

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

Minutes

January 19, 2017

Commission Members Present:

Bianca Chang
Joan Hash
Reverend Turner
Ilene Kessler
Ivette Lopez
Frank Eastham
Kui Zhao
Bob Ford
Misbah Farooqi

Commission Members Absent:

Peter Hwang
Shiraz Ahmed
Opel T. Jones

Staff:

Dr. Barbara J. Sands, HRC Executive Secretary
Stephanie Chapple, HRC Recording Secretary

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. PUBLIC FORUM – N/A

3. HRC CASES UPDATE – LEGAL COUNSEL – N/A

4. APPROVE MINUTES

December meeting minutes were approved pending correction on attendance for Peter Hwang.

5. CHAIR'S REPORT – Reverend Turner welcomed new members Bob Ford and Kui Zhao. Refreshments will be provided during the February meeting.

- Sub-committee re. CR-180 will meet next Tues. at the Howard Building - Jessup Room. New members, please review the committees listed on the agenda that may be of interest for you to serve on. Please contact Stephanie.
- Goals Sub-committee meeting was cancelled today and will be rescheduled within the next few weeks.
- **CB9-2017 – DISCUSSION** - Ivette reads Bill to members. The Council is interested in hearing from us (HRC), whether we want to make suggestions, etc. Per Dr. Sands, following MAHRA meeting, a suggestion was made to go public with a statement to clarify HRC's role within Howard County.
- Commissioner Joan Hash reads written statement from Commissioner Peter Hwang for the record. Peter requested his statement be read only if discussion comes up. Peter's written comments will be forwarded to everyone via email.
- Question from Chair – As we discuss this, the Council wants us to consider if there are ways in which the legislation can be strengthened? Chair asked members to reflect on whether there are rights that we should consider protecting with this legislation. Rev. Turner's concerns are not with the political aspect of this legislation, but he is concerned with the Commission embracing HRC's charge, which is to protect the rights of all citizens in the county, regardless to what political side initiates a legislation. Whether popular or unpopular, that is not important. Our job is to protect the rights of all citizens.
- Commissioner Ivette Lopez, Chair of the Legislation Committee commented "there is room to improve the legislation." Ivette suggested certain language in the Bill be removed or changed. Ivette commented "as a Commission, we can act very narrowly, without getting involved in the political aspect of the legislation."
- ALL members shared their opinion on whether HRC should take a position, or not take a position.
- Ivette gave a motion to have HRC Chair craft/write a letter to the editor stating "We as a Commission stand behind the notion that there should be no discrimination based on citizenship."
- During discussion, Reverend Turner directed members to draw their attention to the agenda, under Committee reports, 2nd bullet is Legislation. Chair commented "the purpose of the Legislation Committee is to bring information and discussion on Legislation that has to do with human rights. Our job is to decide what action to take, and ask the question, 'how will we as a Commission respond to the legislation?' Our job is to educate the community while the discussion of legislation is going on, that there is a place where you can turn to, to have your rights protected. You don't wait until something passes, you speak up right when the issue is being discussed."
- Motion was repeated to authorize HRC Chair to write letter on behalf of HRC, with an amendment to the motion, to omit any mention of the Bill, CB9-2017. There should be no mention in the letter of CB9-2017. HRC will not take any position on the legislation, but the letter is HRC's task to take advantage of this opportunity to speak up and

remind everyone in the county that there is a Human Rights Commission, and our job is to protect the rights of all citizens.

- Vote was taken – 8 in favor of the motion, 1 opposed. Motion passed. Chair Turner will draft the letter, Ivette will assist. Draft will be circulated to all members for suggestions prior to being sent to Stephanie. Stephanie will place final draft on HRC letterhead to be sent to media outlet.
- Virginia Governor is reviewing and considering making changes to strengthen the Hate Crimes legislation. This may be worth looking into to see how our county's Hate Crime laws can be strengthened. Chair Turner gave this charge to Ivette to review, make comparisons, etc. and share information at the February meeting.

