

**Lisa Wolfe**

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**From:** Jen Karras Burns [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 16, 2021 6:01 PM  
**To:** Lisa Wolfe  
**Subject:** Agenda item 14.B

Dear Council,

My name is Jennifer Burns and I'm a resident of Benicia. After reading the many applicants for the CURE commission, I'd like to uplift the names Amira Barger and Brandon Greene. They are the most qualified as one has a DEI background and the other is social justice lawyer for the ACLU. They would both be a huge asset to CURE.

The previous agreement with BBLM allowed that they choose two of their own members to be on the CURE as they were the ones that created it. I realize that the council had voted not too long ago to change what was agreed upon and take things into their own hands, despite the many public comments against this. So I ask that you do this at the very least, and hold to your original word that there would be two members of BBLM. Please note that the only applicants that are currently members are Amira, Brandon, and Kashanna. I support any of these three to be part of the commission, but especially Amira and Brandon. Please consider.

Jennifer

**Lisa Wolfe**

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**From:** Amira Barger [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 16, 2021 6:03 PM  
**To:** Lisa Wolfe  
**Subject:** 11/16 Public Comment, Agenda Item 14B

Good Evening Mayor Young and Members of the City Council,

I am providing a public comment regarding agenda item ITEM 14B for the 11/16/2021 city council meeting. I understand that a subcommittee is presenting a list of preferences for the Committee United for Racial Equity (CURE) Commission this evening.

The process surrounding and the proposed list of preferred appointees to the CURE Commission is concerning to me, even amidst my own positive advancement in the process. As originally written, Resolution 20-103 calls for the creation of a City Council subcommittee, composed of two Council members, the City Manager, the Police Chief, and two Benicia Black Lives Matter (BBLM) representatives. But a recent (10/5/2021) City Council meeting removed these 2 guaranteed seats for BBLM representatives that would have helped to ensure the lived experience of Black Benicians would be represented and centered. This centering is important considering the startling lack of representation in city government, our schools, and various positions of power and privilege across the city. I would like the City Council to be aware of the below points as you progress preferred appointees and make final determinations at the 12/7 City Council meeting:

- The creation and existence of the CURE Commission are made possible by the labor and experience of Brandon Greene. Brandon is the primary author of the precedent setting Resolution 20-103 which has served to prompt the advancement of multiple systems-changes in the City of Benicia. And it should be made clear that no other representatives or BBLM members, past or present, share in the same level of input for Resolution 20-103 - the content of this resolution was based almost entirely on recommendations emailed by BBLM co-founder Brandon Greene to then Mayor Elizabeth Patterson. To not advance Brandon's candidacy in particular seems a missed opportunity, and, more egregiously, a diminished version of what was envisioned, promised, and set into motion almost a year ago.
- Secondly, while the requirement for 2 BBLM reps was recently removed, I wanted to be sure you are aware that the only current and active BBLM member put forward in the preferences is myself. The only other BBLM reps are Brandon Greene and Kashanna Harmon-Lee, neither of whom is being advanced despite their clear qualifications personally, civically, and professionally in advancing equity for communities. This is especially vital to make note of as other candidates put forward may not have the pulse of the community-at-large that we intend to serve, as both Brandon and Kashanna are deeply engaged across Benicia and are advanced in their civic engagement know-how.
- Finally, I would like to mention that many members of our community – Black, Brown, and otherwise – took note as several of our city leaders stood in front of the crowd at the First Street gazebo in June 2020 and promised allyship and real, substantive change in areas of racial inequity. What we are asking for now is the tangible proof that those were not empty words or merely campaign rhetoric. What you have before you now is an opportunity to practice integrity and put into policy the promises that you stood before us and made.

Thank you,  
Amira Barger  
Benicia, CA

[REDACTED]

**Lisa Wolfe**

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**From:** Benicia Black Lives Matter <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 16, 2021 6:05 PM  
**To:** Lisa Wolfe  
**Subject:** Statement Regarding Agenda Item 14.B - Submitted to be Read

Benicia Black Lives Matter statement regarding the Benicia City Council subcommittee's preferences to the mayor for nominees to the CURE subcommittee

The standing City Council subcommittee called the Committee United for Racial Equity ("CURE"), so named by Benicia Black Lives Matter ("BBLM") in collaboration with current City Manager Erik Upson, is an embodiment of Resolution 20-103 that was adopted at the August 25, 2020 City Council meeting. The resolution, as well as the formation of BBLM, were borne out of the anger, grief, and exhaustion felt nationwide after the viral murder of George Floyd. His tragic and avoidable death, one of many instances of police against Black and Brown communities that tapped into the voyeuristic interest of an American populace that had numerous times before and sadly numerous times after ignored the cries of Black and Brown communities, was said to be the beginning of a racial reckoning in America.

