.

- (1) African Americans in St. Petersburg have a different perception of justice.
- (2) City officials must recognize African Americans' different perception of justice.
- (3) The south side of St. Petersburg must be viewed as a part of the entire city.
- (4) African Americans will choose their own leaders.
- (5) The educational system must recognize and service the needs of African American students.
- (6) Employment opportunities and training programs must be fostered by the business community and the city.

The Advisory Committee asked Mr. Russell some questions, including what he thought must be addressed promptly. The perception that the police act to terrorize African Americans must be addressed by city administrators, he said. When Mr. Ingram asked about the depth of the community's problem with the police, Mr. Russell explained that although the police chief has established progressive policies, the police corps remains unchanged and some act to undermine the chief's leadership. Dr. Berry asked about the overwhelming presence of blacks but few whites at the community forum. Mr. Russell responded that some whites do not see the connection between the disturbances and their lives. He noted that after the October 24<sup>th</sup> disturbance, there was more white attendance at various forums.

Mr. Russell told the Advisory Committee that Kweisi Mfume, President of the NAACP, has written to Attorney General Reno to request a Justice Department investigation. He added that he has urged Charles Wilson, U.S Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, not to rely solely on evidence gathered by local law enforcement. When asked by Mr. Ingram what the NAACP could do, Mr. Russell replied that the organization would press for economic and community development and review the complaints to assess the legal issues.

Reverend Wayne Thompson of the First Baptist Institutional Church was next to address the Advisory Committee. In his opening statement, Reverend Thompson said there are two St. Petersburgs - one black, one white. The shooting of TyRon Lewis, he said, was history repeating itself on the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street. There are two issues, he noted: (1) the police department polices itself and (2) the policing standard in north St. Petersburg is different from that of south St. Petersburg. Regarding the green team, Rev. Thompson said the team patrols only the black section of St. Petersburg by kicking in doors, and/or destroying furniture, all without a warrant.

Rev. Thompson said his greatest concern is for the youth in the city who are often victims of police harassment and framing. He complained that police officers unnecessarily transfer young suspects to different facilities. The southside, he said, is last to receive the city's services. Rev. Thompson said streets on the southside are last to be paved and the street lamps are repaired last. He further stated that whites will not go to gatherings on the southside and city officials would not consider holding a town meeting there. The root of the problem is economical, educational, and ecological said Rev. Thompson. He explained that there are no African American members on the school board, no ATM machines at the bank in south St. Petersburg, and there are no recreational facilities on the southside. Rev. Thompson concluded that systemic racism is entrenched in the community.

When asked if he would prefer a citizens' review board decision over the police department's Internal Affairs conclusion, Rev. Thompson replied that the citizens' review board was constantly undermined because it was told that it lacks technical knowledge to understand the materials it is reviewing. He questioned the Internal Affairs consistent finding for the police. Rev. Thompson also criticized the police union's hold over the department's policies.

Sevell Brown, III, President of the St. Petersburg Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Chairman of the Coalition of African American Leadership, next addressed the Advisory Committee. The Coalition, said Mr. Brown, was formed to prevent the erosion of civil rights. Mr. Brown said the Coalition requested a November 11, 1996 meeting with the "principal power brokers in the city" to focus on the economic inclusion of African Americans. That meeting, which has yet to take place, was to include the Chairperson of the School Board (Andrea Thacker), Chairman of the Convention and Visitors Bureau (Kenna Eagen), Chairman of the City Council (Dr. Edward Cole), Chairperson of the County Commission (Sally Parks), and the President of the Chamber of Commerce (Russ Sloan).

Mr. Brown said the economic package would consider 500 jobs based on the Youth Bill model, a partnership to redevelop the riot torn area, and the consideration of tax credit and subsidies. The revitalization of downtown, he said, should be seen as an effort to increase employment and contractual opportunities for African Americans. There should be a merger of the small business loans of the Federal government with the plans of the governor, he added. All plans must include the input of the Coalition, he concluded.

