

# Mayor's Commission on African American Elders

c/o Aging and Disability Services, Seattle-King County  
Mailing Address: PO Box 34215, Seattle WA 98124-4215  
Office Address: Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 5th Ave, 51st Floor  
206-684-0706 • TTY 206-684-0274 • FAX 206-684-0689  
Website: [www.seattle.gov/MCAAE](http://www.seattle.gov/MCAAE)

---

## **MCAAE RETREAT #1 February 21, 2025 1:30pm – 3:30pm ARTS at King Street Station**

**Members:** Benjamin Abe, Nathan Yemane, Pamela Williams, Claudette Thomas

**Members Absent:** Rita Howard, Charlotte Antoine, Tiffanie Toms, Paul Mitchell

**ADS Staff:** Michael Adusah, Eldad Mekuria, Mary Mitchell Pearson, Dinah Stevens

**Guests:** Sharon Hargraves, Crystal Dawkins, Hiwot Zewdie

### **1. Welcome & Opening Remarks – Eldad**

Eldad extended greetings, introduced new member Nathan Yemane, and explained the purpose of this first of a two-part retreat.

### **2. Refreshing Our History – Mary**

A slide [presentation](#) was shown documenting a brief history of MCAAE with Mary outlining key accomplishments and milestones.

An overview of the African American Elder Program, which was initiated to address racial disparities impacting Black older adults in Seattle. The MCAAE was established with the intention of having oversight of the AAEP. The program, which has been running for 20 years, is currently overseen by Catholic Community Services. The program is due for a landscape analysis to evaluate its effectiveness and identify potential improvements. Mary highlighted the need for a new program director, as the current one, Ms Margaret Bode, is planning to retire. The new director should be able to grow the program's foundation and identify additional services needed. The challenge is finding a candidate whose salary requirements match those of other program directors at Catholic Community Services. Mary offered to provide more information to those interested in applying for the position.

### **3. Claiming Our Role as Advocates – Dinah**

The discussion centered around the need to move the MCAAE from absorbing information to making advocacy asks of the mayor or city council. Dinah defined advocacy as influencing decisions within institutions and communities and highlighted the council's power due to its position within the mayor's office. Dinah highlighted the council's advocacy actions in recent years, including submitting comments on the city's comprehensive plan. Types of advocacies were discussed, along with challenges faced. Dinah suggested potential synchronization between the MCAAE and the Advisory Council and encouraged the MCAAE to leverage their position within the city to advocate.

#### **4. Group Activity: Advocacy in Action – Dinah and Eldad**

The importance of advocating for vulnerable adults was discussed, particularly African American older adults, who often lack a voice in their communities. One suggestion expressed was for organizations to reach out to minority-owned funeral homes to support the African American community and create a network of support.

The importance of advocacy and community engagement emphasized the need for intentional outreach to legislators and policy makers, and the value of storytelling in advocacy work. Legislators need to be updated on community issues and the potential for policy changes based on community feedback.

As a group identified strategies for advocacy such as educating & empowering, collaboration, resource sharing, communication plan, synergy, network of support and intentionality.

#### **5. Strengthening Our Council: Recruitment & Engagement – Eldad and Dinah**

The need for a stronger council was expressed, with a focus on recruitment, engagement, and collaboration with allies. Members were asked to think about potential members and how to reach out to them. The conversation moved the group to consider potential collaborators and how to connect with them. The goal is to increase the council's membership from seven to twelve members by the end of the year. Potential new members from networks were identified, along with representatives from home care agencies. There was general agreement of the value that having a diverse group of people with different perspectives and voices would have for the council's advocacy efforts.

There is need for an intergenerational space to bring unique perspectives and diverse backgrounds to discussions and advocacy efforts. Consideration for the importance of representation from various sectors, such as healthcare, home care, and social work, to better understand and address the issues faced by African American elders. The idea of inviting young adults from church ministries and having an elder law attorney on the council was also proposed. The conversation highlighted the need for education and awareness about services like hospice care to encourage their use and reduce disparities in access.

The potential for collaboration with the Tubman Center for Health and Freedom, and its flagship facility set to open in 2027 were mentioned. Other recruitment strategies were targeting university student centers and community centers. Mary mentioned the need for updating the website and increasing the organization's online presence. The importance of social media hashtags like #MCAAE was highlighted as a method of reaching more people.

The discussion moved to a more active approach to community outreach and the importance of setting clear expectations for participation. Also, for a more focused approach to advocacy, with on specific issues such as housing, transportation, and financial literacy. There was agreement to set goals for the coming year during the spring retreat and to prioritize these issues in the advocacy efforts. The conversation ended with a discussion on the best ways to introduce new issues to the group and the importance of member-led initiatives.