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PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

M I N U T E S

TIME: 3:18 P.M.

Held at
Honors Suite
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101

November 27, 2023

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission
November 27, 2023

COMMISSIONERS:

Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chair
Dr. Raquel O. Yiengst, Vice Chair
Mayur Patel, Esquire, Secretary - Absent
Dr. Rad Agrawal - Absent
Michael Hardiman, Esquire
Curtis Jones - Absent
Aleena Sorathia - Via telephone

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Chad Dion Lassiter, MSW

CHIEF COUNSEL

Meredith Millard, Esquire

COMMISSION COUNSEL

Vacant

STAFF PRESENT:

Amanda Brothman, Director of Communications
Desiree Chang, Director of Education
Lauren Daman, Director of Human Resources
Caroline Eister, Director of Fair Housing and
Commercial Property
Adrian Garcia, Director of Fair Housing and Commercial
Property
Darlene Hemerka, Esquire, Hearing Examiner
Robert Lindsey, Regional Office Director,
Philadelphia
Heather Roth, Regional Office Director, Harrisburg
Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Hearing Examiner
Ashley Walkowiak, Director of Policy,
Intergovernmental Affairs and Mediation
Debbie Walters, Administrative Officer
Zulay Rojas, Special Assistant to Executive Director

1 ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

2
3 Khera Bowman, Outreach Coordinator, PHRC
4 Ronnessa Edwards, Human Relations Representative, PHRC
5 Razin Karu, Executive Director, Governor's Advisory
6 Commission on AAPI Affairs
7 Stacy McNaney, Esquire, Assistant Chief Counsel, PHRC
8 Katie Merritt, Assistant Deputy Secretary
9 Olga Negrón, Executive Director, GACLA
10 Montrell Smith, Human Relations Representative, PHRC
11

12
13 ***

14 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

15 November 27, 2023

16 ***

17 MEETING CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING STATEMENT

18 [Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chair, called the meeting to
19 order at 3:18 p.m.

20 Pursuant to Section 711 (a) of the Sunshine Act,
21 this Commission meeting may be recorded by attendees.
22 Voluntary participation in the meeting constitutes
23 consent to be recorded. The meeting has been
24 advertised in accordance with the provisions of the
25 Sunshine Act. Prior to the meeting and in keeping
26 with the confidentiality requirements of the Sunshine
27 Act, a closed session was held to discuss compliance
28 matters, management updates, and adjudicative case
29 deliberations.

30 After concluding the business portion of the
31 meeting, any guests present will be invited to

1 introduce themselves and any organizations that they
2 represent. Guests will have an opportunity to
3 briefly address the Commission. All comments are
4 welcomed about equal opportunity and Civil Rights
5 issues and problems with discrimination. We value
6 everyone's partnership in promoting equal opportunity
7 and we're glad to hear about the work of different
8 organizations that are represented; however, the
9 Commission cannot hear any facts relating to any
10 specific cases or open investigations that the
11 Commission may have to rule on in the future.

12 Mr. Bolstein convened the monthly meeting of the
13 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. He noted
14 the presence of a quorum.]

15 ***

16 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

17 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

18 The first item is to adopt the agenda,
19 so I need a motion.

20 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

21 So moved.

22 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

23 Second, .

24 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

25 It's been moved and seconded to adopt

1 the agenda for the meeting. Anybody
2 have any comments? Not hearing any, all
3 in favor say aye?

4 [The motion carried unanimously.]

5 ***

6 APPROVAL OF PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

7 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

8 We have four meeting minutes that we
9 have to vote on, the meeting minutes
10 from July 24, 2023, August 29, 2023,
11 September 18, 2023, and October 23,
12 2023.

13 Is there a motion to approve the
14 minutes?

15 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

16 So moved.

17 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

18 Second.

19 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

20 It's been moved and seconded. Are there
21 any comments on those minutes? Not
22 hearing any, all those in favor of
23 approving those minutes from the four
24 public meetings please say aye. Any
25 opposed?

1 [The motion carried unanimously.]

2

3 ADJUDICATION - RECOMMENDATION AND PROPOSED FINAL
4 ORDER

5 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

6 We do have one adjudication. It's a
7 Rule to Show Cause, Case No. 202201108,
8 Juli Watrous Vs. Orson D. Duran; Megan
9 Rodriguez.

