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PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

M I N U T E S

TIME: 3:27 P.M.

Held at
Honors Suite
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101

May 20, 2024

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission
May 20, 2024

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COMMISSIONERS:

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

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
- Adrian Garcia, Director of Enforcement
- Caroline Eister, Director of Fair Housing and Commercial Property
- Darlene Hemerka, Esquire, Hearing Examiner-Via Phone
- Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Hearing Examiner
- Heather Roth, Regional Office Director, Harrisburg
- Robert Lindsey, Regional Office Director-Via Phone
- Ashley Walkowiak, Director of Policy, Intergovernmental Affairs and Mediation
- LaDawn Robinson, Regional Office Director, Pittsburgh
- Zulay Rojas, Special Assistant to Executive Director
- Amanda Martin, Clerical Assistant III

AUDIENCE MEMBERS PRESENT:

- Andrae Holsey
- Richard Holsey
- Marcia Bronstein
- Hilary Levine

1 ***

2 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

3 May 20, 2024

4 ***

5 MEETING CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING STATEMENT

6 The time is now 3:27 p.m.

7 Welcome to the public meeting of the Pennsylvania
8 Human Relations Commission. We are pleased to have
9 you join us.

10 Pursuant to Section 711 (a) of the Sunshine Act,
11 65 P.S. § 711(a), this Commission meeting may be
12 recorded by attendees. Your voluntary participation
13 in the meeting constitutes consent to be recorded.
14 The meeting has been advertised in accordance with
15 the provisions of the Sunshine Act. Prior to the
16 meeting and in keeping with the confidentiality
17 requirements of the Sunshine Act, there was a closed
18 session to discuss compliance matters, management
19 updates and adjudicative case deliberations.

20 After concluding with the business portion of the
21 meeting, guests will be invited to introduce
22 themselves and any organizations you represent.
23 Guests will have an opportunity to briefly address
24 the Commission. We welcome your comments about equal
25 opportunity and Civil Rights issues or problems of

1 discrimination. We value your partnership in
2 promoting equal opportunity and would love to hear
3 about the work of organizations represented; however,
4 the Commission cannot hear specifics of open
5 investigations or cases they may have to rule on in
6 the future.

7 Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chair, convened the
8 monthly meeting of the Pennsylvania Human Relations
9 Commission. A quorum was not present. Voting on
10 specific items will be postponed until the June
11 meeting.]

12 ***

13 INTRODUCTIONS

14 [Chad Dion Lassiter, Executive Director, requested
15 introductions of all members of the management team
16 and Commissioners present, followed by the public
17 guests.

18 Hearing Examiner Tamara Shehadeh-Cope has been
19 with the Commission since January of 2023.

20 Amanda Brothman, Director of Communications, has
21 been with the Commission since December 2022.

22 Desiree Chang, Director of Education and Outreach
23 is in her fifth year.

24 Ashley Walkowiak, Director of Policy,
25 Intergovernmental Affairs and Mediation, has one year

1 with the Commission.

2 Adrian Garcia, Director of Enforcement, has four
3 years with the Commission.

4 Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chairperson, PHRC, has
5 been with the Commission for 25 years and has served
6 as Chairperson since 2016. He is also an attorney
7 with the Fox Rothchild group.

8 Chad Dion Lassiter, Executive Director, PHRC, has
9 been with the Commission for six years.

10 Michael Hardiman, Esquire, worked previously for
11 the Commission for 33 years, retired and returned 4
12 years later and has served 8 years as a commissioner.

13 Amanda Martin, Clerical Assistant III, has been
14 with the Commission 2 years.

15 Zulay Rojas, Special Assistant to the Executive
16 Director, has been with the Commission for 3 years.

17 Heather Roth, Regional Director, Harrisburg, has
18 been with the Commission for 11 1/2 years.

19 Caroline Eister, Director of Fair Housing and
20 Commercial Property has been with the Commonwealth
21 since 2007, with the Commission since November.