The Advisory Committee asked Mr. Brown several questions. Mr. Brown said that he had hoped that the Mayor, as chief executive officer of the city, would convene the requested meeting. When Dr. Berry asked about the relationship between the Coalition chaired by Mr. Brown and the task force scheduled to meet with the Mayor on December 4, 1996, Mr. Brown said there was no relationship. The task force, he said, was the Mayor's way of saying that he is listening to the entire city, including a group like Uhuru - formerly shunned by the city. While Mr. Brown applauded the efforts of the Mayor, he stressed that the Coalition is mostly concerned with economic inclusion. When asked about the diversity/sensitivity training of the police department, Mr. Brown said the police force rejected the offer of Dr. Bernard Lafayette of the Martin Luther King Institute. The department, he said, preferred consultants who were experts in the field rather than "non-policy types".

Next, the Advisory Committee heard from Theresa Lassiter, a single mother from St. Petersburg, who described the scene on the night of the riots. Ms. Lassiter, who said she did not participate in disorderly activities, also said that police officers yelled at her for no apparent reason and harassed young black men. She suggested the Advisory Committee review the videotapes of the October 24<sup>th</sup> and November 13<sup>th</sup> city council meetings. She told the Advisory Committee that council members could be seen arguing among themselves whether they should attend the forum. She also asked the committee to look into the firing, for no apparent reason, of a black police officer. Ms. Lassiter concluded by criticizing the current economic state. People, she said, are chastised for not working while jobs have become more scarce due to downsizing.

Marva Dennard was next to address the Advisory Committee. Ms. Dennard, a native of St. Petersburg, recalled a time when there were about 150 black-owned businesses in the area. The businesses, she said, disappeared after the city demolished Methodist Town. The conversion of Laurel Park into a parking lot for the dome, and the planned demolition of Jordan Park has further exasperated the problem, she said. In addition to the loss of black enterprises, Ms. Dennard told the Advisory Committee young black men cannot gather in public without the

suspicion of the police. Ms. Dennard, who holds a doctorate degree, complained of a job market that has refused to hire her because she is "overqualified".

Ms. Dennard told the Advisory Committee that she was at the Uhuru house on November 13th. She alleged after meeting with the media and calling for calm, the Uhuru chairman was surrounded by police officers and doused with pepper spray. Ms. Dennard said she heard on the news that the Uhuru house was targeted because it was deemed a breeding ground for trouble. It is not Uhuru that is the source of the city's woes, she said, but the disparities in city services between blacks and whites. An example she gave was the alleged difference in wattage for the lights on the white side of town verses the street lamps on the south side. Ms. Dennard concluded by asking the committee to support the plight of the people.

Dr. Berry asked if things in St. Petersburg have gotten worse since the days of segregation. Ms. Dennard replied things are worse in the sense that the lack of businesses have negatively impacted African American communities. She added that children are tired of being bussed to schools for hours and being shut out from schools' social functions because of the distance. Ms. Dennard concluded by stating that from now on African Americans in St. Petersburg will be involved in economic development issues and decisions.

Sheila Turner, the final scheduled participant at the community forum on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, is an Attorney-at-Law. Ms. Turner said despite having 45 black attorneys in St. Petersburg, most do not service the area because of lack of employment opportunities. In order to participate on a committee like the task force or school board, Ms. Turner told the Advisory Committee that one had to "say the right things". She concluded her remarks by saying that on the night of the riots a number of innocent young black men were harassed, arrested, intimidated, and framed.

Asked by Dr. Berry the whereabouts of the other individual that was riding with TyRon Lewis, Ms. Turner said the boy, 14 to 16 years old, remained in jail until the grand jury rendered its decision on November 13<sup>th</sup>. She insinuated that the confession obtained from a young person kept in jail for a long time is tainted. Ms. Turner closed by stating that she can point to no sign of progress in the police force. In fact, she stated, the police force has been emboldened.

Following the last scheduled participant, the Florida Advisory Committee heard from a number of unscheduled participants before moving to reconvene at 10:00 a.m. on December 4, 1996.

#### **The Forum at St. Petersburg, FL - December 4, 1996**

Charles Wilson, U. S. Attorney from Tampa, FL, appeared before the Florida Advisory Committee on behalf of his office and then Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Deval Patrick. Mr. Wilson told the Advisory Committee that the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department have been working jointly in the investigation of TyRon Lewis' death. He explained that the U.S. Attorney's Office was precluded from revealing too much information on the investigation which is still in its early stage. The investigation will be thorough, independent and fair, he added. The purpose of the investigation is to determine if

Federal laws, specifically Federal criminal laws, were violated. He concluded by remarking that he has met with members of the civil rights community.