10 [Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Hearing Examiner, noted a
11 complaint regarding this matter was filed on or about
12 March 2, 2023, whereby complainant alleged unlawful
13 discrimination based on her disability when they
14 denied reasonable accommodations and refused to rent
15 to her. And also alleged that respondent engaged in
16 discriminatory harassment and unlawful retaliation
17 after complainant requested reasonable accommodation
18 for disability, specifically a mental disability and
19 has a need for an emotional support animal on
20 premises.

21 Complainant alleged that between November 11 and
22 18 of 2022, respondent engage in discriminatory
23 retaliatory and harassing behavior which included but
24 not limited to observing her in her home for hours
25 uninvited, unfounded accusations of uncleanliness and

1 accusations of not having obtained necessary shots
2 and licenses for emotional support animal as well as
3 public accusations of lying when complainant posted
4 online about her ordeal.

5 This spanned the time from her initial injury
6 about renting to her official denial of the
7 opportunity to rent an apartment.

8 The verified amended complaint was served to the
9 respondent on March 14, 2023, and respondent was
10 reminded in August of 2023 of their obligations to
11 answer the complaint.

12 A Petition to Show Cause was filed with our
13 office and subsequently issued on August 30 of this
14 year directing respondent to respond on or before
15 September 19, 2023. To date, respondent has not
16 responded to this Rule to Show Cause.

17 RECOMMENDATION

18 [Hearing Examiner Shehadeh-Cope recommended that the
19 PHRC find probable cause and enter judgement of
20 liability relating to allegations of the amended
21 complaint.

22 She further recommended that the Commission
23 direct conciliation efforts be attempted by the
24 parties, and should they fail, that parties be
25 informed that a public hearing may be held on the

1 issue of damages.

2 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

3 I need a motion to adopt the
4 recommendation of the Proposed Final
5 Order of the Hearing Examiner in Case
6 No. 202201108.

7 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

8 I move that we accept the recommendation
9 of the Hearing Examiner.

10 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

11 Is there a second?

12 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

13 Second.

14 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

15 Is there any comment, any questions, any
16 discussion? Not hearing any, all those
17 in favor of the motion please say aye.
18 Any opposed?

19 [The motion carried unanimously.]

20 ***

21 CONCILIATION AGREEMENTS/CONSENT ORDERS

22 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

23 We have five Conciliation Agreements or
24 consent orders. They're on the agenda
25 as items four through eight, File Nos.

1 201802135, 201802736, 202102248,
2 202102284 and 20220001. I need a motion
3 to approve the Conciliation Agreements.

4 COMMISSIONER SORATHIA:

5 Chairman Bolstein, is there a way for us
6 to separate out number eight. I just
7 have a conflict on that one.

8 CHAIRMAN BOLSTEIN:

9 We'll have to hold off on Consent Order
10 No. 8, that's the Conciliation Agreement
11 or Consent Order Case No. 20220001.

12 The motion will be to approve the
13 Conciliation Agreements or Consent
14 Orders for Items 4 through 7, Case Nos.
15 201802135, 201802736, 202102248 and
16 202102284.

17 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

18 So moved.

19 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

20 Is there a second?

21 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

22 Second.

23 CHAIRMAN BOLSTEIN:

24 Any discussion about any of those? Not
25 hearing any, all those in favor of the

1 motion to approve the Conciliation
2 Agreements or Consent Orders, Item Nos.
3 4 through 7, please say aye. Any
4 opposed?

5 [The motion carried unanimously. Item No. 8,
6 20220001, will be discussed at the December meeting.]

7 ***

8 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

9 We also have 24 Requests for Preliminary
10 Hearing, Item Nos. 9 through 28, Case
11 Nos. 201703102, 201802000, 201803372,
12 201903397, 202001038, 202101518,
13 202101552, 202108148, 202102425,
14 202102433, 202200938, 202201064,
15 202201202, 202201751, 202002902,
16 202101400, 202101643, 202101667,
17 202102536, 202102596, 202200298,
18 202200482, 202201372, 202202187.