22 LaDawn Robinson, Regional Director, Pittsburgh,
23 has been with the Commission since January 8 of 2024.

24 Andrae Holsey, President of Blair County NAACP.

25 Richard Holsey, Executive Committee, Blair County

1 NAACP.

2 Marcia Bronstein, Regional Director, American
3 Jewish Committee.

4 Hilary Levine, Associate Director, American
5 Jewish Committee, Philadelphia, and Southern New
6 Jersey.

7 ***

8 [Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chairperson, explained the
9 PHRC is responsible for enforcement of the anti-
10 discrimination laws in the Commonwealth and has
11 jurisdiction over discrimination in employment,
12 housing, public accommodations. Anyone who believes
13 they have been discriminated against and falls within
14 a protected class within the Commonwealth can file a
15 complaint with the PHRC which will then be
16 investigated.

17 PHRC has the ability to offer remedies to those
18 discriminated against. He noted thousands of
19 discrimination complaints are handled annually and
20 the Commission is involved in areas of racial
21 tension.

22 He indicated that recently a regulatory package
23 was developed that became final in August of 2023
24 that extended protected class status to those
25 individuals identified as LGBTQ. Chairperson

1 Bolstein also noted involved with issues related to
2 anti-Semitism. Trainings, outreach, and law
3 enforcement are also provided.

4 ***

5 PRESENTATIONS

6 [Marcia Bronstein, Regional Director, American Jewish
7 Committee, referred to interactive information
8 available on the website found at ajc.org which is
9 constantly updated. She thanked the Executive
10 Director for inviting AJC to present its critical and
11 timely information.

12 Hilary Levine, Associate Director, American
13 Jewish Committee, Philadelphia, and Southern New
14 Jersey, commended the Commission for taking this
15 issue seriously and for the opportunity to share
16 information presenting with partners across the
17 state.

18 Ms. Levine stated the purpose of today's
19 presentation is to share topline findings from AJC's
20 State of Anti-Semitism in America Report 2023, which
21 is available online.

22 She noted the report is comprised of two parallel
23 surveys, one for American Jews age 18 and over and
24 one for U.S. adults aged 18 and over. The report
25 indicates how Americans perceive anti-Semitism in the

1 United States and how American Jews experience it.
2 The report focuses on experiences in perceptions.

3 It's five years since AJC first published State
4 of Anti-Semitism in America Survey of American Jews
5 launched on October 27, 2019, a year after the Tree
6 of Life Synagogue shooting which remains the
7 deadliest attack on American Jews in our country's
8 history.

9 Ms. Levine indicated a parallel survey was added
10 in 2020 of U.S. adults and the report now consists of
11 both surveys.

12 She noted the survey was placed in the field on
13 October 5, 2023, just days before the deadly
14 terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas. The survey was
15 taken out of the field, a few questions and placed it
16 back in the field on October 17, 2023.

17 Ms. Bronstein shared key data points from the
18 2023 report. She indicated that one of the most
19 consequential findings is the number of American
20 Jews, 63 percent, who note that the status of Jews is
21 less secure than a year ago. She talked about
22 incidents at a number of synagogues including signs
23 that have been defaced, Israeli flags stolen, Bring
24 Them Home signs of hostages have been taken down and
25 hate messages chalked on the sidewalk. Ms. Bronstein

1 referred to a 20-year-old Israeli singer on American
2 Idol who made it to the semi-finals and received
3 death threats, and individuals attending the
4 Eurovision Conference were provided police
5 protection.

6 Ms. Bronstein noted that American Jews when
7 surveyed were also asked whether they have changed
8 their behavior one of three ways out of fear of anti-
9 Semitism, including avoiding carrying or displaying
10 an item publicly that might identify them as being
11 Jewish, avoiding certain places or events out of fear
12 or safety, avoiding or posting online contents to
13 identify them as Jewish. She stated nearly half of
14 American Jews changed their behavior out of fear of
15 anti-Semitism.

