

public citizens for children + youth

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#BlackLivesMatter

Teens from Across Southeast PA Speak Out Against Racism In PCCY's Teen Town Hall

Link for Video and Quote Sheet Now Available

MEETING RECORDING: <https://youtu.be/Wjyx9QlqIK4>

Philadelphia (June 12, 2020) – As nationwide Civil Rights protests continue well into their second week, teens in Philadelphia's 5-county region joined PCCY today for a frank conversation on how race and racism affects them, the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and an open discussion on what it will take to end racism in their lifetime.

"Today, we are talking with young people about race and racism – a conversation that is often so painful that adults can't talk about it," said Tomea Sippio-Smith, K-12 Policy Director, PCCY, in her opening remarks. "Our children have been watching, processing and leading. And today, they are weighing in."

Students were joined by **Senator Bob Casey, Congressman Dwight Evans, Congresswoman Madeleine Dean, Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon**. PA State Representative and Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus **Jordan Harris**, Montgomery County Commissioner **Val Arkoosh**, School Psychologist and contributor to *Ms. Magazine* **Dr. Tawanna Jones**, PCCY K-12 Policy Director **Tomea Sippio Smith**, and town hall moderator, **Loraine Ballard Morrill**, Director of News and Community Affairs, iHeartMedia.

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PANELIST QUOTE SHEET PROVIDED BELOW

Student Panelists



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Kayla Cocci, student, Ridley HS

I am a product of the love that we lack in today's society. My skin color is the outcome of the unity between white and black love. I have also been put in an awful position by my own brothers and sisters. I watch mortified with the reminder that my black brother could be Trayvon Martin, I cry with tears of frustration that my white grandparents who have raised me stare at their own race with anger, and with fear of the evil that they could do to women and men who look like their granddaughter and grandson. My skin is one color, but my heart is divided because of society.

Kramoh Mansalay, student, Academy Park HS

“Black people have been failed by this government that promises us equality and fair treatment time and time again. Police brutality disproportionately affecting black people is a prime and current example of a failure of this government.

This has motivated me to organize and advocate for causes such as this is my awareness of the reality that being black is criminalized in America, and if I want to see change, I have to be the change I wish to see. That starts with community cleanups, along with hosting public information sessions on black history and related topics, attending protests, as well as signing petitions”

Michelle Waksman, student, Pennsbury HS

“I am an American Jew who is surrounded by a strong Jewish family and a larger Jewish community. Many people in both of these groups are quick to call out antisemitism but turn a blind eye to other forms of hate, prejudice, bigotry, and racism. Often, they unfortunately contribute to the problem. I often find myself in conversations with family members and other members of my Jewish community, trying to show them how their words and actions are racist, and that if someone said that about a Jewish person they'd be angry and expect change, so their double standards and bigotry are glaringly abhorrent.”

Seif Ghazi, student, Radnor HS

“During my sophomore year, my math teacher without ever asking me assumed I was Indian. Half way through the year, she gave us a new seating chart and she seated me next to the only other Indian girl in class. Throughout that quarter, she repeatedly made jokes about us flirting; she went as far as to say in front of the entire class that we would be cute together even after seeing that we were visibly uncomfortable with that rhetoric. Her signaling me and my classmate out as the only brown people in class made me feel very self-conscious about my skin color and made me acutely aware of how different I was from the rest of my class.”

Harry Cotter, student, Ridley HS

“Racial equity and justice is one of my community’s weaknesses. Black students make up a sizable segment of my school’s student body, but I have had only one nonwhite teacher in high school. I don’t believe there has been more than three black teachers at my school in the time that I’ve been there. When I was an underclassman, one of our assistant principals was a black man, and the way he was able to connect to black students at my school showed me just how important it is to have a teaching staff that is representative of the student body.”

“I believe that many of my peers succumb to racist ideas because so many adults and institutions around them teach and/or reinforce those ideas. Racism is not only systemic, it is generational. Representation and stronger, more thorough education on racial issues is essential.”

Kelly Meinert, student, Central Bucks HS East

“My school district is predominantly white, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t still work that you can do. The best thing you can do is start having conversations with people close to you and start calling out racism whenever you see it...I’ve had to speak out against some of my closest friends, and it was very hard. I’ve had to unfortunately sever some friendships that were harmful because of their inability to listen and learn about why racism is a problem in this country and why their actions are harmful.”

Paris Thomson, student, Springfield Township HS

“I was researching my township police department, and I realized that PA doesn’t reveal the disciplinary records on police officers, and I feel like I’d be a lot more comfortable if things like this were released.”

Non-Student Panelists

Tomea Sippio-Smith, K-12 Policy Director, PCCY

[Opening remarks]

“Today, we are talking with young people about race and racism – a conversation that is often so painful that adults can’t talk about it. George Floyd’s death has forced us to start talking and taking a good hard look at justice, fairness and the impact race has on whether or not we are treated fairly or justly. From the outrage, demonstrations, protests, re-animated fears and tears it is clear, we have not liked what we’ve seen. People all over the world are saying we, as a society, will not tolerate racism. We can not perpetuate injustice. Enough is enough.

Our children have been watching, processing and leading. And today, they are weighing in.”

Senator Bob Casey

“We have a moment here in American history that we’re living through that is unlike any moment of its kind at least in the last 50 years. It’s a moral moment. And each of you is part of this and each of you can contribute to it. You’ve already inspired us adults to take action.”

Congressman Dwight Evans

““When we talk about policies...you need people other than African-Americans to raise issues about discrimination against African-Americans...When you talk to a person, if that person is not ‘woke,’ you can educate them.”

Congresswoman Madeleine Dean

[On the reforms needed]

“It’s not just dealing with policing. It is dealing with how we spend our money...In addition to modernizing and reimagining how policing should be done, we have to invest in our communities. We have to invest in education, making sure it is equitable. We have to invest in housing, making sure it’s available, humane, safe and affordable. And we have to invest in jobs so that everybody has an equal shot at all of these opportunities.”

Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon

“What can young people do?...It started with March for Our Lives with young people going out there and demanding change, doing the hard work of organizing and registering people to vote and then getting people to vote. That activity brought people like Congresswoman Dean and myself to congress for the first time. We have a gun safe party for the first time in decades, and that’s because young people got out there and spoke the truth about what they were seeing, and then organized to do something about it. We need to carry that through to this moment, to dismantling systemic racism.”

State Representative Jordan Harris

“I’m one that believes that we don’t need more armed police officers in schools. What we need is more social workers in our schools, more folks who live in our communities to be in our schools...We cannot criminalize childhood activities and childhood behavior.”

Commissioner Val Arkoosh, Montgomery County

“There’s inherent structural racism and bias that so many white people carry around, and that can translate to having a much more aggressive response to a person of color than a white person by the police.”

Dr. Tawanna Jones-Morrison, School Psychologist

[Q: How can schools implement a program in which implicit bias is addressed?]

“Implicit bias training is not a one-time training where you go for a few hours and you figure things out and you move on. What we really can be doing in schools is helping our teachers and all people coming into the building to work with students to really practice self-reflection first and understand who they are and how their identities have developed because that can help shape how our conversations about students and the conversations we have with students go. That’s important because our interactions with students help shape their own positive identity development.”

[Concluding words to students]

“I acknowledge your bravery. Your voices are so important...Some adults might not tell you this but we are learning from you. You are leading the way.”

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