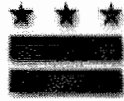


**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**



**UNOFFICIAL COMMISSION MEETING**

July 9, 2014

One Judiciary Square, 441 Fourth Street, NW, Room 1117

**ATTENDEES**

**Commissioners:**

Nkechi Taifa, Chairperson  
Michael Ward, Vice Chairperson  
Dr. Edwin Powell, Secretary  
Dr. John D. Robinson  
Alexandra Beninda

**Commissioners Whose Reappointment Has Not Been Completed:**

Motoko Aizawa  
David Scruggs

**New Commissioners Who Had Not Been Sworn-in:**

Dr. Alberto Figueroa-Garcia  
Michelle McLeod  
Ali Muhammad

**Commission on Human Rights Staff:**

David C. Simmons, Chief Administrative Law Judge  
Dianne S. Harris, Administrative Law Judge  
Christina Cobb

**Members of the Public:**

Michael Sindram  
Deborah Neville  
Statement of Carolyn Cook [Submitted in writing]

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Taifa called the Commission's May meeting to order at 6:33pm.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Secretary Powell conducted the roll call and five Commissioners were present. Since eight Commissioners were not present, a quorum was not reached and the

Commission was unable to transact official business. However, the Commission did utilize the opportunity to discuss several items. The three newly nominated Commissioners introduced themselves to the body.

### **III. ADOPTION OF MEETING MINUTES**

Lacking a quorum the Commission did not adopt the January meeting minutes or the March or May unofficial meeting minutes.

### **IV. REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

Director Monica Palacio presented the report on behalf of OHR and gave a brief overview of its performance since the last Commission meeting. She reported about several Policy and Communications unit initiatives. A Human Rights Liaison training program on the Human Rights Act is scheduled for July 15<sup>th</sup> with several social justice organizations. She also announced that the Office was finalizing a plan designed to prevent discrimination and increase the reporting of alleged incidents of discrimination concerning District Taxicabs failing to haul certain people because of their race or disability. She also reported about a major Language Access Program event which involving more than 100 limited and non-English proficient residents who discussed (in 10 different languages) their experiences with and assessment of the Language Access Program over its first 10 years. This program was extremely well received. Director Palacio also announced that the General Counsel, Alexis Taylor, would be leaving her position in August, and that Administrative Law Judge, Eli Bruch had resigned his position in June.

With respect to statistical information, she reported that in May, the Office docket 29 complaints and 44 cases were closed during the month. The settlement benefits for May were \$54,363, bringing the total settlement benefit for the year to \$1,250,673.29. In June, 35 complaints were docketed and 30 cases were closed. The settlement benefits for June were \$175,628, bringing the total settlement benefit for the year to \$1,426,301.29

The Commissioners discussed several matters with the Director concerning such matters such as interactions with the Taxi Commissions, how reports of failure to haul individuals might be reported and the process of how Director's Inquiries regarding issues of discrimination worked.

### **V. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

Chief Judge Simmons delivered the report of the Commission and presented an overview of its performance since the last Commission meeting.

The Commission currently has a docket of 7 Commission cases, 3 OHR cases, and 4 CBX appeals. Judge Simmons reported that looking at the case closure numbers thus far in the fiscal year; the Commission will meet all of its performance goals for the year.

With respect to the appointment of various Commissioners, Judge Simmons reported that the 180-day holdover term of three Commissioners had expired on June 30<sup>th</sup>. He also noted that the terms of three Commissioners would expire on December 31, 2014. However, he reported that he had been advised that the three Commissioners who were serving in a holdover status had been re-nominated by the Mayor for a new term. Also, those Commissioners whose terms would expire on December 31, 2014 would also be re-nominated. The staff of the Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety had advised him that after the summer recess, it was anticipated that the Council would move expeditiously on the confirmation of both sets of Commissioners. It was further reported that the three newly nominated Commissioners who had appeared before the Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety earlier in July, would have their nominations presented to the full Council for action at the July legislative session.

Judge Simmons reported that planning for the Human Rights Award Gala on December 11, 2014, was already underway. It was noted that the Awards Committee would be seeking nominations for the Neil Alexander Humanitarian Award.

Finally, Judge Simmons alerted the body that Judge Eli Bruch had accepted a position as an Administrative Law Judge with the DC Office of Administrative Hearings.

## **VI. OLD BUSINESS**

Judge Simmons reported on the roundtable hearing held by the Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Commissioner Aizawa testified, as did Commission nominees Alberto Figueroa-Garcia, Michelle McLeod and Ali Muhammad. As noted above, Judge Simmons reported that it was expected that the full Council would act on the candidacy of the three newly nominated Commissioners at the July Legislative Session. He also stated that he would follow-up with the Council Committee with respect to action on the confirmation of the three holdover Commissioners.

## **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

The Commissioners were asked to consider a possible theme for this year's Human Rights Awards event. It was suggested that perhaps a theme acknowledging that 2014 was the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 might be appropriate. Commissioner McCollough, who is particularly skilled at developing themes for various types of campaigns, was not at the meeting, however he had proposed a possible theme and Judge Simmons reported that he would follow-up with Commissioner McCollough.

## **VIII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

Michael Sindram discussed several concerns he had with the Office and the Commission.

Ms. Carolyn Cook had previously submitted a written statement which had been circulated to the Commissioners prior to the meeting via e-mail.

Ms. Rebecca Neville a law student volunteer with the Amara Legal Center attended the meeting. She was introduced and told the group a little about the Amara Legal Center.

**IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Chairperson Taifa announced that Commissioner McCollough was unable to attend the meeting that evening because he had recently gotten married and was on his honeymoon. All of the Commissioners expressed their congratulations to Commissioner McCollough and his bride.

Chairperson Taifa also noted that recently she had heard Commissioner Earline Budd on the radio talking about a human rights issue and wanted to bring that to the attention of the group.

**X. ADJOURNMENT**

The Commission's May meeting was adjourned at 7:44pm.

**X. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

No Executive Session was held.