HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

APPROVED Minutes
May 20, 2021

Meeting occurred via WebEx Teleconferencing

Chair Scott Markow called meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Scott Markow, (Chair), Bianca Chang (Vice Chair), Mabrooka Chaudhry, Lynda Earle, Bob Ford, Peter Hwang, Kui Zhao, Gabriel Terrasa, Joan Hash, and Jonathon Di Pietro (Student Commissioner).

Absent: Joshua Kaufmann.

Staff Present: Yolanda F. Sonnier (Executive Secretary)

Legal Counsel: Melissa Goldmeier

Public Attendees Present: Keith Merkey

I. PUBLIC FORUM
Keith Merkey, from MD Commission of Civil Rights, attended and just wanted to sit in.

II. APPROVAL OF April 15, 2021 MINUTES
Scott stated April minutes were not finished yet and will be deferred to June meeting.

III. CHAIR’S REPORT – SCOTT
Congratulated Peter and Joan for being reappointed to the Human Rights Commission for a 3-year term. This is Jonathon’s last meeting. Thanked Nominating Committee for meeting deadlines. Thanked Awards Committee for finalizing a place and date and names for the Awards Ceremony. Thanked Yolanda for filling in for Chaunta. May is AAPI month and if attended any events please let Mabrooka know so it can be added to annual report.

UPCOMING:
LGBTQ Pride Month is June. Bob confirmed the Pride Festival will be in October. There will be 2 presentations to Commission. The first will be in June by the Director of Howard County Housing, regarding Howard County Master Plan. The second will be in July by Mike Mitchell, Director of Luminus Network for New Americans, formerly known as FIRN.

The county webpage update looks nice but HRC website still needs refreshing. Yolanda stated that they can work with Marla and will reach out to Marla regarding the update. Scott wants the OHRE site be moved in order for the public can view it easily. Kui and Joan expressed their thoughts on the new website. Scott wanted to know if we can have meeting with speakers in person with masks outdoors in June and July. Yolanda created a poll and the results show 8 people said Yes for June, 8 people said Yes for July, 1 person said No for June, and 1 person said No for July. Because not unanimous, Scott stated the 2 meetings will not be in person.

IV. STUDENT REPORT
Jonathan talks about his “term report” showing recommendations of reporting hate crime biases. Asked Yolanda why ages are not provided in reports. Yolanda responded that the police department does not provide that information to us. Jonathan states that it is important because we cannot determine what age group that have encountered HBI without those numbers.
Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion meetings: There were 48 HBI cases and only 8 went to the Police. Social media was involved in 42 of the HBI reports. Schools teach from a Eurocentric view, and not from other views. Students feel there is lack of staff accountability and there is a need to include marginalized groups when discussions involve diversity. Student body believes the same students that are chosen for leadership roles keep being chosen. No variety.

HCPSS HBI Reporting Process: ODEI stated that they do not investigate or provide resolutions to the reported situations but do provide school administration support during that process. They do not contact the police unless a staff member reports it. The flaw is that cases must be reported to the police to be included in the stats. Another issue is that students are fearful bringing these situations to the teachers. Mabrooka talks about the school’s Office Referral Form that would include students’ name, incident, and the time of incident. There is only one category that the teacher would check off and that is “bullying/cyberbullying/intimidation”, but nothing specific that shows ‘discrimination’. This usually does not get reported to the police. HR would launch an investigation for a staff member. They will gather statements, question possible witnesses, and provide info to Staff Relations. Office of Staff Relations will then decide if this was an actual incident and how to deal with situation. Can appeal to Chief to Human Resources if needed or involve law enforcement. When appeal happens, teacher’s union is usually involved. It is common knowledge that if you report something, there will be retaliation with no resolution. Students are reluctant to report incidents. The processes and training are inconsistent for HCPSS. Staff appear unsatisfied with the training offered to them. Staff wants an independent reporting system apart from the school system.

Recommendations: 1) HCPSS needs to build trust with staff and students, 2) Build a better reporting process, 3) Anonymize reports.

Lynda questions if the issue is the ‘culture’ around reporting. Scott asks if this report will go public and Jonathan states that he intends it to be, however, the report has been given to HRC. The individuals interviewed in the report remain anonymous.

V. EXECUTIVE SECRETARY REPORT
Yolanda states the department has several AAPI events this month, concerning the Chen, Filipino, Korean, Indian, Chinese community. There was an email about pronouns that was sent out to everyone. The office completed the 2020 Annual Report and has been posted on the website. The office has 3 vacancies, the Outreach Coordinator, Intake Investigator, and Compliance Investigator. Interviews for Chaunta’s position has begun. Other interviews are underway. Yolanda asks the commission to be mindful when communicating with staff and with each other. Scott should be copied for any communication that deals with Constituent Services or any other department within the county, out of the OHRE. Yolanda gives thanks to Joan, Peter, and Bob for their work on the Nomination Committee. Executive Office is stating that there should be a reason as to why you chose or have that recommendation and to communicate with Scott. For the remaining vacancy, should provide ranking and reasons. Peter states we have a right to decide our own protocols on providing our ranking and reasons, before providing that information automatically. The county has plans to reopen the building on July 13th by appointment only, and on August 2nd offices will fully open to the public, but this is dependent on the COVID situation. The US State’s Attorney’s Office for the Office of Civil Rights will give a presentation on May 26th at 4 pm. Discussed if the HRC email is subject to public record.