In response to Mr. Ford's question, Mr. Wilson explained that a violation of Federal law would mean that the matter would proceed to a Federal grand jury. Dr. Brown asked Mr. Wilson if his office has contacted the Uhuru group. He also asked if there was another organization, apart from the FBI, that the African American community could contact and if any of the attorneys have civil rights experience. The investigation is ongoing, therefore the Uhuru group will be contacted, if that has not yet occurred, Mr. Wilson responded. Mr. Wilson said that his prosecutors have litigated civil rights cases and many different Federal cases. Regarding the community's concern about speaking with the FBI, Mr. Wilson said he was confident in the ability of the agents. If witnesses remain skeptical, he added, they can contact the U.S. Attorney's Office.

When Ms. Littler asked if the incidents of November 13<sup>th</sup> were being investigated, Mr. Wilson said he was restricted from commenting on any other investigations, whether they exist or not. When Mr. Eng asked if there was an investigative process, Mr. Wilson replied there was no exact method for registering a complaint with Federal law enforcement. Complaints can be lodged with his office or another law enforcement agency, he said. Mr. Clarkson asked that Mr. Wilson review the tapes and transcripts of the previous day's forum.

Commissioner Lee asked if the St. Petersburg police force has been investigated by the U.S. Attorney's Office. Mr. Wilson said that he was not aware of any prior investigations. He clarified his remarks to state that, during his tenure, his office had not been significantly involved in St. Petersburg. Dr. Berry asked Mr. Wilson if he recognized that many community members distrust the FBI and other government agents. He replied that as long as he was in the U.S. Attorney's office, the community should feel confident that their complaints will be investigated. When asked about the successful prosecution of police misconduct cases, Mr. Wilson replied that such cases were difficult to prosecute and yielded few convictions. Mr. Wilson closed by requesting a copy of the transcript for review of alleged civil rights violations.

Next, Peter Wubbenhorst, Supervisory Special Agent with the FBI and chief counsel for the Tampa Division, addressed the Advisory Committee. Mr. Wubbenhorst, an experienced police instructor and civil rights instructor throughout central Florida, explained the investigative process. The investigation of a police department, he said, would be pursuant to Federal laws dealing with criminal conspiracy to deprive one of their constitutional rights, actions under color of law, and the state's internal affairs administrative action. Cases are brought to the attention of Federal law enforcement officials by victims, community contacts, or through the offices own initiative, he added. After a preliminary inquiry to assess the allegation, said Mr. Wubbenhorst, the FBI will conduct a civil rights investigation which includes contacting witnesses, assessing the scene, and looking into medical reports. Records from the departments are obtained, the accused officer is notified, and the FBI cross checks the incident through NCIC. The files are then discussed with the Department of Justice prosecutors to determine if the case is prosecutable. By the time the FBI is involved in the case, said Mr. Wubbenhorst, Internal Affairs



has already initiated an investigation. After gathering the information, the Justice Department will tell the FBI if further investigation is necessary and if the case is prosecutable.

Rabbi Agin asked Mr. Wubbenhorst if he had ever done civil rights training for the St. Petersburg police department. Mr. Wubbenhorst replied "excessive training" of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Department was provided a couple of years ago. He explained that the training consisted of a presentation on civil rights, the FBI's investigative procedures, and related Federal laws. That training was for senior staff officers but was open to police supervisors who would then impart the message to the corps.

Asked about the FBI's sensitivity to citizens filing complaints, Mr. Wubbenhorst said trained staff and investigative assistants take the complaints which are then reviewed by the supervisor. Mr. Wubbenhorst could not comment specifically on which members of the community were contacted by the FBI. Responding to Mr. Ingram's inquiry, Mr. Wubbenhorst said he would gladly review the previous night's transcript. He told the Advisory Committee he has no knowledge of community members being intimidated by the FBI. If that is the case, there is a possibility that valuable information is not being provided.

When asked by Dr. Brown about the mechanism in place to draw out the most valuable information from witnesses, Mr. Wubbenhorst said trained agents know how to help get the best information from witnesses. Asked about the demographic breakdown of his office, Mr. Wubbenhorst said he did not have that information readily available but he would make it available to the Commission at a later date. Commissioner Lee asked about the number of civil rights complaints from St. Petersburg in the past 5 to 10 years. Mr. Wubbenhorst said those statistics would be provided to the Commission. When pressed on whether civil rights training for local law enforcement is necessary, Mr. Wubbenhorst said he preferred not to comment further on this issue. In his final response to SAC members' questions, Mr. Wubbenhorst said that the FBI did not deploy heavy artillery on the nights of October 24<sup>th</sup> or November 13<sup>th</sup>.

