



2016 City Council Policy Discussion on Poverty

Biographies of Panelist Presenters



Melvin W. Carter III,
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Melvin W. Carter III currently serves as executive director of the Minnesota Children's Cabinet, advocating for and advising Governor Mark Dayton on state early childhood policy investments. Prior to joining state government, Carter served on the Saint Paul City Council from 2008 to 2013. In that capacity, he championed policies to address some of the city's most pressing issues, including:

- Forming the city's Department of Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity (HREEO);
- "Banning the Box" to eliminate employment discrimination against people with criminal backgrounds,
- Requiring landlords to notify tenants of a pending foreclosure on their property; and
- Prohibiting the sale of candy cigarettes and toy lighters to reduce "practice smoking" among children.

In addition to crafting policy, Council Member Carter was a constant advocate on social justice issues; primarily education and transit. In 2009, he created a partnership between City, County, School and grassroots leaders to support high quality education outcomes, which later became the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. As part of a broad community movement, Carter also worked to secure additional stations; support local businesses; and train residents for jobs along Saint Paul's Green Line Light Rail Corridor.

Having become engaged in electoral politics after his brother was turned away from a Florida polling precinct during Election 2000, Melvin is passionate about helping others engage. He has trained political candidates, community organizers and campaign workers in over 30 states with several national organizations, including Wellstone Action, People for the American Way Foundation, and Progressive Majority, and is a community faculty member at Metropolitan State University.

For his committed service to community, Carter received the 2011 Barbara Jordan Leadership Award from the National Young Elected Officials Network and was recognized in Ebony Magazine's "30 Under 30" issue in 2008. Carter is currently an Ascend Fellow with the prestigious Aspen Institute, developing and promoting multi-generational strategies to build economic security, educational success, and health and well-being for low-income families in the US.

Carter is a product of the Saint Paul Public Schools, having attended Capitol Hill and graduated from Saint Paul Central High School. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in business administration from Florida A&M University and a Master of Public Policy from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. Melvin enjoys playing tennis, running and spending time with his two daughters, Maylena (10) and Naomi (8).



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Acooa Ellis is the director of advocacy for Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In this role, Ellis directs the organization's social justice advocacy and community engagement work, leading a network of thousands of advocates, volunteers, and community leaders.

Ellis's passion for social justice has driven her work in nonprofit and human services organizations, local governments, and business. Most recently, Ellis was a leader in the government relations department at Target Corporation, where she was co-chair of the company's African American Business Council. She has also held community engagement, planning, and public policy roles at Hennepin County and the City of Saint Paul. Additionally, Ellis's previous experience includes time in direct service roles supporting families at Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Twin Cities and adults at Summit Academy OIC.

In addition to her professional resume, Ellis's experience includes extensive volunteerism and civic engagement. She served on the advisory board of the Multicultural Endowment Fund of the Saint Paul Foundation from 2007-2010, and was a member of the board of directors and chair of the policy advisory committee for the Citizens League.

Since joining Catholic Charities in late 2015, Ellis has already begun advancing critical social justice initiatives. Her work so far includes serving as the only nonprofit representative on the Citizens League's Met Council Task Force, which is evaluating the Met Council's role in ensuring regional vitality. Ellis views the Met Council as critical to a regional future which fosters opportunity for all greater Twin Cities residents.

"Acooa's passion for social justice and community engagement is inspiring," said Tim Marx, president and CEO of Catholic Charities. "Her unique perspective will enhance our ability to engage leaders across business, civic, faith and community sectors, and to advance our

vision of a community where there is poverty for no one, and opportunity for everyone.”

Ellis received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Iowa and earned her master’s degree in public policy, with a concentration in community economic development, from the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Policy.



Tracy Fischman, Executive Director
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Tracy Fischman joined Prepare + Prosper as executive director in July 2009, immediately after moving to the Twin Cities from Chicago. Prepare + Prosper (P+P) is a nonprofit organization that facilitates financial capability and economic mobility through the provision of free tax assistance, access to financial services and products, training/T.A., and advocacy. Prior to working with P+P, Tracy served as a consultant to non-profit, philanthropic, and political organizations, providing strategic campaign, project management, and organizational development services.

Tracy has a long history of fostering social and economic justice, with nearly 25 years of experience in public health, HIV/AIDS, civil rights, and women’s rights. She has an extensive background in policy and advocacy, as well as organizational planning and development. Tracy has worked for organizations such as Planned Parenthood of Illinois as the vice president for public policy and the Chicago Department of Public Health’s STD/HIV/AIDS Division as the director of policy and legislative affairs.

Tracy serves on the Boards of Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and women winning, and has also served on the Boards for organizations such as Girl’s Best Friend Foundation, Illinois Health and Medicine Policy Research Group, Citizen Action of Illinois, and Communities Advocating Emergency AIDS Relief. Tracy holds a Bachelor’s degree from Macalester College and a Master’s Degree in Public Policy from the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.



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Dr. MayKao Hang is the president and CEO of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving lives in the greater St. Paul community and beyond through direct services, research, and community building. MayKao has extensive experience in the public and non-profit sectors, serving low income and disadvantaged populations. She is committed to achieving an equitable society where everyone can prosper. She believes that harnessing and building social and civic capital can transform the world.

MayKao has a BA in Psychology from Brown University, a MA in Social Policy and Distributive Justice from the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and a Doctorate in Public Administration from Hamline University. She is Chair of the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Trustee and Chair of the Grants & Community Initiatives Committee of Minnesota Philanthropy Partners, Co-Chair of the Itasca Project’s Socio-economic Disparities Work Group, and is on the Advisory Committee for John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. She is a founding member of the Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL) in Minnesota.

Dr. Hang has been recognized with numerous awards including the Community Champion 40 & Forward Award, the Humphrey Public Leadership Award, the Ann Bancroft Award, the Ultimate Hmong Woman Award, and the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans Leadership Award.



Clarence Hightower, Ph.D.
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Dr. Clarence Hightower is the executive director of Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties, part of a national network of more than 1,000 organizations and one of the largest Community Action agencies in Minnesota. In this role, Dr. Hightower guides the work of an agency first established in 1964 as part of the “War on Poverty.” His responsibilities include the management of a \$20 million annual budget, a staff of 300, and 13 work sites.

Prior to Community Action, Dr. Hightower spent 10 years as President/CEO of the Minneapolis Urban League. His 34 years of executive leadership in the Twin Cities nonprofit sector also includes serving as executive director of both The City, Inc. and North Community YMCA. He is the author of *Claiming the Constitution*, and has been a featured columnist for *Insight News* (“Urban Views”), *The Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder* (“The Anti-Poverty Soldier”) and other Twin Cities publications.

In 2002, he was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU), where he served until 2014. Dr. Hightower was elected Chair of MnSCU’s Board of Trustees in 2012, the first African American to ever hold that distinction. He is the recipient of The Minneapolis Award, as well as a Bush Foundation Leadership Fellowship.

Dr. Hightower earned his Bachelor’s Degree from Southwest Minnesota State University and his Master’s Degree in Human and Community Service from George Williams College in Aurora, Illinois. In 2015, he graduated summa cum laude from Jackson State University, earning his Ph.D. in Urban Higher Education. An ordained minister, devoted husband, and proud father of one daughter, Dr. Hightower is the Pastor of New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in north Minneapolis.