

**Committee Name: Diversity and Inclusion Committee Chair: Jeff Commings**

**Minutes recorded by: Ally Sega**

**Session #1**

**Date of meeting: 1/4/2023**

**Time of meeting: 8 pm EDT**

### **Actions Taken:**

1. Approved December meeting minutes.

**Number of committee members present: 11 Absent: 2**

**Committee members present (list all, including chair and vice chair):** Jeff Commings, Ally Sega, Sarah Welch, Virgil Chancy, Vicki Shu, Leo Letendre, Leann Rossi, Rook Campbell, Laura Dennison, Martha Arradondo, Katherine Weathers, Chris Campbell, Liaison to the National Board

**Others present:**

**Not present:** Wilson Josephson, Coaches Committee Liaison, Daniel Paulling, Liaison to the National Office

### **Minutes**

1. Welcome and Announcements. Jeff welcomed people to the call.
2. Leann motioned to approve the November meeting minutes and Sarah seconded. Virgil requested that his last name be spelled correctly. All approved pending the correction. .
3. Introductions of new members: Laura Dennison, She/Her, is a member of New England LMSC as the para athlete coordinator. She wants to see more people with disabilities swim, better training for coaches to work with swimmers with disabilities, and she believes that words matter. Martha Arradondo is from Minnesota, is on the board there, and is working on starting a program called Ebony Mermaids. Katherine Weathers is with Auburn Masters and is in the Southeastern LMSC. Her day job works

with Title 9 and so she spends much of her time looking at inclusion from that perspective and would like to use that looking into USMS becoming more welcoming.

4. History of committee: The committee approved in 2019 and was a task force starting in 2016. Virgil, Sarah, and Jeff were on the task force. Ally joined in the first year as a committee. Rook, Leann, Leo, and Vicki joined last year. Chris is our liaison to the board as the Vice President of Community Services. Jeff is also on the Board of Directors. We have a Best Practices subcommittee that started with a coaches survey and the write ups are now on the USMS website.

5. Daniel's question about words regarding an article on Global Adaptive Aquatics. It's a program for adults and children with "special needs" which is the word that they use. Daniel has found that the term "special needs" is often frowned on with a request to use more specific language. Laura stated as a special education teacher, there is an emphasis currently on a person (athlete) with a disability or a specific issue. She thinks asking the people involved is important. She would shift away from special needs as we all have special needs. Ally agreed on many levels. She dislikes special needs because the connotation is often intellectually disabled or neurodivergent, even though it could be physically disabled people with normal cognitive abilities. Ally prefers the term adaptive athletes, while Laura didn't like that term. Ally suggested that this might be in part a difference of having a disability that is visually easier to see or not. This reinforced the idea to ask the group for their preferences. Virgil agreed that the conversation had many aspects to look at and how people view the meanings. Ally suggested that whatever term or terms Daniel uses he could explain what he means and why he is using those terms. Leo also suggested defining the terms. Laura suggested using the team's name and describing their mission, but then use the term swimmer instead of classifying them repeatedly. Jeff agreed that using the term black in a news story about someone involved in a situation can send messages that the race is somehow important when it maybe shouldn't be.

6. Code of Conduct Webinar: Sarah said that Wilson and her have been working on this and may be looking for more help. Sarah feels strongly that all clubs/workout groups should feel safe in their groups and all should have a defined explanation of what is tolerated and what will not be. So she is looking at doing a webinar with coaches and LMSCs. We would help create a video that would build upon what the National Office already did. It would include why it is important to have one, even if everything seems good as it is. It would include things to include, such as statements of inclusion, how to start creating one, and provide examples of existing codes. Wilson and Sarah have looked at starting with LMSCs and then moving to coaches, but decided that working with coaches first as they spend more time on the deck with swimmers made sense. Vicki questioned if instead of working with coaches, maybe it

would be better to work with team boards. Chris suggested using the term “team leadership” as that may be a coach, but it also might be a team owner or board. Jeff agreed that the focus should be on the how and why of creating a code, instead of what the code should say.

7. LMSC D&I position: Jeff said that he had reached out to the LMSC Committee Chair, Dave Brancamp. Ally volunteered to work with the LMSC Committee to implement a plan.

8. Transgender Task Force: Rook gave an overview of his experience. There were some positives and good dialog but also some frustrations. Vicki added her frustration that there were a lot of voices speaking from a competitive basis, and that there wasn't enough discussion of the USMS mission and values. Leo added his agreement on the USMS aspect, but also added his frustration with FINA. Leo mentioned that he had written that the current rules do not line up with current best practices of medical care. Rook expressed his frustration with the idea that as it relates to trans athletes, there seems to be the thought that fairness and inclusion cannot coexist. Rook also expressed his frustration with the use of words that were misused, mislabeled, and were at times offensive. Katherine asked if they had done a climate survey of masters swimmers. As a competitive swimmer, she would rather be in an inclusive environment even when it might not be to her competitive benefit.

9. Holiday Calendar: There were complaints that the document was not helpful, people couldn't be expected to not hold events on all holidays, and it was generally not well received. Chris added that there was confusion at the Board level if the document was meant to be informational to give people an idea of how their event might be perceived on certain holidays. Sarah's understanding was that the document created by D&I was not well received by Dawson and Peter, and that they would create their own document. Chris said that he would get a copy for Sarah to review.

7. National Board Update: Chris mentioned an issue regarding a code of conduct issue that is working its way through the process. The basic issue is about a person who met and then targeted another member of a swim team, but then carried the issue outside of the swimming environment. The question in part then is how liable is the team, lmsc, USMS, etc for behavior that happens outside of the pool. Jeff suggested that they look at USA swimming policies and see if anything seemed relevant or helpful.

8. Wrap Up: Jeff concluded with noting that there were no legislative items from D&I at this point and that may make the committee's work easier this year.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm EDT. Next meeting is February 1, 2023.