Nancy Hawkins, Deputy Regional Administrator for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Training Administration and Director of Job Training, spoke about the Federal government's earmarked allocation of \$20 million to St. Petersburg. The team, which will return on December 20<sup>th</sup> to assess the implementation of the economic plan, consists of 32 members from the private sector, educational institutions, social service agencies, community based organizations and locally elected officials.

The Labor Secretary, reported Ms. Hawkins, was concerned that (1) citizens be involved in the process; (2) services be provided to the targeted community; and (3) a mechanism be implemented so that the programs can prosper even after the Federal funds have expired. Ms. Hawkins said since November 4<sup>th</sup> over 500 applicants have registered and referrals have been made at the job service office located in south St. Petersburg. She added that \$500,000 has been allocated for the Youth Bill, which will train young people for constructing and rehabilitating low income homes, provide academic funds for preparation for the GED, and develop participants' employable skills. In addition, a Work Opportunities Tax Credit will be provided

so that businesses can be encouraged to hire local residents. Funds are also set aside for the employment of ex-offenders, she said.

Rabbi Agin asked if funds are also available for training outside of construction work. Ms. Hawkins replied that training for demand skills, such as computer skills, are included. Asked about the denial of employment opportunities for community members, Ms. Hawkins said such cases should be directed to the EEOC. Ms. Hawkins promised to return to St. Petersburg to ensure that the programs are in operation and reaching the targeted group. Ms. Hawkins also said an advisory committee consisting of five Coalition members, three Chamber of Commerce representatives, and three designated persons by the Mayor have been approved. The agencies that are part of the task force are the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Commerce, Department of Education, Department of Justice, and the Department of Labor.

George Milburn, Area Coordinator for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, stated that the St. Petersburg fair housing laws mirror or exceed the requirements of the 1968 and 1988 Fair Housing Acts. Housing discrimination complaints, he said, are filed either with the city agency or HUD. Of the 100 cases filed for the years 1994-1996, 59 were race-based allegations of which 10 were found "for cause".

Mr. Milburn acknowledged that the city's racial issues are divided along north and south lines. Of the city's 40 real estate agents registered with HUD's Tampa office, he noted only three are minorities. Of the 41 appraisers voluntarily registered with HUD, all are white, non-Hispanic males and females, he said. Mr. Milburn reported that the St. Petersburg Public Housing Authority has been notified of its failure to have an updated, consistently applied admissions policy. The housing authority, he concluded, is currently taking steps to correct that.

Asked about the absence of minorities in the number of appraisers, Mr. Milburn added that 7 of the 41 self-identified appraisers are women. Ms. Garcia told Mr. Milburn that the destruction of public housing has further strained south St. Petersburg. Mr. Milburn said because the "one-for-one replacement" policy is no longer in effect, there is not much that can be done. The Secretary's plan, he explained, restricts demolition unless there exists an "adequate redevelopment plan in place". It is Mr. Milburn's understanding that this policy is to remain even after Secretary Cisneros' departure from HUD. Asked if HUD is doing anything to reach out to minority real estate agents, Mr. Milburn said no, although he sees its importance.

Regarding the racial breakdown of recipients of Section 8<sup>3</sup> versus public housing, Mr. Milburn said he would provide the Advisory Committee a list. Asked about Section 3<sup>4</sup> contracts under the community block development grants, Mr. Milburn responded that contracts are reviewed by

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<sup>3</sup> Section 8 is a HUD program where a certificate or coupon is provided to recipients allowing them to make up the difference between 30% of income and fair housing rent in the area. The coupon is portable thereby allowing recipients to find their housing of choice.

<sup>4</sup> Section 3 is a HUD program that encourages public housing authorities to use contractors and subcontractors who hire public housing residents for construction work.

the technical staff from the Jacksonville office. Mr. McDuffie voiced his concern that Section 3 contracts are allocated in a manner that excludes African American and other small businesses. Mr. Milburn offered to review Section 3 contracts. Mr. Milburn agreed with Mr. Ingram's observation that the situation in St. Petersburg and Jordan Park is volatile, but added that he was encouraged by Secretary Cisneros' plan. Mr. Milburn explained that HUD did not have responsibility or authority to make a decision regarding the demolition of Jordan Park. Mr. Milburn closed by reading some portions of HUD's plan and submitted the document for the record. He noted, specifically, HUD's plan to make \$5 million available for the revitalization of Jordan Park.