19 I need a motion to Deny the Request
20 for Preliminary Hearing.

21 COMMISSIONER SORATHIA:

22 Commissioner Bolstein, I have to recuse
23 myself from No. 22 as well.

24 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

25 The motion would be to deny the Request

1 for Preliminary Hearings for Item Nos. 9
2 through 21 on the agenda and Item Nos.
3 23 through 32 on the agenda. Item No.
4 22 will be postponed until the December
5 meeting.

6 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

7 I move that we deny the Request for
8 Preliminary Hearings.

9 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

10 Is there a second?

11 COMMISSIONER HARDISON:

12 Second.

13 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

14 Any discussion about any of those? Not
15 hearing any, all those in favor of the
16 motion please say aye? Any opposed?

17 [The motion carried unanimously. The Request for
18 Preliminary Hearing for Case No. 202201751 will be
19 discussed at the December meeting.]

20 ***

21 MOTIONS AND OTHER ACTIONS

22 None

23 ***

24 APPROVED FOR PUBLIC HEARING DOCKET

25 None

1 ***

2 PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

3 None

4 ***

5 INTRODUCTIONS/PRESENTATIONS

6 [Chad Dion Lassiter, Executive Director, stated he is
7 honored to have members of the Governor's Advisory
8 Commission present today and asked each of them to
9 introduce themselves and provide a brief history of
10 their involvement with the Commission and what each
11 likes to do during spare time. Four members of the
12 PHRC including Supervisor Edwards, Montrel Smith,
13 Khera Bowman and Director Desiree Chang were asked to
14 share their experiences in dealing with grief,
15 vicarious traumatization, anger and anti-black racism
16 that exists in our democracy.

17 Executive Director Lassiter commented that during
18 Executive Session and Compliance Session sentiments
19 were shared for Samantha Lopez, and something in a
20 tangible way would be done for Samantha's family. He
21 stated that she and Ronnessa share a common bond
22 inside and outside the workplace. As Director Daman
23 has suggested, members of the PHRC will allow for the
24 grieving process.

25 Introductions included Razin Karu, Executive

1 Director for the Governor's Commission on AAPI
2 Affairs; Olga Negrón, Executive Director, GACLA; and
3 PHRC staff. All were then asked to provide a brief
4 summary of their involvement with the PHRC.

5 ***

6 MANAGEMENT REPORTS

7 CHIEF COUNSEL

8 [Meredith Millard, Esquire, PHRC Chief Counsel,
9 identified several matters that legal has been
10 involved with moving primarily to move our case into
11 law on the public hearing docket and Commonwealth
12 Court. She noted being ready to address any issues
13 that may come up.]

14 ***

15 HEARING EXAMINERS

16 [It was noted by the Hearing Examiner that October and
17 November were busy months as well as December. Two
18 public hearings were held in October 2023 and a few
19 more before the end of the year, and a number of
20 continuances had been received to allow parties to
21 consider settlement as an alternative option to public
22 hearing.]

23 ***

24 REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PITTSBURGH REGIONAL OFFICE

25 [Chad Dion Lassiter is serving as interim regional

1 director in Pittsburgh due to the retirement of the
2 former regional director this past June but indicated
3 this regional office consisting of three supervisors,
4 investigators and staff continues to do outreach.]

5

6 REGIONAL DIRECTOR, HARRISBURG REGIONAL OFFICE
7 [Heather Roth, Regional Director, reported the office
8 continues to take appointments from the public for
9 intake and receiving a high volume of calls. Case
10 investigations continued to be closed at a high rate,
11 and there had been a number of settlements totaling
12 almost \$1 million. 11 cases had been approved for
13 probable cause with a few pending. Director Roth
14 indicated the staff received mental health first aid
15 training and are now certified mental health
16 responders. They also had domestic health training
17 this past October.

18 Executive Director Lassiter commented that under
19 the leadership of the Harrisburg Regional Director,
20 an Adopt a Family Program was initiated to serve
21 those in need.]

22

23 REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL OFFICE
24 [Robert Lindsey, Regional Director, noted he is
25 honored to be associated with this organization and

1 pleased with the dedicated Philadelphia office staff
2 who serve the citizens of the Commonwealth.]

