

# HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

## *Minutes*

June 16, 2016

### Commission Members Absent:

Ivan Betancourt  
Eli Sauerwalt

### Commission Members Present:

Reverend Turner  
Opel T. Jones, I  
Ivette Lopez  
Bianca Chang  
Peter Hwang  
Joan Hash  
Shiraz Ahmed  
Ilene Kessler  
Frank Eastham

### Staff:

Dr. Barbara J. Sands, HRC Executive Secretary  
Stephanie Chapple, HRC Recording Secretary  
Barry Sanders, HRC Legal Counsel

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

#### 2. PUBLIC FORUM –

#### 3. HRC CASES UPDATE – LEGAL COUNSEL –

HRC denied appeal cases HRC Case No. 16-02-001 & 16-04-003

#### 4. APPROVE MINUTES

May minutes were approved pending amendments to correct the attendance chart. Ilene Kessler and Shiraz Ahmed were incorrectly listed as Absent; both will be listed under Commission Members Present.

#### 5. CHAIR'S REPORT –

##### Discussion Regarding Attendance:

- Reverend Turner thanked Stephanie and all Commissioners who attended & participated in the Awards program.
- Reverend Turner opened discussion regarding challenges with a quorum.
- Joan commented that actions taken as a result of being absent from 3 “consecutive” meetings, is a standard on many boards & commissions she serves on.
- Ivette commented that HRC members should consider looking into alternative technology methods i.e. call-ins, video conference calls, etc. as an option when members are unable to be physically present.
- Frank suggested that, on the Monday prior to the meeting, members should contact the Chair and Stephanie if you are unable to attend. If it appears there will be lack of a quorum, the Chair can re-schedule the meeting on an alternate date.
- Reverend Turner commented that, even if members call in to indicate when they will be absent, or if members decide to possibly look at changing the code, this will not necessarily solve the problem. A quorum is needed to conduct official business. Reverend Turner suggested to “plainly adhere to the code, and encouraged everyone to re-commit themselves to the importance of the monthly meetings as a priority by attending.

##### Student Commission Open Position – Interviews

- 17 applications were received. Reverend Turner created a 4-point criteria when reviewing the applications: Articulation, Passion for Human Rights, Leadership Impact, & Personal Experiences.
- Joan volunteered to review the applications using the criteria Rev. Turner put forth. Frank made a motion for both the Chair and Joan to select a short list. Once the short list of applicants is determined, those 3-4 candidates will come before the Commission for interviews. All approved. Interviews will be targeted for July.

##### HRC Budget

- Reverend Turner, Opel, Ivette will review the budget and discuss ideas, suggestions for training, workshops, materials to distribute, etc. Discussion regarding budget will be held during the July meeting. Bianca and Opel will also look at dates for Awards program 2017, possibly April.

### Training

- Reverend Turner thanked former Commissioner, Tim Johnson for conducting “Words that Hurt, Words that Heal” training during the May meeting.
- Reverend Turner opened the discussion as a result of comments that were made by a Commissioner during a celebratory Commissioner event, as well as, during a recent meeting. Those comments were offensive to some of the members. Reverend Turner commented that “when your rights as an individual are in conflict with your responsibility as a Commissioner, members should ask themselves ‘is this the right Commission for me to serve on?’” Frank commented “when Commissioners are speaking as individuals and not as Commissioners at a Commission event or meeting, we are not fulfilling our duties by representing ALL the citizens we serve.” Dr. Sands commented that, “as Commissioners and those who work for all citizens of Howard County, we should be sensitive, mindful and careful of what we say. Although there is Freedom of Speech, there are also boundaries within the Freedom of Speech which doesn’t give someone the right to say hurtful words and comments.” Reverend Sands will contact the Office of Law to invite someone from the Office to come and talk about the Freedom of Speech under the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment, and the ramifications of that law. Ivette agreed with Dr. Sands to have some type of training regarding this sensitive issue. Dr. Sands will work with the Office of Law on this assignment to possibly schedule a separate meeting outside of the monthly meeting. All Commissioners agreed that this was an important training for all members to attend.
- Dr. Sands will work with new Commissioners to schedule “New Members” Training & will coordinate schedules with new members and OHR staff.