Next, the Advisory Committee heard from Gregory Durden, Chief of Civil Rights for the Florida Attorney General's Office. Mr. Durden opened by stating that he could not comment on a number of issues because of the ongoing investigation. The State Attorney General's Office, he said, does not conduct an independent investigation. Curtis Lee, the contact person from the Tampa office was introduced as the local contact person involved with matters since the first day of the unrest. Mr. Durden closed by cautioning that riots flowing from police-community tensions are becoming common.

Asked by Rabbi Agin the scope of the investigation, Mr. Durden said the files of St. Petersburg's 500 police officers will be reviewed. The investigative process has already begun. Mr. Ingram pointed out that participants from the previous night's forum said no one has interviewed them regarding the incidents. Mr. Durden remained firm that members of the community have been interviewed and he has plans to meet with others. He agreed to review the transcript and videotape to further identify potential witnesses.

Randolph Bradley, State Representative from District 55, told the Advisory Committee he has spoken with the Pinellas County School Board and Pinellas County Commission and asked them to reexamine the voting structure. Because board members are elected county-wide, an African American has never been elected to either of the two posts, he said. The plight of south St. Petersburg will continue to exist because an elected official from that region is doomed to lose in the county-wide election, he added. Mr. Bradley concluded by stating that he hopes the Mayor will accompany him when he discusses these issues.

Dr. Berry asked Mr. Bradley how receptive the boards have been to his proposal. Mr. Bradley said that the school board discussed the issue prior to the last election but did not act on it. Litigation has not been considered, but other avenues of persuasion will be considered if there is not an effort to address the issue.

Ronald McElrath, Executive Director of the Florida Commission on Human Relations, next addressed the Advisory Committee. The purpose of the human relations commission, he said, is to investigate claims of housing and employment discrimination. The human relations commission was involved in housing complaints following the Hurricane Andrew relief, he said. Although 40 positions are to be funded, vacancies will not be filled because of the lack of Federal dollars, he stated. In the past, the human relations commission provided police-community relations workshops. Due to lack of funding, such workshops have ceased. Mr.

McElrath closed by stating that he would be happy if the human relations commission could serve as a resource or facilitator in these matters.

Rabbi Agin asked if the offer to help was to the city or the community. Mr. McElrath said the offer was available to any interested party. Lack of resources has prevented the commission from making an offer directly to the community. Regarding employment discrimination claims, Mr. McElrath said the public is more likely to pursue such claims in state courts where recovered damages are greater. With regard to housing complaints, a study conducted by the human relations commission with a HUD grant of \$300,000 found about 60% of such discrimination claims were settled and damages were collected in approximately 80% of the cases. Mr. McElrath concluded by stating that the commission would assist the affected community if asked.

Dr. Berry asked what could the commission do. The human relations commission, he said, could provide technical assistance, training, and if funds are available, police-community relations workshops. Regarding complaints of the city's housing code violations, the agency could recommend that the State Attorney General's Office get involved, he said. Employment discrimination complaints would be reviewed if claims are filed under state statutes, he explained. He closed by stating trained commission personnel would direct a complainant on which jurisdiction they should file their complaint.

Mayor David Fischer next appeared before the Florida Advisory Committee. Four years ago, he said, a civil disturbance brought with it a stronger form of city government. Mayor Fischer said he recognized that there was not a level playing field in St. Petersburg. He developed "Operation Commitment" where neighborhood departments were formed in mixed or mostly black areas that were at-risk. These associations, he noted, would propose ideas on how to improve the area. Mayor Fischer also spoke about the code assistance program where the "N Team" has assisted over 500 houses in the past 3½ years by bringing them up to code.

The success of these programs has led to the proliferation of black community associations, said the Mayor. With the increased number of black organizations, he added, came improved recreational centers, expanded streets and sidewalks, and improved landscaping and housing. Mayor Fischer said several police officers have attended the neighborhood meetings and participated in the improvement efforts. The Mayor also praised the St. Petersburg's citizen review panel and minority business enterprise programs. Mayor Fischer said because he was concerned about the disturbances, he contacted the President of the United States. He closed by asking the task force of religious, community and grassroots leaders to help heal the city.

