

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

Minutes

March 16, 2017

Commission Members Present:

Bianca Chang
Joan Hash
Opel T. Jones
Peter Hwang
Kui Zhao
Bob Ford
Shiraz Ahmed
Frank Eastham
Misbah Farooqi

Commission Members Absent:

Reverend Turner
Ivette Lopez
Ilene Kessler

Staff:

Dr. Barbara J. Sands, HRC Executive Secretary
Stephanie Chapple, HRC Recording Secretary
Melissa Goldmeier, HRC Legal Counsel

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. PUBLIC FORUM – Dr. Foose, HCPSS Superintendent, Linda Wise, Deputy Superintendent, Bill Chenowich, Jaqueline Sutton (citizen), Jason Sutton (student), Kim Pruum and Najee Bailey from Councilman Ball's Office, Dale Chase – President of ASCME Local 35 & President Council 67 for the State of Md Public Employees

Dr. Foose shared detailed information during meeting on HCPSS new testing platforms, new assessments for students, introduction of KOGAT & MAP (Measure of Academic Process), removal of SKAT, etc. Noted that suspension rate has decreased, and is the lowest in the state. Committee for Diversity & Inclusion Frank spear-headed presented 50 recommendations to the school board; of those, 20 recommendations were implemented immediately. Re. – Mandatory Cultural Proficiency for HCPSS teachers/staff – many teachers have taken the training, it can be mandated but the results may not change the person's attitudes or belief systems. "It is everyone's job to make students feel valued, accepted, respected and included. Cultural shifts take time, usually 5-7 years" per Dr. Foose. Dr. Foose indicated she is open to have all HCPSS instructors/administrators take the training, but "how will we know if they feel different? How will we know if a change in the individual is made?" Commissioner Joan agreed with Dr. Foose, made suggestions that the initial discussion of requesting all HCPSS staff to receive training was a good message in show of support that the school system believes in this. Joan also indicated that this is a great way to send an overt message, and that the school system has reinforced this as a priority. Due to numerous lay-offs in Baltimore City schools, Dr. Foose advertised for minority instructors in Baltimore to apply to HCPSS. She also advertised throughout the state. Per Dr. Foose, "students feel included by involving students in engagement, lifting up student voice, and making suggestions re. curriculum." Following Dr. Foose's discussion, Dr. Sands asked if there were any other questions from members, to please ask now. There were no more questions. Members thanked Dr. Foose and Deputy Superintendent Linda Wise for their time.

Kim Pruum from Councilman Ball's Office read the letter Dr. Ball sent to the HRC dated 3/9/17. Members are encouraged to please examine and make recommendations re. Section 12.208 "Unlawful employment practices" of the Howard County Code, Subsection 12.208.III (e) "Howard County employees."

Dale Chase supports and applauded Councilman Ball in requesting that HRC review and make recommendations. Dr. Sands asked Mr. Chase "so what you are asking is that OHR would have the ability or the jurisdiction to hear the concerns of state/county employees if there is an issue of discrimination." For the record, Dr. Sands questioned Mr. Chase commenting "even though the county may be paying or giving money to an entity, the employees of that entity are not considered county employees, they are considered state employees. So are you saying that this Commission ought to also have the right to investigate in the complaints that these people have?" Mr. Chase responded "I'm asking for employees who work for Howard County employees and state employees who are merit employees to have the right to bring lawful discrimination be brought to OHR and have it investigated by OHR."

Commissioner Peter (Hwang) clarified that although the letter states HRC, he believes Councilman Ball's office was referring to OHR, not HRC. Members agreed. Peter asked if "the Office of Law has been brought in to this to see if a change like this in the County Code can be made?" Mr. Chase commented, "if recommendations can be made, it can be brought to the County Council for legislation."

