



NJNAACP Y&C <njnaacpycpres@gmail.com>

NJ State Youth and College Div Needs Help

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To: bonyenaka@naacpnet.org

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Dear Ms. Bernadette,

Please pass this letter along to President Brooks.

Thank you for your help.

Dear President Brooks,

The NJ Youth & College Division has been experiencing a troubling lack of support from our adult counterparts. This problem has grown enormously during my tenure as Y&C Division President, which began in January 2014. We reached out to the National Youth support staff for assistance and were offered help planning an activities from Desmond Seymour which never materialized. We waited 3 months for Sammie Dow to give us an appointment for a National staff member to come up and train our Executive Committee, which we learned today was cancelled. It was scheduled to take place tomorrow.

We need help. My team is a group of young, progressive individuals who are highly motivated to carry out the mission of the NAACP and do good civil rights work. The adults who should be acting in a capacity as supporters and collaborators seem to be working against us instead.

When you and I met at the airport in Las Vegas in July, I spoke with you briefly about some of the issues we are facing here in NJ. As they have grown critical, I'm now appealing to you for immediate assistance.

Here are details about some of the issues we are experiencing:

FINANCIAL ISSUES

State Conference hasn't provided Youth & College Division with the paperwork we need to open a bank account. They also haven't provided us with a Treasurer's report or minutes from the previous executive committee, or any money. When he was removed as state treasurer, Carolyn Ann told us that the \$10,000 Tom Reynolds had said we would be receiving from the State Conference had been reduced to \$5000. Subsequently, she told us that we would not be receiving any money.

Please note that without a bank account, we cannot fundraise, but we have not received help from the State Conference or our advisor to open an account. I have been in touch with Nazar Scott about the paperwork we need to open an account. He said that we need to request a duplicate from the IRS of the EIN number

designation form, which is the final documentation required.

Y&C Executive Committee members have not received reimbursement for the expense of traveling to State Conference quarterly or executive meetings or convention planning committees, although I have explained several times that it is a financial hardship to pay for these expenses out of our own pockets - to the extent that sometimes, we are unable to afford to do so. Whenever I have brought this issue up to our advisor, she dismisses it as not being a relevant issue.

Our advisor, Carolyn Ann Powell, said that the State Convention would not help to pay for me to attend the NAACP National Convention, and they did not pay. I covered most of the costs out of pocket and about \$300 was covered by the BCC (Bergen Community College) NAACP chapter, which voted to send me as their delegate.

A youth programming committee was convened for state convention planning that had not a single youth on it. I knew nothing about the committee until two friends called my mother to advise her that a convention planning meeting was taking place the following day, which they suggested I attend. I was able to be there for part of the meeting and my mother drove my brother to the meeting site so he could sit in after I left.

That is when I learned of the youth programming committee. I was told that my brother and I would be added to the committee, but we did not receive any meeting notifications or other communication until we learned several months later from Mrs. Banks, the mother of our YC secretary, that Carolyn had contacted her daughter to schedule a phone meeting about the conference. Mrs. Banks was curious as to why the advisor was scheduling the meeting and not me.

I decided to send out an agenda for that meeting, at which point our advisor sent me a barrage of messages saying that this was her meeting and I could not set its agenda.

In any event, I ran the meeting the following day and proposed three workshop topics relevant to youth. A vote taken by 4 youth and others on the phone conference - Cheryl, the committee chair; Rev. Scott, Youth Works Committee Chair and Carolyn Ann - selected by a large percentage, the three workshops I proposed over those which had been proposed by the committee without youth input. At which point our advisor said that a fourth workshop should be added, and named one of the previous topics.

PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR QUESTIONS to the state planning committee and the youth programming committee ABOUT PLANS TO SPEND THE \$5000 ANNUAL GRANT arranged for by past Pres. James Harris SPECIFICALLY DESIGNATED FOR YOUTH PROGRAMMING for the state convention, have not been answered. We only know that our request that part of this money be spent to rent several hotel rooms for youth from around the state to share; and to subsidize the cost of tickets for youth unable to afford the cost was denied. Both Pres. Smith and our advisor told us after we made this request recently, that this is not an appropriate use of the \$5000, but they did not tell us what the adults are planning to spend it on.

MORE ADVISOR ISSUES

For several months, we have been asking how to replace our advisor, who is working against Youth and College interests. In reading the bylaws, we see that as the YC Executive Committee did not vote to elect Carolyn Ann Powell, replacing her may be as easy as voting for a new advisor. But we want to be sure.

At a recent meeting when Carolyn Ann proposed a motion, I reminded her that as according to the bylaws, advisors do not have voting privileges. She responded that when she met in person with Rev. Ford at a meeting in New Jersey, that he specifically told her that she could vote in YC matters. I asked that the bylaws be respected while we cleared this point up with Rev. Ford, after which Carolyn Ann sent me an email attacking my mother for her support of our Executive Committee.

