



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
BI-MONTHLY PUBLIC MEETING

OFFICIAL COMMISSION MEETING

Via Webex

March 10, 2021

ATTENDEES

Commissioners

Motoko Aizawa, Chair
Eleanor Collinson, Vice Chair
Anika Simpson, Secretary
Wynter Allen
Brian Griffey
Adam E. Maier
Karen Mulhauser
Teri Quinn
Timothy Thomas

Office of Human Rights Staff

Monica Palacio, Director

Commission on Human Rights Staff

Erika Pierson, Chief ALJ
Brandes Ash, ALJ

Guests

Al Santiago
Arnolda Beaujuin
Eileen Megias
Jason Pleasants
Larry Williams
Erica (Broadus)Walls, PhD
*unidentified caller(s), including students from George Washington University

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

- Chair Aizawa called the Commission's Official Meeting to order at 6:34 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

- Commissioner Simpson conducted the roll call.
- A total of 9 commissioners appeared. There was a quorum.

III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

- The 03/10/2021 agenda was adopted.

IV. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

- The 01/13/2021 meeting minutes were adopted by acclamation.

V. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

- Director Palacio discussed OHR's preparation for the 2020-2021 fiscal year Performance Oversight Hearing held on Friday, March 5, 2021. Director Palacio thanked OHR, Commissioner Aizawa, and the Administrative Law Judges for their assistance.
- Director Palacio provided a few updates on behalf of OHR, including the following:
 - OHR continues to work diligently on its Street Law program;
 - OHR is working to fill the second Commission ALJ vacancy;
 - OHR is hiring for approximately 20 positions— Director Palacio will make sure the Commission and Chief Judge Pierson receive details;
 - OHR is almost fully staffed with a new enforcement team structure, a project that started in late 2019 but had to be suspended due to the hiring freeze and pandemic. Specifically, four new enforcement positions have already been filled and, in the immediate future, four to six more positions will be filled. OHR has also hired two new attorney advisors who are currently in the process of being fully onboarded and trained.

- Chair Aizawa asked if Director Palacio could share her testimony from the Performance Oversight Hearing with the Commissioners as well as her power point presentation (“Introduction to OHR + Key Priorities”). Director Palacio agreed.

VI. REPORT OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE

Chief Judge Erika Pierson gave the report for the Commission on Human Rights (Commission), highlighting the following:

- **Case Management System**
 - OCTO and the Commission’s case management system vendor, Synergy, have seemingly reached impasse. Consequently, the Commission has not been able to go live for outside filers.
 - The Commission will meet with higher ups within OCTO and Synergy next week about next steps. Ultimately, the Commission may need to explore using a different system.
- **Commission Operations Update**
 - The Commission continues to operate remotely and successfully hold hearings and mediations remotely via WebEx.
- **Staffing Update/ Georgetown Fellowship Position**
 - More than 40 applications have been received for the Georgetown Fellowship. Interviews will take place in the near future.
 - There will be a posting for a 2nd ALJ position in the coming weeks.
- **Virtual OHR/Commission Event: “Navigating Hate: Unity & Healing Through the Community”**
 - The event was held on February 25, 2021 from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM and focused on the impact of the events of January 6, 2021 at the Capitol and the roles youth play in shaping the future.
 - There was a great turnout and the moderator—Benjamin Banneker High School senior **Cedric Missouri**—did a phenomenal job. Other event participants included: **Sgt. Nicole Brown**, MPD Special Liaison who focuses on LGBTQ, Latino, Asian, Jewish, Islamic and interfaith affairs; **Briana Strachan Cleveland**, Director of Community Support, Martha’s Table; **Shyheim Snead**, Manager, Strategy and Partnerships, United Way;

Linda Litweiler, DCPS Mental Health Professional; **Coach George Rice**, Founder, The Rebound 4 Success Institute.

- Navigating Hate: Unity & Healing Through the Community will be posted on OHR's website.

- **Financial Disclosures Packets for Commissioners**

- The packets will be mailed to Commissioners' homes and emailed to their respective Commission email addresses. All Commissioners are required to file Financial Disclosures.
- Typically, filings are due in or around July. Commissioners will be informed of this year's deadline.

