

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2021
7:00 p.m.
VIRTUAL (Zoom)

Members Present

Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair
Janeka Cogdell
Michelle Cho
Kevin Edwards, Vice Chair
Lynette Foster
Chris Harris
Katherine Lloyd
Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson
Scott Schwartz

Staff Present

Jean Keller, Investigator
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez

Members Excused

Danielle Beach
Matt Harris, Chair
Susan Kellom
David Rigsby

Guests

Fiona Lassiter

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Vice Chair, Kevin Edwards

Vice Chair Edwards called the meeting to order at 7:05p.m. Introductions were made. Vice Chair Edwards welcomed Fiona Lassiter, who is interested in joining the Human Rights Commission and said that she is his neighbor and the Vice President of their HOA.

2. Approval of October Minutes

Upon a motion by Vice Chair Brunner, seconded by Commissioner Foster, the Commission approved the minutes of the October meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye with one abstention.

3. Executive Committee /Upcoming Meetings

Vice Chair Edwards stated that the Executive Committee met on November 8th, met with Dr. Goodman Okpara from the Office of Housing, who is seeking the Commission's support in conducting Fair Housing Testing to identify discrimination.

Vice Chair Edwards also reported that the Executive Committee had discussed the Commission's priorities for the remainder of the year. He added that one of the topics they discussed was the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and their bias testing. Commissioner Brunner talked about the pretrial risk assessment instrument, which is used to determine whether people qualify for parole or should be released on bail. She stated that the Department of Criminal Justice Services has been proactive about reaching out to different groups, experts and consulting on the design of this software, the use of this instrument and putting it through some bias testing. She added that they are coming up with a version 2.0 and would like to make a presentation to the Human Rights Commission after March 2022.

Vice Chair Edwards stated that he had brought up the subject of Contributory Negligence about two meetings ago and said that everyone on the Executive Committee is on board with supporting advocating for a change on this legislation. He said that if the Human Rights Commission does not want to advocate for it as it does not fall under the Commission's responsibilities, however, the Commission can get another Commission to bring it up before the City Council. Vice Chair Edwards explained that

Contributory Negligence is a doctrine in the following four states: Alabama, Maryland, North Carolina and Virginia. He added that in contributory negligence doctrine, if the insurance company or their attorneys discover or show that you are one percent at fault for the accident, they can deny paying any of the medical expenses from the accident. He added that contributory negligence is an antiquated law, it has been around since the 1800's and that it disproportionately impacts low income people.

Commissioner Schwartz stated that he would like to have the support of another Commission that has a better connection to this because he does not know that it falls under the Human Rights purview, but that he supports it. Director Kelleher stated that she will check with Sarah Taylor to see if anyone else is bringing this issue forward. After an extensive discussion on this issue, Commissioner Palmer Johnson made a motion to make this issue a priority for the Commission, seconded by Commissioner Schwartz and the motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Schwartz stated that he will be happy to draft something after Director Kelleher talks to Sarah Taylor and finds out about the status of the issue. Vice Chair Edwards reported that Acting Police Chief Don Hayes will be coming to the February Commission meeting.

Vice Chair Brunner stated that they have spoken about the pre-trial risk assessment instrument and said that she has reached out to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services Vice Chair Edwards also reported that Sarah Taylor will be the guest speaker for the December meeting. Commissioner Cogdell stated that she was trying to contact the Police Chief regarding an issue with community policing. Director Kelleher advised her to raise this issue in the February meeting, and will provide Commissioner Cogdell the contact information for the Police Department.

4. Alexandria's Community Remembrance Project

Vice Chair Edwards stated that Director Kelleher had sent out a PowerPoint presentation to Commissioners about the Community Remembrance project. Director Kelleher stated that the steering committee is meeting with representatives from EJI initiative in Montgomery, Alabama tomorrow. She added that the monthly newsletter is available now, but it has to be requested. She stated that the goal is to bring a replica of the pillar back, which has the names of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas. Director Kelleher will ask Audrey Davis to see if she can join the Commission at the December meeting.

5. Old and New Business

Rainbow Crosswalk letter

Director Kelleher stated that last month she had checked with Yon Lambert, the head of Transportation and Environmental services and Diane Ruggiero, the Deputy Director of RPCA and in charge of Public Arts. Director Kelleher stated that because there will be a new City Manager, things will not start moving until that is settled, but both Yon Lambert and Ms. Ruggiero suggested to meet with representatives of the Commission.

ARPA Funds

Vice Chair Edwards stated that the Commission had talked about this last month Alexandria has designated \$3 million dollars to give a basic income to 150 families in the low-income population, which is \$500 a month for the next two years. He reported that non-profit organizations are going to target certain low-income people that meet the eligibility requirement and will ask them to apply, and then the Committee for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds will randomly select those 150 families who are going to be used as the test for this minimum basic income.

Director Kelleher shared the news on the 3G coverage and how this adversely impacts elderly and poor people who have old phones; this is an issue that is cutting off communication for a lot of people. Commissioner Schwartz stated that this is certainly something that affects the poor and the elderly and he thinks this is an issue for the Human Rights Commission. Vice Chair Edwards stated that the first step will be for Director Kelleher to send out information to the Commission on this issue. Then it will be put under new business on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting.

6. Liaison Reports

Commissioner Palmer Johnson reported that the Commission for Women has two subcommittees; one on affordable housing committee and the second on domestic and sexual assault. She shared that she serves on the affordable housing committee. She additionally reported that October was Domestic Violence awareness month, and everyone wore purple on October 21 to make the public aware of it. She added that the Affordable Housing committee reviewed the proposed legislative changes for 2022.

Commissioner Lloyd reported that the Alexandria Commission on Person with Disabilities did not have a guest speaker and they focused mainly on their effort to start working on Autism awareness month, which is in April. Commissioner Lloyd announced that she will be leaving the Commission, and that January will be her last meeting. She said that her family and she are moving to New Mexico.

Commissioner Cogdell reported that the Economic Opportunities Commission is focusing on eviction housing and Landlord. She shared that their guest speaker was Melodie Seau from the Housing Office. She stated that the Economic opportunities Commission is focusing on breaking down in different sub committees for childcare, food and housing.

7. Announcements /Adjournment

Director Kelleher announced that she will be preparing a December Human Rights Proclamation.

MOTION: adjourn the meeting.

Palmer Johnson/Schwartz **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05p.m.