

SCCC Students Discuss Race and Reforms with Police Commissioner

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart and police department representatives joined 60 Suffolk County Community College students and staff July 13 in a virtual conversation about policing in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd. The forum was arranged as part of Suffolk's The Center for Social Justice and Human Understanding's weekly forums for students.

Advocacy and Empowerment 101: Protest to Progress was born from weekly virtual gatherings held each Monday evening to empower students as well as provide an open forum to share their thoughts after the death of George Floyd while being detained by Minneapolis police and the subsequent national dialogue about police, discrimination and race. The students also discuss what they can do to effectively and actively bring about change.

Hart shared with students the department's ongoing efforts to engage with and build community relationships. Hart was joined by Deputy Commissioner Risco Mention-Lewis, Assistant to the Police Commissioner Felix Adeyeye and Inspector Milagros Soto.

Suffolk County Community College 2020 graduate Germani Williams, 28, from Holbrook said she urged the college to initiate the forum with police.

"I wanted to know what Suffolk was going to do to make students feel safe during this time, and I wanted to be a part of it," Williams said, adding that watching the news during the last several weeks has brought about a range of emotions from angry to sad and worried and a lot of anxiety. But, Williams said, speaking with the Suffolk County Police Commissioner was "potentially a once in a lifetime necessary conversation."

Williams said that while the conversation was a good beginning, more needs to be done."

There was honesty," she said. "But it was disheartening to go to a protest in Huntington the next day and witness police officers handing out tickets to protestors."

The former student added she will continue to be a voice for social justice and equal rights as she prepares to continue her studies at St. Joseph's College in the fall.

"The Center for Social Justice and Human Understanding and Suffolk County Community College are committed to providing opportunities for students to connect and openly discuss important issues impacting students' lives," said Jill Santiago, director of The Center for Social Justice and Human Understanding. "The conversations the students are having with each other and with the police department are a critical first step if we expect to bring about substantial change in our communities. We expect these conversations to continue throughout the summer and into the fall."

The weekly forums open to all Suffolk County Community College students are sponsored by the College's Center for Social Justice and Human Understanding, the Office of Student Affairs, and the Black and African American Student Success Task Force.

The Center for Social Justice and Human Understanding: Featuring the Holocaust Collection's mission is to teach about historical events and promote issues of social justice and respect for human dignity through educational programming. The center's vision is of a world in which each person can live in peaceful coexistence and pursue a life in freedom and dignity, and in which our citizens reflect upon their moral responsibilities. In addition to programs and events, the center offers tours of its Holocaust museum which houses the largest collection of Holocaust artifacts in the region.





Germani Williams, at left, marches at a protest in Huntington earlier this month. Photo from SCCC