



MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE BOSTON BOARD OF HEALTH

A meeting of the Boston Board of Health (Board) was held on Thursday, July 1st, 2021 by remote participation pursuant to An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency.

Board Members Present

Manny Lopes, Chair, Rebecca Gutman, Phillomin Laptiste, Guale Valdez, Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak, John Fernandez

Also Present

Christine Vu, Christy Moulin, Cynthia Hamwey, Darien Mather, Garris Jordan, Donna Bruno, Daniel Dooley, Donald Osgood Sr., Duncan Silayo, Eline Van Es, Gerald James, Gerry Thomas, Grace Connolly, Janine Barros, Jaylen Clarke, Jennifer Lo, Jim Imprescia, Jocelyn Cius, Johnna Murphy, Julie Sklar, Laura Segal, Leon Bethune, Lindsay Arnold, Margaret Reid, Mariana Sarango, Mark Scott, Marlen Cale, Chief Marty Martinez, Mea Allen, Michelle Corbin, Molly Yeagley, Nazia Ashraful, Neel Batra, Paul Shoemaker, Rebecca Shoaf Kozak, Rich DeRosa, Roy Wada, Sade Douglas, Sara Helen Ayanian, Shannon O'Malley, Sheila Lee, Scot Minkin, Sonia Amado, Sonia Carter, Stacey Kokaram, Stephanie Seller, Steve Simmons, Sunday Taylor, Tania Mireles, Tim Harrington, Triniese Polk, Vanessa Manzi, PJ McCann

Proceedings

Chairperson's Comments

Hello and welcome, everyone, to this exciting special meeting of the Board of Health. Thank you to our Board members and members of the public for being here.

This meeting is being conducted by remote participation as authorized by An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency. In keeping with our usual practice, members of the public and BPHC staff will be allowed to observe the proceedings and we will use the moderating features on the Zoom application to keep all on mute other than Board members and BPHC presenters and others as needed. Since we are deliberating remotely, any votes will be taken by a roll call of the members

Executive Director Search Committee Report and Recommendation for Consideration by the Board

Mr. Lopes: I am pleased to ask Philly to report out from the Executive Director Search Committee.

Ms. Laptiste: Thank you, Manny. The search committee has been meeting to screen applicants since January of last year. While the circumstances of the past year have complicated our efforts, I am very pleased to share with the Board today that the search committee has decided to recommend Dr. Bisola Ojikutu to the Board for consideration for the Executive Director position. At this time, I would like to introduce Dr. Ojikutu to speak about her background and interest in the role and welcome any questions Board members may have.

Dr. Ojikutu: Good morning Chairperson Lopes, members of the Boston Public Health Commission and Board of Health, Interim Executive Director Nieves, Chief Martinez, and everyone else who has joined this morning, I thank you for this opportunity to meet with you and hopefully to move forward regarding the position of executive director of the Commission. I'd like to start by saying that I sincerely appreciate the guidance that you have provided over the course of the last months. I really appreciate the time and effort that you've put into this, particularly the Search Committee, your insights and the time has been enormously helpful to me. And for those of you who I'm meeting for the first time, in terms of the board members, I really look forward to working with you very closely and to establishing strong working relationships.

I'd like to spend a few minutes to share a bit about my background, as well as why I'm enthusiastic about this opportunity to lead the Boston Public Health Commission. I actually came to Boston almost 20 years ago, from Chicago where I was born, I came for health policy, training and fellowship as well as infectious disease fellowship and I decided to build a life here, I got married, had a child, and we hope to continue to build and grow here in the city of Boston. Currently, I'm an infectious disease specialist at MGH and Brigham, I'm also a health equity researcher, and I'm funded by NIH and PCORI, the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, and my primary areas of focus have been infectious diseases, as well as women's health and immigrant health and really addressing the many structural barriers faced by marginalized populations – and that includes structural racism. I've held a number of leadership roles within academia at Harvard, all of which have been focused on equity, and community and engagement of vulnerable and marginalized populations.

In addition, outside of academia, I worked for more than five years or so, as a senior advisor and director of a large USAID-funded program, working in about 15 different countries, advising local governments and ministries of health, providing technical assistance to build public health systems, primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also in Latin America. I was also a clinical director of connected HIV projects with John Snow International and I served as the Director of the Office of International Programs with Harvard Medical School for quite a bit a little bit earlier in my career.