Months ago, when Carolyn Ann learned that we had reached out to the national office for help learning about our rights and obligations, she told us that our actions were highly improper, as it made the State Conference adults look bad and was like, "biting the hands of the people who put you in office," which I don't understand as I was elected by my peers.

Another problem with our advisor, is her desire to dominate our meetings, which are held over the phone. She strikes down any actions we propose, explaining at length why they are not appropriate or

possible. Frequently, Carolyn Ann takes control of our meetings and speaks at length for as long as 15 minutes at a time, refusing to give up the floor even when I repeatedly attempt to interrupt her.

Most recently, Carolyn Ann attempted to block the YC Executive Committee from voting to support and promote the People's Climate march, even though this initiative is receiving support from the National office and the State Conference voted to support it. We held the vote during that phone meeting anyway, and it passed by majority consent.

This week, which is two weeks later, Carolyn Ann asked if we had filed "the paperwork" with national to support our participation in the march but she did not specify which paperwork needed to be filed nor did she offer guidance for filing it. Fortunately, Bergen County Branch President Anthony Cureton contacted my brother to explain the procedure and we received help from Kevin Myles in submitting a Direct Action application to him, which we did yesterday.

On a regular basis, I have asked Carolyn for emerging chapters information, but she only shared one school contact with me in June, for a high school chapter in South Jersey. On several occasions, I have asked her for the Bergen Academies contact information which she maintains she doesn't have, although I became aware of that chapter's emerging status when she invited me the day before she delivered a training there, to attend the training. Today, I learned from Anthony Cureton that he also attended that training session.

COMPLETE LACK OF STATE SUPPORT FOR THE YOUTH AND COLLEGE DIVISION

We have not been given the tools we need to do our job as the group overseeing the NAACP youth councils and college branches in New Jersey. These are some specific issues:

We did not receive a list of youth councils and college branches from our advisor or the State Conference, or contact information for any of the units. We repeatedly asked for this list and our advisor gave us the following feedback:

- 1 She only had a list of emails but no names or affiliations were associated with them
- 2 Advisor over several months gave different reasons why she could not send that list of email addresses
- 3 She was "working on it" and would get back to us
- 4 Advisor at one point sent us a list of all the non-compliant units in New Jersey, indicating that this was the list we needed. However, the list did not show which units are youth councils or college branches, and did not include contact information

For over seven months, the efficacy of the YC Division was hampered by our inability to reach our secretary, Dominique Banks. We did not know how to get in touch with her, and several brainstorming sessions about how to contact Dominique were held during phone meetings which Carolyn Ann attended. Eventually, Pres. Harris facilitated a phone conference between me with Dominique and her mother. I learned from them that Carolyn Ann had worked closely with Dominique during her tenure as the previous YC Executive Committee secretary, and that Carolyn Ann knew exactly how to reach her. Now that we are in touch with Dominique, she is a valuable asset to our team.

Youth councils and college chapters have not received direction from the State YC Advisor on how to be compliant; their executive committees appear not to receive training on a regular basis and they are not directed to pay dues to the State YC Division - although if they did send us dues, without a bank account we could not deposit them anyway.

Pres. Smith insisted that we attend the adult quarterly conference meetings, although at the last meeting the idea was broached that youth hold our own meetings and our advisor suggested we meet in Bridgeton, although most of the YC members live in the state's north and that is a long drive for us. At the last quarterly conference we were also asked to pay a fee to attend the conference and several youth supporters asked if youth quarterly conference fees would be paid to the State Conference or to the YC Division, and this

question was not answered.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT SMITH

President Smith does not maintain an open line of communication with the Youth and College Executive Committee, or myself as President. In fact, he does not respond to my emails or phone calls and has not done so during the 8 months I have served as YC Division President.

President Smith indicated to my brother, in my mother's presence the day Luis first attended the State Convention planning, that he as State Conference President fulfills his job in reference to the youth by sending me information about actions he wants us to research and get involved with, and that he has been disappointed that YC has not acted on this direction; and for this reason, he feels YC is not serious about their role in the overall State NAACP organization structure.

At the last convention planning meeting in August, our Membership Chair Nora Figueroa and I were asked to stay on after the 5+ hour meeting finished to discuss the youth schedule, although we hadn't been offered anything to eat since breakfast. The meeting began with Pres. Smith and Carolyn Ann saying that they do not want us to speak with Pres. Harris. Pres. Smith elaborated, "He has a different agenda than I do. And he's not on my committee." I explained that Pres. Harris mentored me in the opening of the BCC NAACP Branch and that he has been responsive and supportive to us when he can help - as in, recently putting us in touch with Dominique Banks.

OUR DIVISION'S NON-COMPLIANCE STATUS

The question of why the NJ Youth & College Division came up at a State Conference Executive Committee meeting in May and Carolyn Ann responded that the division may owe some money for the 2013 filing assessment and that she would find out if money was owed by filing the annual report. State Secretary Vivian Darkes, President Smith and several other Executive Committee members were present during that discussion. However, we have not heard from Carolyn Ann on this issue since.