5. COMMITTEES/ REPORTS

- Finance & Fair Lending with Housing – *Ilene, Ivette, Joan* - Ilene indicated that there are many realtors in the Housing industry who are worried about some of the proposed legislation, Paul Ryan's bill as it affects real estate, taxation, and lending. Ilene will share more information in February.
- Legislation – *Ivette* – CB9-2017 Discussion (held during Chair's report) and Review of Virginia's Hate Crime laws, per Reverend Turner.
- Education, Public Safety and Student Life Committee – *Frank, Reverend Turner, Opel, Ivette* – Frank shared update on Equity and Inclusion Committee final report. This committee consisted of HCPSS students, parents, community members and staff. Following 8-week workgroup sessions, 52 recommendations were sent to the Board. This committee specifically asked that the recommendations be sent to the Board, 100% unedited, without any revisions. Re. Cultural Proficiency – increased effort for all staff to receive CP Training. This is not a mandate of HCPSS staff, however, it is a part of the new teachers' training. DISCUSSION – Chair and members feel CP Training should be a mandatory requirement. Motion was made for a letter to be drafted to the Superintendent and Board that CP Training be required for all HCPSS teachers, staff, etc. All approved.
- HRC Awards Committee – *Bianca & Opel* – Bianca asked all members to please circulate nomination forms to your professional networks, community groups and faith-based organizations. Currently we have not received any nominations. Chair Turner made a charge for all members to consider submitting 2 nominations by next Friday. Stephanie will re-circulate the nominations form which is located on the county's webpage.
- Human Trafficking Committee – Peter, Shiraz and Joan – Human Trafficking now falls under Community Action Council and Dept. of Aging. OHR will continue to assist with coordinating training.
- LGBTQ Committee – *Opel* – Per Dr. Sands, there will be a Safe Place for LGBTQIA conference on 1/24 at the Miller Library from 12p – 3:30 p.m. More detailed information will be sent to everyone via email.
- Aging, Disability and Health Care Committee – *Bianca* – Enrollment for healthcare has been extended to 1/31/17 for county residents.
- HRC Goals Committee – Peter, Bianca, Rev. Turner – meeting with David Lee will be rescheduled. Meeting is to discuss ways HRC can take advantage every month in speaking to the community about the rights of citizens, to respond to things going on in the county, to speak to issues as they arise, and to remain current and relevant.
- Ad-Hoc Committee/Nominating Committee – Shiraz, Peter, Joan – Interviews for HRC open seats are complete. 17 applicants were interviewed. Thank you Stephanie for coordinating room location, copies of resumes, etc. Per Dr. Sands, recommendations should be forwarded to David Lee before the 4th Thursday of the month.

6. STUDENT REPORT – Misbah is working with SGA leaders at Oakland Mills and River Hill H.S. on a campaign that encourages community activism. This campaign is entitled "100 Days of Action" beginning on 1/21/17. See flier. Stephanie will circulate flier to everyone via email. Please share with students and young people. To take away the focus of the Inauguration during lunch period, students at Wilde Lake are encouraged to write something positive about their school.

7. STAFF REPORT/UPDATES – Please see written report from Dr. Sands. OHR, in conjunction with Law Enforcement and HCPSS will hold 3 events per year to inform and educate the community on various topics. Last night's topic was discussion on the use of heroine, and other drugs that parents should be aware of. Approximately 50 parents attended this informational session. OHR is partnering with HC Library during the week of 3/11 on a community-wide project "Human Books." This program will allow community members, who specialize or have extensive knowledge in a specific area, to share that knowledge with those interested in hearing their story. If you are interested in being a "Human Book" please contact Dr. Sands. One Howard community civility forum was held for community members to hear from the County Executive, discuss recent social media online students incidents, etc. Both HRC and MLK Student Commissioners spoke to the audience. 100 pledge cards were signed and received from the KWANZAA program. Dr. Sands thanked Reverend Turner for articles/letters, etc. submitted to the editors. This is an ongoing task for HRC to become a voice of the county. Dr. Sands is hoping to have the theatrical play "Disgrace" showing in April 2018. More information will follow. IOAHRA Conference will be held in Howard County. Dr. Sands

is encouraging all members to assist with this international 3-day conference. Assistance is needed with transportation, listing of historic sites, and volunteers. More information will follow.

9. **NEW BUSINESS** – Commissioner Eastham was invited to join 100 leaders across the country as well as, many Congressmen, to develop a Reconciliation Plan to be presented to the President. This event will be held one day prior to the National Prayer Breakfast, and will be given to the President during the Breakfast.

10. **ANNOUNCEMENTS/UPDATES** – Ilene and Ivette served on a Panel from a 2013 HRC housing case. Panel voted in favor of Complainant from OHR’s finding. Ilene thanked Ivette for writing the final summary. Ilene commented “although the discrimination was subtle, it was apparent once you followed the dots. This was an awesome victory.” This case was also used as an example at a Fair Housing class taught by OHR. In December, a Circuit Court Judge ruled in favor of HRC’s decision.

11. **ADJOURNMENT** – Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.