In addition, I'm also an alumni of the Commonwealth Fund Fellowship in Minority Health Policy. So why am I interested in this position at this point in my career? I have to say that this is a really exciting time for public health. From my perspective, I think we're at a critical inflection point. We've been talking about inequity and racism and disparities, the persistent disparities that we've seen in our own city for a long time, and I believe that we're now well positioned to actualize a stronger culture of health and to narrow the gaps that we've seen in health outcomes as well as well-being in Boston. I'm really excited about the potential to lead some of that work and work very closely with all of you. I think that specifically, this will mean continuing to tackle COVID-19 and redouble our efforts to address the disparate impact of the pandemic on Black, Latinx and other vulnerable residents of our city, specifically to continue to promote efforts to increase vaccination rates in neighborhoods with the highest rates of infection. Also, a lot of my research in the past and I would say engagement work, have really been focusing on vaccine uptake and understanding what can be multifaceted

barriers to uptake amongst our most vulnerable populations. Certainly, I think we need to strengthen our surveillance efforts continue to promote testing, and to also focus our efforts on promoting vaccination, where rates are lower relative to other groups, and we have a lot of work to do in that regard. Certainly, the expertise in the Child, Adolescent and Family Health Bureau will be critical, as well as working in very close partnership with community leaders within the health centers, as well as other institutions across the city.

Another reason that I would say is this citywide commitment, and national commitment, in a sense, to addressing racism as a public health crisis. A number of initiatives I know are underway. I've been very impressed by the work that's been done thus far, but I really do feel like there's has to be some, you know, acceleration of those of those efforts, and really a promotion of needs to address inequity, with the urgency that's really required to address any crisis. To that end, I would ensure that strategies to eliminate structural racism and the metrics to measure progress over time have fully integrated into all of our work across all of our bureaus. Of course, another key and critical focus of our anti-racism work will be diversity, equity, inclusion, employment practices, ensuring that, across the board, from staff to more senior level positions, we're truly representative of Boston and reflect our core values as a commission, and hopefully it distributed. Thirdly, I'm hopeful about our ability to address mental and behavioral health challenges currently facing the residents of Boston, particularly the intersection of substance use, youth homelessness and mental health with the urgency that it deserves. Obviously, I've seen it in many of my patients, the isolation and stress exacerbated mental and behavioral health concerns for many of our most vulnerable populations. I think we're all aware that substance use overall, not just simply opioid overdoses, is a problem. And it's a well-established issue that has to be tackled. So I'm looking forward to working very closely with you all, as the Board, as well as the Mayor's Office to establish really holistic, comprehensive and public health oriented strategies.

Lastly, I want to add that many people who have worked with this commission have really put forth an outstanding effort over the course of the last year plus, and I want to commend them for their efforts, I look forward to spending time in leadership, acknowledging their work, ensuring that they feel valued, and building morale and increasing public health visibility externally. I think this will help us to increase our ability to recruit the mission driven staff that I think we're looking for and I think it also promotes excitement, about working in public health, both internally and externally as well as a real appreciation of the value of public health oriented approaches and initiatives. That's what I'm really excited about. In summary, before the challenges of a big job, there's a lot of work to do, but I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you and to share my thoughts and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Lopes: At this point, we will open it up to Board members to ask any questions, or make comments or statements.

Mr. Valdez: It's a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for that insight and information. How do you think the global perspectives in your experience apply, and what from them can you bring, to an urban environment, a city environment such as such as Boston?

Ojikutu: I think it's a really important question. As I mentioned, a lot of my career has blended both domestic and international perspective, but I include under the broad umbrella of what is truly global, a number of different lessons that we can glean from experiences globally. One that has really come to the fore for me, and I'll just emphasize this within the last year. Plus, being involved in the community, and the need for the

grassroots to really be involved in not only organizing but actually shaping and deciding what it is that needs to be done within their own communities within their own neighborhoods. It's something that doesn't happen enough, as you are probably well aware. Oftentimes, we in public health tend to take interventions and then just sort of supplant them on whole countries. I've seen it happen, working with many of these large funders that I have worked with over the years, without very much input from understanding the global norms, beliefs, dynamics, having people not only at the table, but driving the process, I think is critical. That's certainly critical as we move forward looking at issues of disparities. I would also say that, it's really not just about "having been at the table." We use that phrase quite often; it's really about shifting decision making power and actually giving people resources directly, so that they can utilize them in the ways that they see fit, and they can decide where the money needs to go and where the emphasis and the investment is to occur. For me, I think that that's something that should be done. Also, domestic issues are often also international issues.

