

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, JULY 16, 2024
7:00 p.m., City Hall
301 King Street, Room 2000
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Marc Bendick, Vice Chair
Lisl Brunner
April Breslaw
Iulia Fratila
Matt Harris
Manisha Maniyar
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson, Vice Chair
Megan Prince (participated over the phone)
Tom Reeder, Jr.
David Rigsby
Scott Schwartz
Jon Thompson, Chair (participated over the phone)

Staff Present

Anna McClure, Investigator/Acting Director
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Un-excused

Conrad Sylvanus

Guests

Dr. Matthew Henry, ACHS

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Vice Chair Marc Bendick

Vice Chair Bendick called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of Minutes of the June Meeting

Upon a motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Reeder, the minutes of the June meeting were approved. All Commissioners present voted aye, with one abstention.

3. Guest- Dr. Matthew Henry, Alexandria City High School

Vice Chair Bendick welcomed Dr. Henry, who has been an English teacher for 15 years at Alexandria City High School (ACHS). Dr. Henry said he had had an interesting year at ACHS. He shared his experience as a gay teacher and said he was caught off guard this year by targeted name-calling. He shared an incident with students after he asked them to go to their classrooms when they were in the hallway. One girl asked him if he was a "f**got," and he did not know what to say, because it has never happened to him before. There was a second incident where students were in the hallway after the bell had rung. One kid asked, "what period is this," and Dr. Henry said, "this is period three, which is where you should be going." The students responded, "we are not talking to you, f**got!" Dr. Henry was very upset because this was the second time it happened. He went to look for his direct supervisor but could not find him. He went to find an administrator. He wanted to get these kids identified, because he was tired of it. He stated that he reported the incident to administrators, but they failed to respond to the student's behavior.

He said every teacher in the building has a story equal to or worse than his; he has not had anyone physically touch him, but other teachers have. He said the first thing the administrator said about the students was, "it must just be their culture." He said that he received an email from an administrator saying they had identified the five kids and asked if he would participate in a

restorative one-on-one session. Dr. Henry declined, because he did not want to meet with all five students when only one said it. He said he was happy to talk to the student who made the comments, if the student was willing, but he has not heard anything at all.

Dr. Henry did not realize the School Board was going to post his letter, until he heard from a colleague expressing support. He has also heard from teachers around the county about their experiences. The only thing he has heard from the Executive Administrator is, “Dr. Henry has had a rough year.” He said he had a rough year in the hallway, but his classroom was great. The behavior happening in the hallway daily has caused his colleagues to shut their doors; he cannot control what is happening out there, he can only control what is happening in his classroom.

Dr. Henry was advised that the Office of Human Rights has jurisdiction that he has 300 days to file a discrimination complaint. Commissioners asked whether the union provides any guidance; he said the union provides support, but no guidance. Commissioners asked if there is a process in place for teachers if they felt unsafe. Dr. Henry said he was not aware of one, but there is a desire to have something in place to hold kids accountable. He stated that administrators and teachers are asking for help but not receiving it from Central Office. Commissioners questioned the role of security guards. Dr. Henry said security in the building has no power and kids are aware of it.

Commissioner Schwartz suggested sending a letter to the School Board, expressing the Commission's interest in the topic. Chair Thompson suggested sending it to the principal and other administrators, inviting them to speak to the Commission. Upon a motion by Commissioner Brunner, seconded by Commissioner Rigsby, Commissioner Schwartz will draft the letter, for approval at the September meeting, inviting the Superintendent and ACHS principal to the October meeting to address the issues that the Commission has concerns about, including safety of LGBTQ+ teachers and students, student behavior and lack of accountability, a rally at which Jewish students felt unsafe, and lack of the security in the hallways.

4. Executive Committee Meeting

Vice Chair Bendick said the Executive Committee discussed the Community Policing Review Board. It has been four years since the Board was established, and they have yet to do a single investigation or to become fully operational. Commissioner Harris stated that he met with Rob Krupicka, who is on the Board and said that the problem was with the MOU and expressed that he likes the idea of having someone from the AHRC sit on the Board. Chair Thompson shared that the Commission is inviting the CPRB to the September meeting and hopes that a good number of members will come. He wants to know what roadblocks and challenges are present and suggested discussing out how the Human Rights Commission can assist to in making the process efficient. Commissioner Schwartz will continue to attend the CPRB meetings.

Commissioner Harris said he reached out to Kevin Harris, from ARHA’s resident association and he has accepted the invitation to come to speak to the Commission at the October meeting.

Chair Thompson said they discussed legislative proposals but were unsure of the deadline. Acting Director McClure said it is usually late September and that Alethea Predeoux is acting

Legislative Director. Chair Thompson said that they talked about adding automatic expungement to their proposals. Acting Director McClure will share an updated draft with the Commission.

Commissioner Harris reported that there has been a request to get a rainbow crosswalk in Del Ray. Commissioner Schwartz and Commissioner Rigsby will meet with the person interested.

5. Old/New Business

Acting Director McClure asked if those who expressed interest in participating in the Charlottesville Human Rights Commission virtual meeting on July 18 received a link to join.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Breslaw, the Human Rights Commission will not meet in August. All Commissioners present voted aye except one.

Vice Chair Bendick said he met with Tenant and Workers United; their perception the Commission is a talk shop, and it is a waste of time to come to meetings. He learned that it seems a lot of non-profits, particularly small ones, are unhappy with how DCHS funds were distributed.

6. Liaison Reports

Commissioner Palmer Johnson said the Commission for Women did not meet in July, but there is webinar on July 30, which she will share details about with Acting Director McClure.

Commissioner Schwartz reported that the Commission on HIV/AIDS came up with language to support legislative proposals. There is big concern regarding major budget cuts around the state and funds reallocated, because Alexandria has one of the highest transmission rates in the state.

Commissioner Reeder reported that City Council approved the Commission Aging Report on their four-year age-friendly plan, and that they are working on the next plan. He said that the commission heard from Erika Kleiner about the older LGBTQ+ community. He said the City celebrates birthdays of residents who turn 100; this year's celebration is on September 10th.

Commissioner Prince reported that the Commission on Persons with Disabilities had their Awards event, on June 26, and had a brief meeting. The Commission does not meet in July.

8. Public Comment

Owen Albrecht, the new City Paratransit Manager introduced himself and said he manages the City's paratransit services, which is mandated, under the ADA, for people who are unable to ride fixed-routed public transit due to a disability.

9. Announcements /Adjournment

Commissioner Harris stated the City should not rely on Twitter as a means of communication, because Elon Musk is anti-transgender rights.

MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Harris/Commissioner Schwartz **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 p.m.