In Benicia, this energy was harnessed into youth-led demonstrations and organizing, all of which culminated in the founding and expansion of BBLM as well as the consideration of a resolution to address systemic inequity in Benicia—namely, Resolution 20-103. The content of this resolution was based almost entirely on recommendations emailed by BBLM co-founder Brandon Greene to then Mayor Elizabeth Patterson in response to the changes Brandon and our Black and Brown communities wished to see in Benicia. Through a series of meetings with the former City Manager and Erik Upson, who was Police Chief at the time, along with additional members of BBLM, the emailed proposal was formalized into the resolution and submitted for consideration and approval to the City Council. Though a year has now passed since that time, the memory of the August 2020 meeting is still vivid in the minds of BBLM members. At that meeting, not only was the necessity of such a position such as the one Dr. Maliika Chambers now holds subject to intense and painful scrutiny, but the resolution was also almost not passed due to a disagreement over the comparatively trivial amount of money that position would require the City to pay. Indeed, rather than make the position permanent, the position was made temporary. This was done under the auspices that Benicia was not in need of an equity study and that it was questionable whether Benicia even has a racism problem.

One year later, after patiently waiting for the work of CURE to begin, and after being promised that two of its members would have a place on the subcommittee that would not exist without them, BBLM members had to sit and watch as the Council—against public outcry—voted to reconstitute the membership of CURE, making all of the seats at large. BBLM members who had for a year been in constant contact with Dr. Chambers, whose position was established by BBLM's own efforts, about when the work would start were told that they would have to apply and interview for the subcommittee. Three members applied: 1) Brandon Greene, Director of the Racial Justice and Economics Program for the Northern Californian arm of the ACLU; 2) Amira Barger, Public Health and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion consultant; and 3) Kashanna Shaw-Patten, experienced medical professional and educational/health advocate. Of the three BBLM members who applied, only Amira was advanced.

The City Council subcommittee's preferences to the mayor for other candidates despite the obvious qualifications of the BBLM applicants, were made without adherence to nor respect for the work of those who are responsible for the proposed mission and mandate of CURE—in particular, the work of Brandon Greene. Instead, the subcommittee's choice to advance other candidates who, at a glance, do not hold the qualifications of BBLM's two rejected applicants appears to be a concerted action on behalf of City Council to erase the work of BBLM and to dilute the work of the CURE subcommittee before that work has even begun, an action in line with the current reporting about the lack of fidelity to the value of actual change, supposedly promised by the cries of allyship at the inception of this country's so-called racial reckoning. Indeed, just one year after making a series of grand promises to its Black and Brown communities, Benicia is

now a hub of the inevitable backlash that accompanies any attempts to take bold steps to address racial inequity. With no voyeuristic element in the form of public attention to buoy its progress, Benicia's leadership has begun to retreat from its promises, even as it asks us to trust its intentions.

This outcome would be dismaying if not for its painful predictability. As the Mother Jones article, *One Year After George Floyd's Murder, the Racial Reckoning Gave Way to a Backlash*, describes:

"...the data suggested that the surge in approval in 2020 was due to the shocking nature of the viral video of Floyd's grueling death, not an actual embrace of the Black Lives Matter movement. All of this adds up to what appears to be yet another example of the inevitable backlash that occurs after a broad movement for racial justice takes place. It's a cycle that repeats itself throughout American history...

"Why does this pattern keep repeating? Why does it seem like with every pivotal moment, like when thousands were taking to the street to protest police brutality, we eventually end up with some version of the status quo? Perhaps it's the final result of the inherent friction between two competing ideas that are embedded in the American experience: That racial inequality is pervasive in our society—and the illusion that it's actually a problem of the past."

The positive contributions BBLM has made to Benicia are numerous and substantive, with impacts felt both within our local community and beyond. Since its inception, BBLM has been involved in organizing everything from poetry readings, youth-focused dance classes, community-wide education events in collaboration with local programs, to backpack and food giveaways, to the inaugural Juneteenth flag-raising and annual community celebration—the last being another provision of the resolution that was passed. Future planned events include a warm coat drive and food giveaway for our community's most vulnerable residents, an educational forum led by Indigenous community leader Mary Ann Buggs, an educational event that will introduce the history and nature of the Kwanzaa celebration, and a march to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and more. Despite veiled suggestions otherwise, BBLM has shown over and over again that it stands in solidarity with the Benicia community, and is here to stay.

For two eminently qualified BBLM members—whose many years of professional, community, and lived experience in imagining and implementing real change are truly substantial—to be overlooked in the subcommittee's selection process is an affront to the effort BBLM has put into the drafting, passage, and realization of Resolution 20-103 along with its co-authors. BBLM strongly objects to the perceived efforts of the subcommittee to dilute and mismanage the CURE subcommittee before it has even had a chance to start working, and seeks active, meaningful dialogue with City Council, its staff, and the community in general to address these real and substantial concerns.

-BBLM