

From: [Alma Vasquez](#)
To: [Clerk](#)
Subject: Letter for public comment for Leelanau Board of Commissioners meeting
Date: Tuesday, September 14, 2021 3:54:35 AM

September 14th, 2021

Dear Leelanau Board of Commissioners,

I write this letter for public comment for the Executive Leelanau Board of Commissioners Meeting.

My name is Alma Vasquez, I have been a resident of Leelanau County for 30 years. I, along with my husband, raised two sons, born and raised in Leelanau all of their lives. They are now young grown adults. This is our home. This is our community! I write this letter as a concerned resident, an employee of the State of Michigan for 22 years, an active community member, a voter, a homeowner, a taxpayer, a law abiding citizen, and most of all, I write this letter as a concerned mother, sister, aunt, wife, friend, and neighbor. While Leelanau County has a lot of magnificent things about it including its natural beautiful PURE Michigan sceneries, it has compassionate and incredible people that does not dismiss the negativity that also exists here within the beauty. There is racism! There is discrimination! It was here long before any of us were born. It was here when I moved here, 30 years ago and sadly heartbroken, it continues to be alive and thriving in the modern day 21st century. How can I possibly say that when others have not seen it or experienced it? I can because I have seen it and experienced it in different settings and in multiple variations. It was not "one isolated" incident as some may want you to believe. My first incident started when I was 12 but it didn't end there. It has happened over the course of my lifetime, while in school, on the bus, at sporting events, at different public settings including out shopping, at the lakes, restaurants, and in the workplace. Thirty years later it continues to happen. I have seen what my husband, sons, family, friends, and community members have had to endure when faced with racism and discrimination. While it may not be real to you and does not exist in your life experiences, it does not invalidate what those of us who live here have had to endure here. It is real and it is wrong! If it was one, two, three, or 100 + incidents, any racism and discrimination at any level is wrong and unacceptable, period! I should not have to make a list of every incident, to live through that pain again for you to know it is true. Yes, I may cry when sharing these incidents or talking about this because it is real and painful. I would not wish it on anyone! It's also heart crushing to know that unfortunately my husband and sons have experienced even more racism and discrimination in their lifetime then I did in mine. They are darker complected then I am and while that should not have any thing to do with how they are treated by some, it is! If I stay out of the sun and dye my hair blonde, I have been treated differently then when I have my natural hair color and stay out in the sun longer. Most of us have been bullied for being too fat or too thin or for pimples or such. The difference is my husband and sons can't lighten their skin. I shouldn't have to hide from the sun or dye my hair to be treated nicer either. I shouldn't have to worry about the safety of my sons or husband. My tears are not for pity or because I want to stir an agenda, this is not a political issue as some want you to think. This is a HUMAN RIGHTS issue! Our county has made more than one national news headline regarding a racist incident in the last two years and additional news headlines in the surrounding counties too. Plus there is ongoing evidence of the racism and discrimination all around our country for all to see on the news and other publications, it does not only happen in bigger inner cities, it happens in every city and town across the nation. We should not need additional news headlines or additional stories from our residents to know this is fact! You passed an anti-racism resolution a year ago and have yet to implement the changes to put that into action. You did do a bias training and passed the resolution that was a start but the work does not end there. You signed and agreed to this resolution. You have an obligation to serve and protect all residents of Leelanau County including those that are discriminated against including to keep your word on the resolution you passed a year ago in light of the racist comment made by a road commissioner. Please do not wait to take action until we make another negative national news headline! You want a list of solid specific ideas on how to combat this issue, I

have several ideas, I would love to share and discuss with you. It would start by taking what you started and implementing it. It would include each and everyone of you and all county/governmental employees and volunteers to take Implicit bias training. It would include meeting and collaborating with people from different races and ethnicities. We can arrange a meeting to discuss additional ways that you can do the necessary and critical work necessary to uphold the resolution you passed and help make our area a better and safer place for all.

I also write this letter to address the fact that our governmental building is a fairly new building in comparison to many other structures in the area and while it may meet the ADA requirements at a minimum it certainly can update some items to better and properly accommodate people with disabilities including the hard of hearing population. First starters, a person with disabilities may not know that you require them to give 24 hour or more notice to accommodate them, how would you assist someone who does not know about that rule or would you not assist them? Harsh to not accommodate someone with a disability creating additional unnecessary barriers. Per a disclaimer, I happened to run across on your website, I know I had to call to ask for an assistive listening device. When I called to ask for that accommodation, staff could not accurately tell me what type of devices were available for me to use. Staff should know what tools your office has to accommodate people with disabilities at the very least the person who they are calling for that information. Secondly, the devices you have are called an FM system that appear outdated. I was handed two of the same FM systems and the first one I tried did not work. Luckily, I was handed two, the second one I tried did work, however, the only type of earphones (Headphones) I was provided were for the inner ear. I was not given an option to use an over the head headphones that would allow me to keep my hearing aids in while listening which for most hearing aids users would be the better or preferred option as it allows them to enhance the quality of their hearing to keep the hearing aids in. I also noticed and learned that the building does not have a loop system installed in the building or in the room where meetings are regularly held. While you are not required to have a loop system more and more businesses and organizations have installed them, one because over time it does save money. Two it is a better tool to assist those that are hard of hearing that wear hearing aids with bluetooth options which most if not all modern day hearing aids have that option. It saves time, money, and is easier for both the business and the person that needs the accommodation as the person would not have to ask for the device to be handed to them and staff would not have to be available to handout the device to the person. The loop system is part of the building or room it is installed into and as the person walks into the area with the loop system they can receive the sound straight (streams) into their hearing aids allowing them to hear better and interact and engage in the meeting and conversations taking place. It is a way the business can uplift a person's abilities instead of highlighting their disabilities. There would be signs in the entrance notifying people coming in the building or room with the loop system that they are entering an area with the loop system so that they know it's available to tap into and use. It is commonly seen and used at churches, theaters, and other businesses and organizations. I highly recommend and encourage you to learn more about the different listening devices available including the loop system and educating your staff on the ones you select to use and have available to the people you are serving. There is an organization in Traverse City called Disability Network of Northern Michigan, it is a great resource that can assist you with more information on the ADA laws and properly accommodating people with disabilities and the options to accommodate them. I would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss this issue in person if you wish too.

Please do what is right! Do not wait for another incident to happen! The incidents that have occurred here are one too many already, please do not allow that list to continue on! Take action! It takes a village and you are part of the village!

Sincerely,

Alma R. Vasquez

Sent from my iPhone