

# News Release

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## **Durham Announces Community Safety and Wellness Task Force Co-Chairs**

*New Task Force to Recommend Services and Programs as Alternatives to the Criminal Legal System*

DURHAM, N.C. – City of Durham Mayor Steve Schewel, Durham County Board of Commissioners Chair Wendy Jacobs, and Durham Public Schools Board of Education Chair Bettina Umstead announced today their choice of Judge Shamioka Rhinehart and Marcia Owen, a community justice advocate, to co-chair the new [Durham Community Safety and Wellness Task Force](#).

The Task Force will be composed of the co-chairs and 15 additional members appointed by the three local governing bodies. The Task Force was formed by the governing bodies with a mission to recommend programs, “to enhance public safety and wellness that rely on community-based prevention, intervention, and re-entry services as alternatives to policing and the criminal legal system.”

Judge Shamioka Rhinehart is a graduate of the North Carolina Central University (NCCU) School of Law, a former assistant district attorney in Durham, and was recently re-elected without opposition to her second term on the district court bench. Marcia Owen is a Durham native, a graduate of Hillside High School and Duke University, and was for many years the executive director of the Religious Coalition for a Non-Violent Durham. She went on to help found and develop Restorative Justice Durham where she continues to volunteer in a leadership role.

“I can’t think of two better people to chair this important Task Force than Judge Rhinehart and Ms. Owen,” said Chair Jacobs. “They both bring deep community roots, intimate knowledge of the legal system, and a genuine commitment to creating community-based services that can be truly effective alternatives to police responses.”

“The creation of the Community Safety and Wellness Task Force comes at a much-needed time as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic as well as increased gun violence,” said Board of Education Chair Umstead. “I know that the Task Force can craft collaborative and community-rooted solutions that will serve Durham well. I look forward to listening, learning, and implementing solutions.”

Judge Rhinehart said, “I want us to build on the wonderful resources we have right here in Durham as well as learning from the best programs around the country to make Durham a model for community-based safety.” Owen added, “We want to hear from our community members about what kinds of responses to 911 calls would make them feel the safest. We want a genuine community-driven process.”

The three local governing bodies are now in the process of choosing the other members of the Task Force. It is anticipated that the members will be chosen over the next six weeks and that the Task Force will have its first meeting in mid- to late January 2021.

“I’m excited,” said Mayor Schewel. “Community members came to us with a strong desire to form this Task Force, and it’s wonderful to be moving forward with these two terrific leaders to help guide the process.”

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