On August 18, I emailed Nazar Scott about this issue. He responded to my query, "I'm concerned about our compliant status and would like to know what it is. If we are not compliant please let me know what we need to do to become compliant." with the following information:

Our noncompliant status is due to owing financial assessment reports for the years 2012 and 2013 as well as a \$350 assessment fee. I believe that the NJ State Conference should pay this money as it is the cause of a lapse which happened before the tenancy of the current YC Executive Committee, or that National should forgive this debt. Our Executive Committee was elected in January 2014 and we are hampered in many ways by our division's non-compliant status.

TRAINING

State Conference training took place during college exam time, for which reason YC executive committee members were unable to attend. Our advisor and Pres Smith offered to deliver the training to us but cancelled several dates that were set and afterwards insisted that the training could only take place in the State's offices in Trenton, where, they said, all state meetings should be held since, "We pay rent for the building". New Brunswick was the location we preferred as it was a more central location. Incidentally, quarterly meetings are now being held in a separate rented facility in Bridgeton, NJ, near Pres. Smith's home.

My mother eventually learned from Mrs. Ogden of Jersey City that the National office regularly sends out training teams to adult branches that were unable to attend the state training session. She suggested that if National could do this for adult branches, surely they could it for youth, who have greater travel challenges.

I want our committee to receive training directly from National staff, because there are many compliance and procedural issues we are facing. Although there is no National staff member assigned to NJ, Sammie Dow is

the staffer who has been temporarily assigned to us. When I contacted Sammie about three months ago about training, I explained to him that this is important enough an issue that our executive committee members are willing to travel to Baltimore to receive it. He assured us that National can send a trainer to us and offered to do it tomorrow (Saturday, Sept 13). However, he has rescinded that offer. An email Sammie sent yesterday, almost a week after his last communication, informed us of this.

Meanwhile, my mother was able to procure a location in a Newark church for the training to be held through NAACP friends in Newark and Irvington who are committed to supporting NAACP youth. The church has been holding that space open for us.

I understand that Sammie Dow has many responsibilities and that he is not the permanent staff member assigned to the NJ Youth & College Division. Apparently, New Jersey lacks an assigned staff person. However, he is the person who has been temporarily assigned to work with us and it is causing us undue hardship that our requests for information and training are not responded to promptly or are ignored altogether. We need help and we need training immediately.

ABOUT BCC NAACP

My mother and I just had a conversation with Anthony Cureton, the Bergen County NAACP President and North Jersey Regional Coordinator. Anthony said that my mother must be banned from participation in any BCC NAACP chapter activities "on campus", even though my mother has been a dedicated and extremely helpful supporter since I began opening the BCC NAACP Chapter over four years ago and has never been anything other than an asset to the chapter. Among other assistance she's offered, my mother has donated her services as a professional graphic designer. Her work has helped get us excellent attendance at our events. This also varies with what I heard Sammie Dow say – that parental support of NAACP youth is always welcome.

Anthony also said that my brother as president of that chapter, MUST attend Bergen County branch meetings and so must the unit advisor, Ms. Aretha McMillan. We understood that our presence at meetings is optional, and would like to point out that the meeting locations is very inaccessible for youth travelling by public transit or bicycle.

Anthony also stated when I called today to ask him for contact information for the Bergen Academies and Fairleigh Dickson University Teaneck emerging chapters, so that I can do my job to facilitate their compliance as new chapters and serve as their youth advocate, that he has been told by Carolyn Ann and other unspecified individuals, that he is now personally responsible for opening any emerging youth or college chapters in Bergen County and the Northeast New Jersey Region. I thanked him for his support and pressed him for the contact information, after which he indicated that it became his duty since he's been told that I am not reliable and do not communicate with our advisor.

Anthony stated that he has been told by Carolyn Ann and other unspecified individuals, that all youth and college chapters in Bergen County must report to, and take direction from, him as Bergen County Branch president. Anthony says that he has been reading the bylaws carefully and understands this to be his role. I told him that's not really how things work, but elected not to argue with him.

He stated repeatedly that I should get it from Carolyn, but after I explained several times that Carolyn has refused to give me this information, Anthony reluctantly said he's shared it with me when he gets to a computer.

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Please help my executive committee understand how to be effective in the face of these political machinations and get the support we need to advance the New Jersey NAACP youth agenda. Attached are

flyers of BCC NAACP chapter accomplishments which took place under my direction with the support of my family which incidentally, includes my mother.

Also attached is the flier for the Peoples Climate March.

Peace,
Ivan
NJ State NAACP Youth & College Division President
Past President BCC NAACP Chapter
201-688-0036

3 attachments



PCM flyer.jpg
191K



2014 BCC NAACP Accomplishments Flier.pdf
138K



BCC NAACP 2013 Voter Education Forum.sm.pdf
141K