

From: [Shandra Benito](#)
To: [CPC Applications](#)
Subject: Cleveland Community Police Commission Application
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Submitted on Sat, 04/30/2022 - 07:57

Submitted by: Anonymous

Submitted values are:

First Name

Shandra

Last Name

Benito

Are you a resident of Cleveland?

Yes

Home Address

City

Cleveland

State

Ohio

Zip Code

44109

Are you over 18 years of age?

Yes

What is your gender identity?

Female

What do you consider your race?

White

What do you consider your ethnicity?

Latina/Hispanic

Most recent place of work, job title, and address

The Nord Center (full time)
Director of Diversity and Inclusion
6140 S Broadway, Lorain, OH 44053

Applewood Centers (part-time)
Juvenile Diversion Specialist
2525 E 22nd St, Cleveland, OH 44115

Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries (PRN)
Youth Empowerment Specialist
4515 Superior Ave, Cleveland, OH 44103

Selection Criteria

After reviewing the selection criteria - the following are important to know about me:

1. I am a person with a disability. I am hard-of-hearing, my first language was American Sign Language, and I use hearing-aids. I also have generalized anxiety disorder and come from a family with severe mental illness. While disability was not identified as one of the populations (just mental illness - which is also a part of the disability community) I think it is important for representation on the committee because of the strong link between disability and police violence. A report written by the Ruderman Family Foundation found that a third to half of people killed by police have some kind of disability but that disability is often left out of the conversation. People with autism and developmental disabilities experience higher rates of negative interactions with law enforcement and police violence. People with mobility devices frequently have their devices mistaken by police as a weapon, and Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing/Deaf-Blind people are often misunderstood by law enforcement as being non-compliant, as threatening, and in addition to not providing communication access, can find themselves handcuffed and completely unable to communicate. These are just a few examples of some of the ways that police violence and disability intersect.

2. I am a licensed social worker (LSW) with over a decade of experience working in mental health and trauma. My current position is as the Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Nord Center, which is the largest behavioral health provider in Lorain County, Ohio. I have also worked as a domestic violence advocate, in homeless shelters, a sexual assault advocate, a mental health case manager, a juvenile diversion specialist and more.

3. I am a volunteer organizer with the Northeast Ohio Chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) which is an organization that organizes white people to join the movement for racial and economic justice. With SURJ I have honed my skills of community outreach, membership development, and coalition building.

Have you been employed as a law enforcement officer during the past five (5) years?

No

Have you ever been employed by the Cleveland Division of Police in any capacity?

No

Have you ever been employed by the Cleveland Department of Public Safety?

No

Do you understand the role of the Commission and the responsibilities of its members?

Yes

Do you acknowledge the potentially significant time commitment expected of each member?

Yes

Do you understand that applications for the Commission are public records, subject to disclosure upon request?

Yes

Do you understand that your social security number may be required to conduct a background check if you are selected as a finalist?

Yes

Do you speak any other languages?

Yes

Language details

American Sign Language

Please state your reasons for desiring to serve on the Commission.

1. I want to serve on the commission because I want to ensure that disability as a whole, in addition to mental health and mental illness, is part of the conversation and solutions around policing. If disability is not represented on the commission, I fear that some of our most vulnerable community members will fall through the cracks of our solutions.

2. I want to serve on the commission because I am deeply passionate about the link between public safety and trauma. The majority of my social work experience has been in trauma and acute crisis (especially domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse). In all of this work, I have seen how law enforcement response frequently exacerbates the trauma of those directly involved, and those in the larger community. At the same time I have worked closely with law enforcement and seen the intensity of the trauma exposure and trauma they are also carrying. The current state of policing is traumatizing to both the community and to police officers, and I want to be a part of the solution to integrate trauma-informed care into public safety.

