

January 15, 2016

## Molinaro Announces New Initiatives to Advance Diversity and Protection of Human Rights in Dutchess County

Poughkeepsie... With the approach of the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday, Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro has announced Dutchess County's enhanced commitment to equality for all citizens, with several Human Resources initiatives, including the appointment of Jody Miller as the County's new Equal Employment Opportunity/Human Rights (EEO/HR) Officer. As the new EEO/HR Officer, Ms. Miller will oversee County Executive Molinaro's initiatives to reconstitute the Human Rights Commission, launch a workforce diversity taskforce and "Ban the Box" on employment applications.

County Executive Molinaro said, "These actions – a new EEO/Human Rights Officer, re-establishment of our Human Rights Commission, a workforce diversity taskforce and 'Banning the Box' – honor the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr and demonstrate Dutchess County's commitment to the protection of civil and human rights. Our goal is always be responsive to our community, providing opportunities for people to have their voice heard, facilitate change where needed and help move our county forward with broader opportunities for all."

Jody Miller will begin as Dutchess County's new Equal Employment Opportunity/Human Rights Officer in February, 2016. Ms. Miller is a graduate of SUNY New Paltz. She has most recently served as the Executive Director for the Mediation Center of Dutchess County, Inc., where she has spent nearly two decades advancing the agency's mission to provide and promote conflict prevention, management and resolution services and education to individuals, families, businesses and organizations in Dutchess County.

Ms. Miller has been actively involved in both local community and statewide organizations. She serves as a Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and has served as a member of the Elder Justice Working Group, NYS Senator Sue Serino's Aging Services Advisory Board, Dutchess County Coalition of Non-Profits, the Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse, and the NYS Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution Mediation Ethics Advisory Committee, among others.

As EEO/Human Rights Officer, Ms. Miller will be responsible for ensuring the County's recruitment and employment policies and practices and ensuring are in compliance with all equal employment opportunity legislation. She will also be responsible for the development, monitoring and/or advocacy of the County's Affirmative Action Plan. Ms. Miller will serve as a resource for the general public in the identification and prevention of discrimination and the protection of the rights of the individual.

### **Human Rights Commission**

With Ms. Miller serving as the Chair, County Executive Molinaro will re-establish the Dutchess County Human Rights Commission. The original Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights was created in 1984 by the Dutchess County Legislature and authorized by then-County Executive Lucille Pattison. County Executive Molinaro will be forwarding a resolution to the Dutchess County Legislature to reconstitute the Human Rights Commission with community members from across the county. Commission members will be appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the Dutchess County Legislature. The Commission will serve in an investigative/advisory role and will be charged with the responsibility of addressing discriminatory practices, attempting to

resolve the practices and serve as an efficient referral of complaint materials to the New York State Division of Human Rights (Peekskill office) in the event a resolution cannot be reached. It will be the duty of the Commission to foster mutual respect and understanding among racial, religious, nationality and other groups in Dutchess County. The Commission will serve as a resource for the community to identify discrimination, address the issue and work with those involved to stop the behavior.

Dutchess County Legislator Barbara Jeter-Jackson, who represents the City of Poughkeepsie, said, “Having a Dutchess County Human Rights Commission provides our residents an opportunity to be heard and assisted when they believe facing issues of discrimination or injustice. I am very excited to be moving forward with the re-establishment of our Human Rights Commission and look forward to working with County Executive Molinaro to ensure its success for all our residents.”

### **Workforce Diversity Taskforce**

Also under the leadership of the EEO/Human Rights Officer, County Executive Molinaro will establish a Dutchess County Workforce Diversity Taskforce. The new taskforce will be an interdisciplinary group of people, representing the diverse makeup of the county, and will develop ideas and recommendations to diversify the pool of applicants for employment in Dutchess County Government, as well as all the local municipalities (including special districts) which rely on the County’s Department of Human Resources for civil service recruitment and hiring, and thus help ensure those being hired for new positions reflect the diversity of the population.

“Our goal is to hire and maintain a workforce that is reflective of our community’s diversity. We all benefit when we recognize and utilize the unique qualities that employees of different backgrounds and cultures bring to the workplace; it strengthens our organization and makes us more proactive in embracing change and innovation,” said County Executive Molinaro.

A majority of government positions are considered to be competitive class and require an applicant to take and pass a civil service examination specific to a job or a class of jobs. The results of these exams then create an eligible hiring list that is used when a position becomes available. To ensure a diverse workforce, it is critical to expand the number of people eligible for available positions. The Workforce Diversity Taskforce will be tasked with evaluating the notification and posting procedures for exams and hiring to ensure they are clear to all audiences, suggesting locations for posting announcements that would encourage broader participation, and helping to more broadly promote awareness for the wide variety of employment opportunities in county and local government as well as other civil divisions such as local school, fire, and library districts.

Dutchess County Commissioner of Human Resources Steven Rector said, “This taskforce will be an important resource in broadening our applicant pool. We want to overcome the barriers that may be preventing individuals from taking exams or applying for positions, while remaining with the regulations of Civil Service Law. The greater number of people we can reach about employment opportunities, the greater number of hires we can make that help County Government be a better representation of our community at large.”

### **Ban the Box**

Effective February 1st, the Dutchess County Department of Human Resources will be removing prescreening questions such as criminal history from exam, recruitment and employment applications to promote fairness and opportunity of all applicants. This will “ban the box” that is currently on the County’s employment application that requires applicants to indicate if they have been convicted of a crime, dishonorably discharged from military service or if they have been dismissed from prior employment for reasons other than lack of work or funds. Eliminating these

questions will help enable them to be more thoughtfully considered for positions for which they may be well-qualified. The “Ban the Box” practice will not, however, eliminate post offer background checks that would provide information about an applicant’s criminal history or employment dismissals that would be relevant to the position applied for.

County Executive Molinaro said, “There are people who have made mistakes in their lives, perhaps being fired from a job or committing a crime. However, time passes and they have paid the price for those actions and learned from them. We should not impose obstacles with unnecessary barriers to employment; rather we should end this practice and help individuals achieve success and independence.”

Eloise Maxey, President of the Northern Dutchess NAACP Chapter, said, “I am pleased the County Executive has re-established the Human Rights Commission for it is very much needed in this area. I’m also pleased the County Executive has ‘banned the box’, which is just another form of discrimination. People who have paid their debt to society and served their time should not be discriminated against when it comes to making a living. These are important actions the County is taking too and we are grateful.”