3 ***

4 DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

5 [Amanda Brothman, Director of Communications,
6 reported increased page visits and more likes on all
7 four platforms. Press releases went out in October
8 regarding PHRC events and noted several upcoming
9 events in December, including a virtual lunch and
10 learn with Dr. Anita Miller, a Fair Housing in Power
11 Hour, Fair Housing in Local Governments virtual event
12 and also a virtual diversity speaks on Islam and
13 Islamophobia on December 7, 2023.]

14 ***

15 DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

16 [Desiree Chang, Director of Education, reported the
17 education division continues to follow trends in
18 education related to discrimination throughout the
19 Commonwealth. Trainings with internal Commonwealth
20 agencies and those external agencies that request
21 them continue to be provided. She noted that
22 outreach coordinator Bowman is actively engaged with
23 advisory councils and the education division
24 continues to participate in career days and other
25 activities that foster relationships with the PHRC.

1 Executive Director indicated an ENUF report on
2 ending racism on college campuses will be made by
3 himself and Senator Art Haywood which started with
4 testimony in the House and Senate around a bill to
5 look at microaggressions and racism on college
6 campuses. Race dialog efforts will also be made on
7 college campuses.]

8 ***
9 DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
10 [Ashley Walkowiak, Director of Policy,
11 Intergovernmental Affairs and Mediation, reported a
12 90 percent success rate of cases mediated in October.
13 Analysis was provided on the White paper on state
14 laws and policies affecting transgender people.]

15 ***
16 DIRECTOR OF FAIR HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY
17 [Adrian Garcia, former Director of Fair Housing and
18 Commercial Property, reported that discussions
19 continue with intergovernmental partners regarding
20 recommendations outlined earlier. The first airing
21 of PHRC Speaks, Fair Housing in the 21st Century, is
22 scheduled on the Pennsylvania Cable Network for
23 December 3, 2023, with Dr. Robert G. Schwemm, author
24 of the Fair Housing litigation books. Mr. Michael
25 Akinwumi, Chief Responsible AI from the National Fair

1 Housing Alliance, and outreach coordinators Brittany
2 Mellinger and Khera Bowman will also be on the air
3 talking about outreach efforts and various programs.]

4 ***

5 DIRECTOR OF ENFORCEMENT

6 [Debbie Walters, Enforcement Division, explained this
7 division is responsible for actions after a case
8 closes and noted closure letters for the last month
9 were issued. This division also manages the Office
10 of Appeals which is where the request for a
11 preliminary hearing is filed.

12 The Enforcement Division also works on the Social
13 Justice Ambassadors Program and noted that group
14 meetings were held this past November with the
15 ambassadors who have volunteered for these roles.
16 Ms. Walters also added that this division is also
17 responsible for analyzing data of the Commission.]

18 ***

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

20 [Chad Dion Lassiter, MSW, noted that every year for
21 the past five years at least 10 staff members had
22 been selected to attend the Martin Luther King
23 Leadership Institute, and this year 15 had been
24 selected. He reported the continuance of race
25 dialogue on college campuses. DEI Commonwealth

1 explained it was a gathering of mental health
2 therapists from across the nation who discussed
3 different nuances that occur in the mental health
4 profession.

5 Ms. Negron noted one of the themes at the
6 symposium was that as therapists and black
7 professionals something called a home space was
8 necessary to discuss different issues and concerns
9 that come up as black mental health therapists so as
10 not to offend.

11 Ms. Negron indicated the Black Mental Health
12 Symposium helped her to clarify what she would like
13 to see done under the position of director of social
14 justice and mental health when it comes to increasing
15 mental health equity and addressing trauma specific
16 to our communities based on race. She referred to
17 what's called Continuous Traumatic Stress Disorder,
18 which is similar to PTSD but continuing.

19 Ms. Negron noted looking forward to being in the
20 position of Director, Social Justice and Mental
21 Health to help provide training to respondents. By
22 attending the symposium she felt enrichment as a
23 person, employee and public servant for the citizens
24 of the Commonwealth.]