3. I want to serve on the commission because I believe change and a better way are possible. I have seen firsthand the power that comes from having a law enforcement response that is grounded in compassion, relationships, and trauma-informed care. I once worked with an officer who chose to stay an extra 6 hours (on his birthday) with a sexual assault survivor to ensure they could give them a ride home from the hospital because he wanted to make sure the survivor had continuity of care. Another law enforcement officer I worked with told me about their own history with mental illness and how that inspired him to become a police officer so

that he could help improve how law enforcement responds to mental health crises. We will all be safer when we can reimagine what the relationship and response can be between carers, law enforcement, and the community, and I want that for our city.

Please describe any skills, life experiences, and expertise that would qualify you for an appointment.

1. My lived experience as a person with a Disability (elaborated on in question one). Relatedly, I have done social work research on attitudes towards people with disabilities and barriers to domestic violence and sexual violence services for survivors with disabilities. I have also developed curricula on understanding disability and accessibility and provided numerous training on disability accessibility for a variety of service providers and sectors.
2. My expertise as a social worker (elaborated on in questions one and two).
3. In Seattle, WA, from 2016 to 2018, I served on the Mayor's Commission on People with Disabilities and was on the Public Safety Committee. Through this commission, I provided consultation to different city-wide departments on barriers to and strategies for improving access for people with disabilities. On the Public Safety Committee, we provided consultation on training and policies for law enforcement and other public safety entities.
4. I have a lot of experience with law enforcement in a variety of settings, both positive and problematic. As a social worker, I have been in roles where I was very congenial with police officers and had interactions with law enforcement that were exceedingly positive and inspiring. In the same roles, I have had experiences with law enforcement that were highly problematic, where officers have tried to intimidate and threaten me because I was advocating for the rights and needs of a survivor or client. Also with my community organizing and activism work, I have been on the front lines of peaceful protests against police violence where I have been hit and knocked down by police officers.
5. I am skilled in the area of public policy; specifically policy development and evaluation. In my Masters of Social Work program, my concentration was in Public Policy and Administration. I have advised on policy issues in a variety of settings including non-profit, for-profit, city, county, and more.

Please describe how you see the oversight role of the new Community Police Commission impacting policing in Cleveland.

I see the oversight role of the new Community Police Commission impacting policing and safety in our city in a way that creates positive change for all stakeholders, including law enforcement. I often hear the Black Lives Matter movement, the police accountability movement, and other social movements described as “anti-police”. I believe that this is categorically false. The current system is failing and traumatizing our police officers too, in addition to all of the pain and trauma caused to communities of color, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, the unhoused, and more.

A few weeks ago, I was providing a workshop on Cultural Awareness to police officers as part of the Crisis Intervention Training in Lorain. During the workshop, we were discussing police culture. One officer opened up about the fact that he had recently witnessed one of his fellow officers be shot and killed, and how little support was provided to the team. He described having to go back to the same location the very next day, and how that impacted him and other officers. Many of the officers I talk to have high levels of trauma exposure and vicarious trauma. On top of that, they are given the nearly impossible task of being everything to everyone when it comes to public safety.

I have a vision of a policing system where law enforcement is not expected to be mental health crisis counselors, domestic and sexual violence advocates, child welfare workers, medical care coordinators, referral screeners, and more. Where law enforcement gets to have meaningful relationships with community members and know them as neighbors outside of a crisis and emergency context. So that when they are responding to emergencies there is context, mutual trust, and recognition of each other. Where depending on the situation you have social workers, spiritual leaders, mental health counselors, educators, public health workers, community leaders, coaches, and others who can also be deployed.

Please provide other information you consider pertinent: (i.e., civic and community group, memberships, related work experiences and professional groups).

I am a member of the New Life Restoration Fellowship Church on the east side of Cleveland, which is a mostly Black pentecostal church. I serve on our outreach auxiliary team, as well as our Kingdom Kids youth program leadership.

For two years, I ran a mutual aid group in Salt Lake City that provided emergency food and financial assistance to individuals and families, provided support to individuals impacted by police violence and their families, and supported safety at community protests including PPE and hand sanitizer (during covid), first aid treatment, water and snacks, and crisis support, and also provided daily hot meals, water, and wifi to an open-air homeless encampment in coalition with other grassroots groups.