3. HRC CASES UPDATE – LEGAL COUNSEL – HRC members denied appeal for HRC Case No. 17-02-003.
4. APPROVE MINUTES
February minutes approved.
5. CHAIR’S REPORT –
 - In the absence of Chair Turner, Peter asked members to re-visit CR-180. Members agreed to begin bidding for a contractor, RFP process, etc. Per Peter, Dr. Ball’s Office was adamant that HRC conduct the study to the best of their ability, and not to hire a contractor. Dr. Ball asked HRC members to review the Task Force study on Community Policing as an example/guide. Members agreed, in order to do a study of this nature with hiring, firing, retention, promotion, you must go back a number of years to establish a pattern. Two things Peter wanted HRC members to consider – conducting a study with concrete, factual information takes (1) time, and (2) expertise. It also takes speaking with current and former employees, employees who were fired, etc. Per Commissioners, Legal Counsel needs to be involved. Statistical analysis is an integral component for measuring data from a study of this magnitude.
 - Motion was made to maintain HRC’s position - HRC is unable to conduct the study without hiring contractor. 5 voted in favor of the motion, 1 abstention, 1 recusal.
 - The next step is to draft letter and schedule meeting with Councilman Ball. Stephanie will contact Dr. Ball’s office to request a meeting with Dr. Ball and HRC members.
 - Commissioners will also schedule a special meeting to discuss draft letter to Councilman Ball re. CR-180.
6. COMMITTEES/ REPORTS
 - Finance & Fair Lending with Housing – *Ilene, Ivette, Joan* - No report.
 - Legislation – *Ivette* – No report.
 - Education, Public Safety and Student Life Committee – *Frank, Reverend Turner, Opel, Ivette* – please see written hard copy submitted.
 - HRC Awards Committee – *Bianca & Opel* – Members voted for 2 nominations to receive the 2017 award. Winners and nominators will be contacted.
 - Human Trafficking Committee – **Peter, Shiraz and Joan** – Per Dr. Sands, there will be an HT conference at HCC on 10/13/17. Discussion – will the county’s HT Committee become a Commission? One Voice – a group of Pastors interested in assisting HT victims discussed meeting with hotel managers, managers of massage parlors, etc. to educate employees on possible signs of human trafficking. Program being planned entitled “Train the Trainer.” Office of Citizen Services has 8 staff interested in receiving this type of training. Goal for this committee is 12.
 - LGBTQ Committee – *Opel* – Opel will attend next PFLAG meeting on Tuesday. If there are any other members interested in serving on this committee with Opel, please contact him. Frank announced that HCPSS communicated their continued support for transgender students. Public notice was sent out that nothing would change regardless of the President’s removal of guidelines from legislation.
 - Aging, Disability and Health Care Committee – *Bianca* – No report.
 - HRC Goals Committee – Peter, Bianca, Rev. Turner – Reverend Turner, Bianca, Peter met with David Lee. Dr. Sands invited D. Lee to a future meeting re. Communications Strategist
6. STUDENT REPORT – See flier from Misbah. There is an upcoming county-wide school event on 3/30 – Bystander Intervention Workshop to train people on what to do if they see discrimination happening, etc.
7. STAFF REPORT/UPDATES – See hard copy report submitted. Please keep in mind October HT event. OHR received 15 new cases in the month of February. This is a first. New Investigator hired, Raemond Parrott. Position was previously a part-time position, now full-time. OHR’s workload has increased tremendously. Thank you HRC members for the work that you’re doing. Per Frank, meeting with HCPD regarding reporting and recording of HBI’s was very effective in moving forward.
9. NEW BUSINESS – Per Dr. Sands, it would good if this body would discuss or at least make recommendations for Howard County employees to be able to come to OHR to file a complaint dealing with employment issues. Please be prepared to discuss the write-up of the play “Disgraced,” and consider what month the writer should be invited to an upcoming meeting to speak to all members. Motion was made for writer to come and discuss play. Voting was unanimous to invite playwright to upcoming meeting. Opel read the last few sentences of Councilman Ball’s letter. Peter asked all members to take time to thoroughly review Dr. Ball’s letter, and asked if discussion be tabled until the next meeting. Opel moved that discussion regarding Councilman Ball’s letter be moved to the next meeting. Vote was taken – all approved. Bob volunteered that he would represent HRC on the #OneHoward Committee since he’s been to all of their meetings.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS/UPDATES – Two events in need of HRC members to volunteer for Veteran’s Fair on 4/4 from 5 – 8 p.m. and Md. Multi-Cultural event on Sat., 4/22 at Marriotts Ridge High School. Please sign-up if you are able to volunteer, and remember to wear your badge. OHR staff will also be present to man the table. Per Bianca, HRC will meet briefly next month at 6p.m. at the Historic Oakland Ballroom prior to the award program, which begins at 6:30 p.m. Bianca thanked Stephanie for all of her hard work in assisting with preparations for the program. Following adjournment, plaque will be given to Frank. Stephanie will contact Ivette to receive her plaque.
Per Kui, May is Asian Pacific Heritage Awareness Month. Kui will send information on upcoming events to Stephanie.

11. ADJOURNMENT – Meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.