25

1 [Razin Karu, Executive Director, Governor's Advisory
2 Commission on AAPI Affairs, presented before the
3 Commission for discussion regarding her attendance at
4 the same symposium. She talked about one session she
5 attended, Rethinking Mental Health in the Criminal
6 Justice System, chosen because of her family's ties
7 to law enforcement. She stated this session
8 acknowledged that there is a large population of
9 African Americans being arrested when they could be
10 receiving help for their mental health issue.

11 Ms. Karu talked about a session by Dr. Kent
12 Butler who shared a picture his eight-year-old
13 daughter had made and on one side of the paper the
14 word white with a colorful heart and on the other
15 side of the paper the word black with a broken heart
16 because they can't express love with one another,
17 with the words B in black people, L was red for
18 bloodshed and M was brown for brown people. She
19 stated this highlighted the fact that more needs to
20 be accomplished for the next generations.]

21 ***

22 [Montrell Smith, Human Relations Representative,
23 provided thanked Director Lassiter and the Commission
24 for allowing him to attend the Black Mental Health
25 symposium. Mr. Smith commented he did not know there

1 were so many people of color in that field.

2 He noted attending a session by Dr. Michael Allen
3 a former football star from Wisconsin who raised his
4 littler brother due to both parents being drug
5 addicts. He talked about Dr. Allen's brother having
6 learning disabilities and being faced with a lot of
7 racism from his educators who were predominantly
8 white. Mr. Smith had concerns that there are many
9 other kids facing that type of racism in school.

10 Mr. Smith noted he was disappointed in the You
11 Good, Bro session at the conference which centered
12 around why millennial men don't seek counseling and
13 then also a discussion regarding black men
14 discriminating against other black men or men of
15 different races because they're gay and not given the
16 proper service.]

17

18 [Ronnessa Edwards, PHRC Human Relations
19 Representative, echoed the sentiments of the other
20 attendees noting further that being in the majority in
21 a room full of black and brown professional men and
22 women and being able to talk candidly was liberating.
23 She referred to some terms used at the conference
24 including racial battle fatigue, complex trauma and
25 racism, how the symptomology is closely related and

1 yet the DSM-5-TR does not recognize complex trauma but
2 the ICD2 does.

3 She talked about the Hayes Cultural Model which
4 addresses cultural complexities and a session by a
5 Caucasian female who was very physically
6 uncomfortable. Ms. Edwards commented that this
7 presenter missed a vital opportunity to grow as a
8 professional and those in attendance missed the
9 opportunity to learn from her how to address these
10 difficult conversations. Ms. Edwards encouraged the
11 Commission to consider sending PHRC representatives
12 again next year and also that ED Lassiter and others
13 present at the conference.

14 Mr. Smith commented that the professionals at the
15 symposium were honored to have PHRC representatives
16 present at the conference.]

17 ***

18 ROUND OF APPLAUSE

19 PUBLIC COMMENT

20 [A member of the planning committee for the 26th
21 Annual Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit will be held
22 on January 19 and 20, 2024 at the Pittsburgh
23 Theological Seminary. The theme is from Othering to
24 Bridging, Reconnecting for Social Change.

25 She thanked Lyle Wood and Adrian Garcia for

1 representing at the past summit. She provided her
2 contact information and requested contact information
3 for the Pittsburgh Regional Office.

4 ***

5 [Chair Bolstein commended members of the Commission
6 and others in attendance for their hard work.]

7 ***

8 ADJOURNMENT

9 [The meeting adjourned at 4:33 p.m.]

10 ***

11 [The next meeting is scheduled for December 18,
12 2023.]

13

CERTIFICATE

1

2

3

4

5

6 I hereby certify that the foregoing summary

7 minutes of the Pennsylvania Human Relations

8 Commission, was reduced to writing by me or under my

9 supervision, and that the minutes accurately

10 summarize the substance of the Pennsylvania Human

11 Relations Commission meeting.

12

13 

14 _____
 Derek Richmond,
 Minute Clerk
 Sargent's Court Reporting
 Service, Inc.

15

16

17

18

19 Respectfully submitted,

20 

21 _____
 Joel Bolstein
 Chairman

22 

o/b/o Mayur Patel

23 _____
 Mayur Patel
 Secretary