Asked by Rabbi Agin if any of the homes that were repaired as part of the code assistance program were in south St. Petersburg, Mayor Fischer said some were. Regarding the allegation that the city posts different lighting in different areas of the city, Mayor Fischer said he was not sure, but it was possible. When asked if he could investigate the matter, Mayor Fischer said he would forward the findings to the Advisory Committee.

Rabbi Agin asked about the reported lack of confidence in the police chief. Mayor Fischer said because this police chief is doing things radically different from the previous chief, it will take a while before the police force reaches a consensus. Mr. Ingram asked if the Mayor played a role in the demolition plans for Jordan Park. The Mayor said he told the director of the housing authority, an independent body in St. Petersburg, that the community's approval of any action should be obtained. Mayor Fischer said he was not the ultimate actor in the Jordan Park affair because nothing was presented to the board and the housing authority had not yet gone into the community. When pressed by Mr. Ingram, Mayor Fischer said he would not push the demolition of Jordan Park unless it was the wish of the community. Federal funds under the HUD plan would not allow for the demolition without the consideration of the community, he said.

With regard to the public's perception of him, Mayor Fischer said there is always room for improvement. He stated that prior to the disturbances, he believed most of the community thought he was doing a fair job. The Mayor explained that the code assistance programs were the result of neighborhood plans. Asked if St. Petersburg has a method to deal with community relations, Mayor Fischer said the state human resource agency deals only with employment and housing discrimination, not police-community relations.

Regarding economic development, Mayor Fischer said that efforts have been made to level the playing field in the past 3½ years. The city money spent in the areas where the disturbances took place, he said, "far outweigh" the funds put into other areas of St. Petersburg. Asked about using banks which participate in the Community Reinvestment Act, the Mayor said that he has employed such programs under the neighborhood plans initiative and plans to carry them out when the Federal funds arrive. Regarding the city's job training program, Mayor Fischer admitted that the program's impact was weak and sporadic.

Dr. Berry asked the Mayor to make available to the public the Federal government's response to the disturbances. When asked if he was contacted by the police chief regarding the deployment of officers and weapons on the night of November 13<sup>th</sup>, Mayor Fischer said he became aware of the details only after the fact. Dr. Berry then asked about a letter that appeared to contain the Mayor's signature and approval of the Jordan Park demolition. Mr. Ingram repeated his earlier question regarding the Mayor's approval of the demolition. Mayor Fischer responded that no final decision was reached on the issue when he signed the letter. In addition, the letter had to be signed to ensure timely processing, he said. Dr. Berry reminded the Mayor that candor was necessary if people are to have trust in their political leaders.

Dr. Brown asked the Mayor to provide the Committee with a list of the racial breakdown of the code enforcement officers. Regarding the Coalition of African American Leaders' requested meeting, the Mayor said the task force meeting on the night of December 4<sup>th</sup> would also include some Coalition members. Regarding allegations that African Americans are barred from public parks, Mayor Fischer reported there was an incident when 700 to 800 people gathered in the park for a concert. He added that he does not agree that African Americans are barred from the parks. At present, the Mayor has no plans to address the perceptions of unfairness by African Americans.

Mr. Ingram asked the Mayor if he agreed with the perception that the police force pose a danger to the lives of African Americans. When Mr. Ingram explained that the citizens' concern was with police brutality, the Mayor said that he did not believe that danger exists. Asked about the arrest of Uhuru members for distributing leaflets, the Mayor said there are restrictions on the placement of leaflets. Asked if it was the Mayor's duty to address the community's negative perception, Mayor Fischer said yes and that he would consider plans other than surveys. He concluded that he was willing to have an outside group look into the actions of the police force.

Following the Mayor's statements, members of the City Council read their prepared statements into the record. The council members present were Connie Kone, Edward Cole, Larry Williams, Davis Welch, Ernest Fillyau, Beatrice Griswold, and Leslie Curran.

Chief of Police, Darrel Stephens appeared before the Florida Advisory Committee and told them that the two nights of civil disturbances were like none he has seen in his 28 years of service. Relations between the police department and community are very difficult, he said. He explained that although St. Petersburg's economy has improved, the southside has been ravaged by crime and drugs. Chief Stephens acknowledged that the problems with police-community relations are based on racial tension.