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS
a. Legislation:
Scott sent out the written report and thanked Jonathan. There were several bills sent to the Governor that are still pending. He has until June 1st to sign or veto them. There were several new bills passed through the House of Reps that involved hate crimes: to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act, and the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act (the Asian American Pacific Islander Hate Crimes Act).

b. Awards:
Lynda thanked Bianca and Gab and OHRE. The date of ceremony is October 19th, 2020, at the Maryland Conservancy. It is reserved for the County Executive with a request that he does a proclamation for the namesake awards. Potential budget of $3,000.00. Deadline of August 15th for nominations to be in before reporting to full commission. Bianca and Marla used Survey Monkey for nominees. Theme: We Are More, Uplifting the Human Spirit. Entertainment: Hammond HighSchool’s Choir, and Atholton High School ROTC for the color guard.

Lynda asks if we still want 2 individual awards or just 1 for each category? Peter suggests go with 1, but if needed than can go with 2 depending on the number of applicants and if its deserving. Joan motions for 1 per category and agree if there are 2 close candidates than award 2. Peter 2nd’s the motion. All in favor.

c. Outreach:
Mabrooka speaks about the Solidarity Vigil concerning the Sikh community after the mass shooting in Annapolis, MD, on April 22nd. Also attended the AAPI Wellness Meeting on May 13th, brainstormed about mental health, domestic abuse/violence, drug overdoses, physical health, and those who are uninsured. There were thoughts about opening an AAPI Heritage Center in Howard County. Mabrooka was invited to a meeting called, “HOPE” (Honoring Our Perspectives Energetically),” by Michelle Tamal on Wednesday, May 26th, at 4:30 pm, in efforts to have a place for Asian American educators to come and share experiences. If anyone attends anything to let Mabrooka know for the Annual Report. Bob states that he attended the HCPSS Rainbow Conference.

d. Nominating:
Peter went over the process of choosing candidates. There were 2 regular commissioner vacancies and 1 student commissioner. Decided to send 2 names for the full commissioner vacancies and 1 name for the student commissioner vacancy. The relayed this to the Executive County’s Office and he declined the full commissioner candidates but accepted the student commissioner candidate and sent that to the Council. Gab asks if release ranking and reasonings, will this be subject to the public. Peter says Yes, and Melissa states that there are exceptions to Public Information Act. Peter asked if they discussed rankings if this can be in a Closed Session and Melissa states yes. A debate about the rankings and reasonings being requested ensued. Peter motions to defer this decision to the Nominating Committee, including Scott, on how to reply to the request of the County Executive Office. Bob 2nd’s the motion. All in favor.

e. Immigration:
Joan was in communication with a contact for putting the Immigration Status in the County Code. Joan was in communicating with Jennifer Jones via email. Joan will be sure to CC Yolanda and Scott for future correspondence with Jennifer.

f. Social and Economic Justice:
Kui had to leave early and Scott will fill in for her. The 2 speakers regarding Scott’s report earlier will be speaking at the June and July meeting.

g. **Hate Crimes and Criminal Justice:**
Mabrooka stated Mia Winkley joined a meeting that was with Jonathan and Lynda. 1) Discussed Jonathan’s report, 2) Reviewed HBI information for May (targeted groups were LGBTQ, Jewish, and Asian), 3) Reviewed data from Office of Human Rights Annual reports from 2015 to 2020, 4) the different type of reporting systems that is most advantageous.

VII. **WORKGROUPS**

a. **LGBTQ+:**
Yolanda stated that it is not an official workgroup at this moment unless they get reinstated or gets recommended as a commission or a board.

b. **LA ALIANZA LATINA:**
Gab reported that in its last quarterly meeting, the La Alianza Latina Workgroup discussed at length that there had been various errors in the Spanish translations concerning the notice of the Covid vaccination issued by the County. It was discussed whether the problem was the use of Google translation. The Workgroup suggested that the County should have someone competent in Spanish employed by the County specifically tasked with making these translations. The group is preparing to petition the workgroup to be extended or to become permanent. There are 3 main committees within this workgroup that meet to discuss issues:
   1) Education – focus on programs for Parks and Recs
   2) Health – Accommodations and maternity programs/Insurance
   3) Economic, Equity, and Empowerment – research needs, services, and how jurisdictions addressing these issues in Latina community.

VIII. **NEW BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS**
Joan discusses the issue of scoring candidates and sending it out to the County Executive. This was Jonathan’s last meeting and bid everyone farewell.

IX. **ADJOURNMENT**
All Commissioners voted in favor of adjourning the meeting.