

Early Activism

UNH senior named to N.H. commission

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Ronelle Tshiela '21 has a friend who never drives with anything in his pockets. He keeps his license and registration on the dashboard so if he gets stopped by the police he doesn't have to reach anywhere they can't see.

And that's in New Hampshire.

"The fear is most definitely present here," Tshiela says. For Black sons and daughters, the talk about what to do if you are ever pulled over is "one of the first talks you get as a kid, kind of like how other kids get the birds and the bees."

Tshiela is an activist. She cofounded Black Lives Matter Manchester four years ago, when she was still in high school. After graduating from UNH, she is looking toward law school. Maybe immigration law.

On June 22, Tshiela was appointed to New Hampshire's Commission on Law Enforcement Accountability, Community and Transparency, newly established by Gov. Chris Sununu in response to issues with law enforcement around the country after the death of George Floyd on May 25.

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The commission is charged with examining the training procedures and policies of New Hampshire law enforcement agencies, looking at state and local procedures related to alleged police misconduct, and community relations. Within 45 days they will submit their recommendations to state leaders. Tshiela is one of two public members.

“I’m hoping that the voices of the Black people on the commission are heard in this conversation, and we can help bring forth recommendations that are necessary for police reform in New Hampshire,” she says.

Of cofounding Black Lives Matter Manchester Tshiela says, “For me it has meant that our elected officials and people in our communities are finally hearing the voices of Black people in New Hampshire. Every day we take small steps towards progress. We still have a long way to go before we see lasting change, but this is the beginning of a conversation that we don’t plan on stopping any time soon.”

The political science major was moved to help launch the Black Lives Matter group in her city after the July 2016 deaths of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. Castile was shot in Minnesota during a traffic stop and Sterling, outside a convenience store in Louisiana. Her sense is that the group means much to the Black population in the Granite State. That it provides a voice. Support. Community.

"When you live in a state like New Hampshire, a state that is around 94 percent white, it's easy to feel like you're not being heard and your concerns are being drowned out by the fact that there aren't a lot of Black people here," says Tshiela, who moved to Manchester just before the start of fifth grade. "I've experienced racism since the year my family moved here, whether that be in school, in our neighborhood, at the grocery store, etc. It's important for people to understand that New Hampshire is by no means exempt from racism."

- WRITTEN BY:



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