Dr. Childs-Roshak: Thank you so much for being here. Certainly your credentials in public health are impeccable, and we're really thrilled about it. I am really excited about your experience and perspective and expertise in public health. As a board, we do have fiduciary responsibilities, and the Boston Public Health Commission is a big business with a lot of moving parts. As a physician, who's moved into management role myself, I know it's a different skill set. Could you share with us a little about what have you thought about in terms of the operations of running the business and what supports do you think that you would need, and what are your thoughts about that very tactical part of running the Boston Public Health Commission?

Dr. Ojikutu: I think these are very important questions. Something I've spent a lot of time thinking about is different skillsets. What I would say in regards to my own background, I have directed a portfolio with a budget about \$35,000,000 in 15 different countries, and hundreds of consultants, teams, both in Boston and DC, State Department team and consortium managing up managing at my peer level, managing my staff. It was complex, and I think I understand complexity. That being said, I'm ready to get in, roll my sleeves and learn from the people who have been doing this work. I do believe that I, as a leader, jumping into a new organization, we need the support of strong financial leadership, a Deputy Director, and other directors in order to fully understand and to manage the organization. I recognize that this is a learning curve, and I'm going to be asking a lot of questions. I think part of what I opened up with, with the fact that I hope to establish strong working relationships with many of you who have a lot of leadership experience and also made transitions, in your own careers, and I hope to use that. I'm not really interested in coming in and leading without understanding the situation. I think I understand that there's a lot that I need to learn and I'm excited about that.

Mr. Fernandez: I just want to disclose that I also work at Mass General Brigham.

Dr. Childs-Roshak: One of the things that I think is really exciting about Boston is that Boston is small, but mighty, and I think, you know, takes a large part of the national stage around public health and around innovations and leadership. I would imagine, it's super tempting to get pulled into some of the national work and I'd like to hear your thoughts about how to balance the high level exciting strategic stuff that's happening at levels outside of Boston with the important work that our city still needs to do, and how do you how do you balance?

Dr. Ojikutu: I agree that it is a challenge. I've spoken to a lot of people here in Boston, internally, including individuals who have previously run the commission and thought about that balance. I'm not sure if it is a

balance. In this first year, year plus, I plan to spend my time focusing in on the work of the Commission. Like I said, I want to roll up my sleeves and I want to understand what's not working, which I'm sure a lot of things are working, and some that we need to focus on. I've done a lot of sort of national, international stuff and it's interesting and good. I think that that's part of getting involved in big coalitions, for example. The reality is that I'm really most interested in focusing on what's here.

Mr. Valdez: You have an impressive resume. It is so all encompassing. Coming to the commission to lead this this amazing organization is change in your career trajectory. Why now?

Dr. Ojikutu: I think my interest in a lot of different areas, but under one overarching umbrella, is equity and working with marginalized populations. I of course have focused on this issue in focus areas such as diseases, but from the very first point in which I came out of residency, I went immediately to the Commonwealth Fund, Fellowship for Minority Health Policy, and that's a leadership program. My plan was to end up in a leadership position and to prepare myself for a leadership position, so that I could be impactful. I think that a lot of what I've learned from each one of those steps, those stages, learned a lot and food a lot watched a lot of happen. I think that right now, I'm prepared to put the skillset into action. It's not because I haven't been doing it. I think right now, that is really a point at which I'm excited because I think there's a lot to do, but I also feel like I'm ready for it.

Mr. Valdez: Thank you; the only other thing I'd like to add is I think the search committee should be commended.

Dr. Childs-Roshak: I have one follow-up. Are you ready to give up practicing medicine to take on this job? And how does that feel? And how can we support you?

Dr. Ojikutu: My interactions with my patients, certainly shaped how I view the healthcare system, how I view the world, really, so I think that's been very important. We have discussed the fact that I need to focus and for an extended period of time my plan is really to focus on the Commission. I may go back to practice at some level at some point, but again I am planning on really focusing in on the issues that are related to policy and public health.