The police can contribute to the healing of the community, he said, by providing sensitive and fair service. The improvement in police services has resulted in less fear for safety and of crime and an increase in the number of reported crimes. Police officers in the area have been active in Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, the police athletic league and Just Say No programs, said the chief. Community policing leads to a reduction of crime and provided police officers the opportunity to get to know their neighborhoods. An officer is always present at the Crime Watch meetings, said Chief Stephens, over 200 community members have attended workshops on police operations and practices as part of the Citizens Police Academy.

Chief Stephens told members of the Advisory Committee that Internal Affairs has a diverse staff who take their work very seriously. That office, he said, produces an annual report that provides insight into the complaint investigative process, the outcome of the investigations and the result of internal disciplinary actions. Chief Stephens also praised the Citizens Review Board's recommendations and suggestions. The Community Police Council, said the chief, influences the department's policies and operations.

Regarding allegations that police harass African Americans gathered in public parks, Chief Stephens explained that last spring the department tried to work with organizers to advise them on their gathering efforts. Chief Stephens said that organizers failed to observe certain ordinances thus requiring the police to step in for enforcement.

Allegations regarding the harassment of African Americans by the "green team" is false, said the chief. He explained the narcotics squad was given that name by drug dealers years ago. Today's narcotics officers, whose uniforms were approved by the Community Police Council and several community groups, work on street operations and are part of the Respect Unit. In closing, Chief Stephens said that accountability and responsibility must be shared by the whole community.

Dr. Berry asked Chief Stephens why he failed to notify the Mayor of his plans regarding the Uhuru house on November 13<sup>th</sup> and whether the decision was good practice. Chief Stephens took responsibility for the unilateral decision. The action was taken, said the Chief, because he was pursuing the arrest of four Uhuru members who were calling for violence for three weeks. It was not the police's intent to provoke a confrontation at the Uhuru house, said the Chief. The arrest went wrong. The incident came about when a suspect ran in the direction of the Uhuru house, he added. The chief explained that pursuing officers were unable to stop the other officers because of a switch in radio channels. When pressed about the judgment of the officers in the car, Chief Stephens said he has not yet spoken with those officers but added that mistakes happen despite the best of training and intentions.

Although the State Advisory Committee's community forum was open to the entire St. Petersburg community and a public invitation extended, it was Chief Stephens' view that the opinions of all African Americans or whites were not well represented at this forum. The Chief said all complaints are taken seriously by the department. When asked about the cartoon drawing of the shooting of TyRon Lewis by a police officer, the Chief said that an investigation is underway to determine the identity of the artists. Asked about what needs to be done to improve the police department, Chief Stephens said he was not opposed to outside help from the Police Foundation.

Mr. Doctor asked if the department tolerated racism. Chief Stephens said there is a zero tolerance level for racial insensitivity and that disciplinary action is employed against those who partake in such activities. Lengthy suspensions and job termination are among the disciplinary actions taken, said the chief. He added that there were six terminations in 1996 of police officers who used excessive force. Rabbi Agin asked about a picture in the October 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the *St. Petersburg Times*. The Chief admitted that the picture detailed members of the narcotics squad whose entire uniforms are green. Regarding the level of artillery used on the night of November 13<sup>th</sup>, Chief Stephens said there was a heavy presence from police officers, sheriff's deputies, state and highway patrol, and from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement because of the level of violence in the area.

When asked about the level of departmental support, the Chief said that he is bothered by the fact that he may never get the support of the police union. He acknowledged that he does not have majority support of the police force. He added that he has disciplined a number of officers in the last 4 years but is not prepared to fire them for every offense. Commissioner Lee asked about the racial breakdown of the force. Chief Stephens reported that 16% of the force is African American in a community where that population is 19%. With regard to the breakdown of police officers at the command level, of the 77 commanding officers, there is an African American assistant chief, 2 African American majors, 5 African American sergeants and one African American lieutenant, he said. Disciplinary actions against any officer may be resolved within an 18-month process.

After Chief Stephen, Debra Bynum, a coordinator from the police Citizen Review Committee, addressed the Advisory Committee. The review committee was urged by the City Council to

research police oversight in the early 1990s. Ms. Bynum admitted that the review committee lacked teeth. The city, she said, does have authority to investigate the police department if ordered by the Mayor. The review committee can investigate how the police department handles complaints but not the disciplinary or the collective bargaining process. All members of the review committee, said Ms. Bynum, are volunteers who must undergo training in police procedure and policy and the complaint process of the Internal Affairs Unit of the police department. Recommendations are made by the committee and forwarded to the Mayor, she explained. Ms. Bynum further added that the review committee only proceeds after internal affairs has completed its investigation. When asked by Commissioner Lee why the citizen's review committee started its review only after the department's Internal Affairs investigation, Ms. Bynum said that restriction is written into the law.