VII. REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE COMMISSION

- Chair Aizawa discussed the Performance Oversight Hearing:
 - The hearing lasted a little more than seven hours and, at one point, there was a joint hearing with OHR and the Office of Risk Management.
 - D.C. Council Government Operations and Facilities Committee Chair, Robert White, led the hearing and was very interested in understanding how both OHR and the Commission works. Among other things, the Government Operations and Facilities Committee ("Committee") requested metrics from OHR and the Commission.
 - The Committee expressed how much it looks forward to continuing to work alongside the Commission.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

- **Chief Judge Pierson discussed the Right to Family Amendment Act of 2021**
 - The Right to Family Amendment Act of 2021 was discussed during the Performance Oversight Hearing held on March 5, 2021. It is a fairly new bill and has not yet been assigned a bill number. Multiple witnesses testified in support of the bill at the hearing.
 - Supporters of the bill are seeking to add a new protected class to the D.C. Human Rights Act—"relationship structure"—in order to protect non-traditional families (e.g. polyamorous families) from discrimination. (Witnesses discussed their experiences with, among other things, discrimination in housing and obtaining health and life insurance, and other death benefits.)

- Commissioner Griffey asked whether some discriminatory acts experienced by non-traditional families are covered under the protected class “familial status”. Director Palacio explained that the familial status protected class does not cover all of the challenges faced by non-traditional families.
- Commissioner Maier asked whether there was any mention of the reintroduction of the **Michael A. Stoops Anti-Discrimination Amendment Act of 2019** at the Performance Oversight Hearing? (This bill would amend the DCHRA to add “homelessness” as a protected act.) Director Palacio shared that one witness appeared at the hearing and asked that the bill be reintroduced and passed.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

- **Commission on Human Rights’ Case Inventory and Commission Assignments**

- Chief Judge Pierson shared the following:
 - The Commission recently received four new cases – three of them being housing cases.
 - There are also several cases that are in their last stages—for instance, two Proposed Orders and Decisions are being shared with parties in the immediate future and two others are headed to the Commission.

- **Human Rights Award/Gala**

- Chair Aizawa shared that on February 10, 2021, a group of volunteers—Chair Aizawa, Commissioner Collinson, Commissioner Mulhauser, Commissioner Griffey, Chief Judge Pierson, and Judge Ash—discussed this year’s Human Rights awards and a possible gala.
 - After the February 10th meeting, a decision was made to consider hosting a virtual event surrounding the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission on Human Rights, which will be on or around July 8, 2021.
 - Ultimately, there will need to be agreement on awardees and the number of awards. Volunteers at the February 10th meeting discussed honoring essential workers during the pandemic and emerging (young) leaders.
- At tonight’s Commission meeting, Chair Aizawa asked for input and suggestions regarding a virtual event in July:
 - Director Palacio shared that OHR will gladly support the Commission and its decision(s) regarding awards and events.

- Commissioner Mulhauser and Commissioner Quinn shared their concerns about hosting a virtual event in July 2021 and offered suggestions related to continuing with the Commission’s tradition of holding a celebration/gala in December 2021.
 - After further discussion, the Commissioners agreed to hold an event in December 2021, and to incorporate the 50th anniversary of the Commission. The Commission will later decide whether the December event will be in-person or virtual. Director Palacio suggested a 50th anniversary video that could be completed by July 2021 and shared at later events, including a gala in December 2021.
 - Commissioners Griffey, Mulhauser, Maier, and Collinson volunteered to be on a planning committee for the December 2021 event. All other Commissioners are open to volunteer at any time.
- **Commission Committees**
 - Chair Aizawa suggested that the Commission continues to work on organizing and utilizing its committees, including resurrecting the Rules Committee. There has also been discussion about establishing an Outreach Committee and a Governance Committee. (Chair Aizawa and Commissioner Mulhauser suggested collapsing Rules and Governance committees.)
 - Commissioner Mulhauser brought up the idea of a Public Education Committee, to help educate the D.C. community about the District of Columbia Human Rights Act. (Commissioner Quinn suggested that the Public Education could easily be a part of the Outreach Committee.)
 - A motion passed to adopt the aforementioned committee structure (Rules, Outreach and Awards Committees).
 - Chair Aizawa will circulate a Committee sign-up sheet to Commissioners. Chair Aizawa asked that Chief Judge Pierson and/or Judge Ash help with the Rules Committee.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Chair Aizawa thanked everyone for attending the Commission meeting, including George Washington University students.
 - George Washington University Professor, Dr. Erica Walls, thanked Commissioner Maier for inviting her and her students from George Washington’s Social Justice program to tonight’s Commission meeting.

- The next Commission meeting will take place on May 12, 2021 at 6:30 PM via Microsoft Teams.

XI. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

- Chair Aizawa adjourned the meeting at 7:45 pm.