Mr. Lopes: I think Commissioner Valdez said it best that search committee's done an outstanding job, screening and identifying the best candidate for us to evaluate. Philly, would you like to get some final thoughts or words before I turn it over for a motion?

Ms. Laptiste: I would just like to thank both the Commission leadership and my fellow Commissioners for your patience as we did our due diligence to find the best fit for this role. Given the pandemic, and all of these things that have happened over the course of the past year-plus, I want to thank all of you and especially, Dr. Ojikutu for staying the course and thank her for her enthusiasm and just very happy with the process.

Lopes: Hearing no further questions of the candidate before us or discussion, I will accept the motion from the board for further action on the recommendation to offer Dr. Ojikutu to serve as Boston Public Health Commission's incoming Executive Director. A motion was made by Mr. Fernandes seconded by Mr. Valdez and accepted unanimously by roll call (Fernandez, Laptiste, Valdez, Childs-Roshak, Gutman, and Lopes).

Lopes: Thank you. Now I'll turn it over to PJ McCann from our General Counsel's office to read the appointment vote into the record:

McCann: Whereas, the Boston Public Health Commission's Interim Executive Director, Rita Nieves, has provided exemplary public health leadership during her tenure in this role since December of 2019; and whereas, a preliminary screening process by the Executive Director Search Committee has yielded a recommendation that the Board of Health has given due consideration; therefore, it is hereby resolved as follows: That Dr. Bisola Ojikutu shall be appointed Executive Director as of September 1st, 2021 subject to further terms and conditions to be agreed upon by the Chair; that Dr. Ojikutu, as Executive Director, shall have signatory authority for the Commission and shall exercise all powers and authorities of the Commission pursuant to the Boston Public Health Act of 1995, Section 3(a); that Dr. Ojikutu shall be a public employee pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Ch. 258 and will be covered by the Commission for liability for any and all acts taken on behalf of the Commission or the Board of Health occurring during the scope of her employment; and that Dr. Ojikutu shall serve in this capacity for a three-year term which may be extended by the Board.

McCann: Now I'll turn it back to the Chair for a motion to approve the appointment resolution.

Lopes: Thank you, PJ. Before I do a roll call for the vote, I'm going to call on chief Martinez from Mayor Janey's office for any thoughts or comments.

Martinez: Thanks, Manny. And thanks to the Board for this work, and just want to say how pleased I am to have Dr. Ojikutu be able to come and share experiences with all of you. On behalf of Mayor Janey, I can say that we are very excited about this next chapter and your leadership that you would bring to the Board's direction and so we both want to extend our appreciation and just excitement. We are eager to work with you. We're also just as excited to celebrate Rita and the work she's done as the Interim Executive Director. I just can't say enough about the appreciation for all that she's done. Just again, thank you so much for all you've done in your leadership. We're excited for Bisola to continue that strong leadership. Thanks so much.

Lopes: Thank you, Chief Martinez. And at this point, we will take a vote on the employment as our deputy counsel as read into the record.

A roll call was taken and unanimously approved in the order of Fernandez, Laptiste, Valdez, Childs-Roshak, Gutman, and Lopes.

Okay, this is an exciting time. I'd like to congratulate Dr. Bisola Ojikutu on her official appointment as our new Executive Director; we are so excited to have you on board. This is an amazing organization. It's an amazing group of individuals that have done just a tremendous amount of work this past year, and they know I think of them every day because without the commission, we would definitely not be where we are today in terms of the pandemic. So thank you to the entire staff.

And again, just to echo chief Martinez, huge gratitude to Rita, we can't thank you enough. I'm hoping we have an opportunity to formally thank you in person because the work that you've done over this past year has been

incredible. You jumped into this role, not asking any questions, and without any doubt, and really led this organization through the most challenging time of my life. Again, just thank you. Thank you.

Also to Deputy Director, Gerry Thomas, thank you again. You know, it just both of you are an example of the dedication that the team that works at the Commission have for the city and the residents of this city, in the organization itself. Thank you for stepping in when we needed you most as well. So with that, I think if there are no further comments or questions, I will look for a motion to adjourn this great meeting this morning. A motion was made by Ms. Laptiste, seconded by Dr. Childs-Roshak and approved unanimously at approximately 10:30am.

/s/PJ McCann
Deputy General Counsel