Jack Soule, president of the police union, is a 19 year veteran of the force. Mr. Soule said he agreed with the chief's praise of community policing and said there is much common ground that can be built between the police chief and the union. Mr. Soule told the Advisory Committee that despite the impressive statistics read by the police chief, there is a decline in citizens' satisfaction with the force, a sore point between the police chief and the union. There is room for improvement, communication with the public is necessary, said Mr. Soule. The Advisory Committee asked Mr. Soule to put in writing the union's effort to establish an improved relationship between the police chief and union.

Major Sam Lynn, a representative of Sheriff Everett Rice of Pinellas County, asked the Advisory Committee to include the sheriff's statement in the record.

Russ Sloan, President of the St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce, highlighted some of the successes of the chamber such as a diverse rotary club, a mentor-protégé program where small businesses are matched with big businesses, and an entrepreneurial academy. The chamber, in conjunction with the school board has concentrated on Melrose Elementary School because of its commitment to education. A good job in the future, he said, is the result of a good education. All these initiatives, said Mr. Sloan, were done before the civil disturbances broke. Responding to the Advisory Committee's question, Mr. Sloan said that he was awaiting the Mayor's appointment of a broad based group, and thus has not met with the Coalition of African American Leadership.

The last participant at the forum was Dr. Howard Hinesley, Superintendent of the Pinellas School System. Dr. Hinesley said the county school system was the 23<sup>rd</sup> largest in the Nation, with over 105,000 students in about 40 schools. Each middle and high school, he said, has multicultural committees. There are 500 role models programs and 38% of African American students have received the state's doorway scholarship, said Dr. Hinesley.

Dr. Hinesley pointed out that the county-wide election of school board members has been a point of contention, and the basis of 2 lawsuits. Based on prior research, he said, 37 districts would have to be created before a predominantly African American district would materialize. Another sore issue is the bussing that resulted from a 1971 court-ordered desegregation program. Bussing disproportionately impacts African American students, said Dr. Hinesley. The disproportionate



disciplinary actions against African American students is also being addressed. Responding to Mr. Doctor's question, Dr. Hinesley explained that the schools have an integrated curriculum for all of its students.

Following the last specifically invited participant, the community forum was opened for public comments.

### **Addendum**

The Federal Interagency Task Force on St. Petersburg led by Reginald Turner, former Area Coordinator, met with the St. Petersburg officials and community members. Stephanie Owens was appointed the Area Coordinator as of January 27, 1996.

A St. Petersburg Citizens' Advisory Commission, with input from Mayor David Fischer, was created. The Commission has established 3 committees: (1) The Vision Committee will develop a vision statement and set forth the goals of the task force; (2) The Community Outreach Committee will develop a strategy for empowering the community; and, (3) The Coordination Committee is responsible for planning a strategy for Federal, State, and local coordination.

Several meeting dates have been scheduled in St. Petersburg, including the Coalition of African American Leadership meeting on February 8, 1997 and the Federal, State, and Local Coordination Conference on February 26-27, 1997.

Since January 13, 1997, the following has been accomplished:

- The Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security (FDLES) pledged \$100,000 to set up a job placement and referral center in affected areas. Since its establishment, 1,162 residents have been referred for jobs, 31 have been placed for employment, and 34 job orders have been received from employers.
- The Department of Labor increased the Youthbuild funding by \$350,000 for the first year.
- The Department of Labor distributed \$3.4 million to improve St. Petersburg's Job Training Initiative's technical assistance efforts.
- The Environmental Protection Agency developed job training grants for environmental job training for lower-income residents.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development is making \$5 million available for the revitalization of Jordan Park.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development is providing technical assistance to city officials and community leaders to assist their handling of \$6.2 million in grants.
- The Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration is helping the city prepare a formal application for the funding of economic development plans for the affected area.
- The Small Business Administration is establishing a small business pre-application loan program for minority businesses.
- The Department of Justice approved a review of the police-community relations in St. Petersburg.



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