### Orlando, Florida Incident

- In response to the tragic incidents in Orlando, Florida, Dr. Sands, Reverend Turner, and Opel will work together on a response letter to the Editor on behalf of the HRC to be sent to the Columbia Flier, Howard County Times, Washington Post, and Baltimore Sun.
- Additionally, Commissioners should forward names of possible candidates who may be interested in serving on the Commission, during the July meeting. The vacant seat was formerly held by Catherine Hyde.

A motion was made to accept the Chair’s Report. All approved.

## 6. COMMITTEES/ REPORTS

Finance & Fair Lending with Housing – Per Ilene, House Bill 37 passed unanimously in the House. Affordable housing stock is low & difficult to find. Condos provide affordable, safe housing for those who cannot afford something else. HUD unfortunately had many rules/regulations to prevent people from buying. Many of those rules will now change if this Bill gets passed through the Senate. See written copy of Ilene’s report.

- Legislation – *Ivette* – Ivette is keeping her eyes open but not much is moving during this election year.
- Education, Public Safety and Student Life Committee – Per Rev. Turner, the African American Community Roundtable is working with the HCPD to sponsor a Community Public Safety forum in September in an effort to build bridges. The purpose is to engage the community in discussions on how we can enhance community policing between the Police Department and various ethnic groups in the county. (Tentatively planned for last Thursday or Saturday in September. More info will follow once confirmed.)

Per Frank, in response to various incidents that occurred where students exhibited racially offensive behavior, the school system commissioned a committee for Diversity & Inclusion. Six meetings were held to offer recommendations to the BOE and Superintendent. Four broad areas covered were: Curriculum, Student Voice, Workforce Diversity, and Professional Learning. Eli and Opel participated and were representatives of the HRC. Recommendations are now being reviewed by different divisions within the Central Office, as well as, staff on the committee. Final recommendations will go to the Board on August 18<sup>th</sup>. ALL recommendations will be submitted, not just those refined by the staff. A conference will be held at Atholton High School on June 29-30th – the focus is “Student Voice.” Frank will get more information and forward to Reverend Turner.

- HRC Awards Committee – *Bianca & Opel* – Bianca will work with Opel to determine possible date for HRC Awards 2017. Target is April 2017. Opel thanked Stephanie for assisting with the overall awards program, and the success of the entire event. Opel also thanked Bianca for spear-heading this program, and for her efforts in pre-planning many details prior to her leaving the country. Joan and Reverend Turner also thanked Opel for his hard work in filling in during Reverend Turner’s absence with hosting the event, welcoming guests, announcing introductions of award winners, special guests, etc.
- Human Trafficking Committee – *Ivan* – No report

- LGBTQ Committee - *Vacant* – Although no report was given, Ivette confirmed that she attended the PFLAG Fundraising event, along with HC Police Officer Wall, and a quick visit from the County Executive. It was a huge success, and a large turn-out from many citizens across the county.
- Aging, Disability and Health Care Committee – *Bianca* – Please see Bianca’s written report.

7. STUDENT REPORT – Ivette and Eli are working together on an informational brochure in hopes that this information can be circulated, displayed in the Guidance Counseling Offices. Ivette will talk to Dr. Sands and Frank on how we can get this resource available within the school system. Eli was unable to attend the June meeting, however, an invitation will be extended to him, to attend the July meeting for a formal farewell, and to personally thank him for his service.

#### 8. STAFF REPORT/UPDATES –

Dr. Sands gave an overview of OHR cases. Students who participated in the “Conversation with Students on Hate & Bias” will determine when the next meeting will be held, possibly resuming in late summer/early fall. Students who submitted their applications for the open HRC Student position will be invited to join.

All of those interested in assisting Human Trafficking victims can attend monthly training session co-sponsored by the Safe House of Hope. Dr. Sands is requesting to have a representative from AGAST to come and speak to Commissioners during the September or October meeting.

“Circles and More Circles” training will be conducted by the Dept. of Justice. More information will follow. OHR has 2 open positions; advertisements for both will be posted in July.

#### 9. NEW BUSINESS –

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS/UPDATES – Juneteenth Celebration being held tomorrow, 6/17 at the Historic Oakland Conference and Ballroom, 12 noon – 8 pm, lots of activities for children, great for families, please stop by. Stephanie will circulate information on 50 + Expo being held in October. Commissioners are encouraged to attend and participate. Volunteers are needed to at the OHR/HRC booth. A volunteer sign-up sheet will be sent to everyone via email.

II. ADJOURNMENT – Meeting adjourned at 9:23 p.m.