



Marlo Alston
Centennial councilmember

Being the first black woman elected in District 4 to serve the City of Centennial is nothing short of a blessing. Knowing that a majority of the district I represent could empower a black woman to represent their interests was amazing.

I appreciate a diverse elected body that represents different races, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations. Diverse representation may result in a better understanding of what it takes to best serve your community. Diversity and inclusion should not be difficult, but for some it is, which is why it's imperative for those of us with a voice use it. Serving on city council allows me to speak up regarding race and gender issues, adding value to Centennial by sharing a different perspective and experiences.

Since being elected to city council, one issue I have felt strongly about is enforcing the use and availability of tobacco, e-cigarettes, vaping products, etc. to our youth population.

“KNOWING THAT A MAJORITY OF THE DISTRICT I REPRESENT COULD EMPOWER A BLACK WOMAN TO REPRESENT THEIR INTERESTS WAS AMAZING.”

Recently, city council listened to several presentations from professional organizations to gather information and better understand the issue of minors' use of tobacco products. A lot of data was shared during these presentations, but what stood out to me was that big tobacco intentionally targets people of color, youth, and lower-income communities; I learned the tobacco industry "disproportionately targets historically disadvantaged populations."

Following the presentations, I shared my perspective of how laws like minor in possession lead to an unjust system that's harmful to communities of people of color.

I expressed the lack of accountability by the retailers or tobacco industries who continue to sell to minors. I shared facts regarding school districts acknowledging discipline disparities and the steps needed to correct this problem. These are challenges people of color face daily.

Although the outcome was not what I hoped, I feel my fellow councilmembers heard and respected my voice. I was able to bring forward a perspective that may not have been considered on the topic of youth tobacco use.

Overall, the City of Centennial encourages inclusivity and diversity and I am proud of many things the city has done, such as adopting a powerful and inclusive value statement.

Additionally, at the request of city council, the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office created a Public Safety Advisory Group for the city. The city council also didn't shy away from hosting a series of public sessions following the murder of Mr. George Floyd to have difficult, but necessary conversations about racial bias and allow the Arapahoe County Sheriff the opportunity to educate the community on law enforcement policies impacting Centennial.

Diversity and equity are critical to community success. We must listen to each other.

I'm hopeful Centennial will continue to have open, honest conversations while being considerate of each other. We may not always agree, but at least the door is open to have a conversation. I'm excited about what happens next in our country and to see the great things we do in Centennial.