16 She indicated an American Jew was the victim of
17 an anti-Semitic attack, which Respondent was
18 physically touched, the victim of an anti-Semitic
19 remark and victim of anti-Semitic vandalism. She
20 noted 25 percent indicated being the personal target
21 of an anti-Semitic act. Ms. Bronstein provided an
22 example of how the Philadelphia community was to be a
23 venue for an Israeli film, but the film was cancelled
24 due to concerns of anti-Israel protests. Then an
25 injunction was obtained, and the film was shown.

1 Ms. Bronstein discussed questions on the survey
2 asking American Jews about the 10/7 attack and how
3 safe they felt as Jews in the U.S. after the attack.
4 98 percent stated they heard about the attack. 78
5 percent stated feeling less safe in the U.S. after
6 the attack. Respondents were asked how vulnerable
7 American Jews feel.

8 U.S. adults and the general population were asked
9 whether they have personally seen or heard anti-
10 Semitism in the past 12 months. 39 percent indicated
11 they had, and of the 39 percent, 68 percent indicated
12 they saw it online or on social media. Others saw it
13 in the street, in a store, in their workplace, from a
14 community or religious leader and from friends or
15 family.

16 The survey also questioned whether anti-Semitism
17 is a problem in the U.S. The replies indicated the
18 problem has increased by ten percentage points.
19 Seventy-four (74) percent of the general public noted
20 anti-Semitism is a problem, and 86 percent indicated
21 it had increased in the past five years. For the
22 first time since 2020, the number of Americans who
23 stated anti-Semitism had increased was over half of
24 all Respondents, 56 percent, a significant increase
25 from 2022.

1 Ms. Levine discussed Jewish institutions targeted
2 by anti-Semitism in the past five years with graffiti
3 and broken windows. She noted a restaurant in
4 Philadelphia was the victim of riot outside as the
5 business was owned by a Jewish-American-Israeli
6 entrepreneur.

7 Ms. Bronstein discussed how young Jews are being
8 affected, those between 18 and 29 being the personal
9 target of anti-Semitism last year including on
10 university and college campuses. These individuals
11 avoid carrying items that would identify them as
12 Jewish out of fear, or being uncomfortable or unsafe
13 on campus, at events.

14 Ms. Levine spent time discussing anti-Semitism in
15 the workplace, which includes individuals avoiding
16 expression of views on Israel and avoiding wearing or
17 displaying an identification as Jewish. Some were
18 told they could not take time off work for the Jewish
19 holidays.

20 Ms. Levine indicated that Jews and the general
21 public agree that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-
22 Semitism. She noted that half of American Jews say
23 anti-Semitism is taken less seriously than other
24 forms of hate and bigotry. Crimes against them
25 versus crimes against other minority groups are not

1 taken as seriously.

2 Chair Bolstein commented that those victims of
3 anti-Semitism should be encouraged to file formal
4 complaints with the PHRC, and the matters will be
5 investigated. He noted an interest in developing a
6 body of law that establishes when certain acts cross
7 the line and become religious discrimination. The
8 presenters were thanked for sharing the survey.

9 There was discussion regarding a complaint filed
10 as a result of fliers distributed in every stall in
11 every bathroom at a restaurant that read as follows:
12 "You don't think we should be able to spread this
13 information. You don't support free speech. You are
14 not an American. You think we are targeting anyone
15 with these fliers. We have distributed thousands and
16 thousands of these informationals indiscriminately
17 across the whole of America. Our only target is the
18 uninformed and deceived. You think we are targeting
19 specific holidays for our distributions, but we do so
20 on our own schedule. You think we operate at the
21 behest of George Soros or some other money
22 manipulator, the idea is laughable, and it
23 demonstrates that you need our information. Your
24 assumption shows that you are clearly lacking."

25 Executive Director Lassiter commented that the

1 disease of this democracy is white supremacy that has
2 branches of hate and should not be taken lightly. He
3 spoke of his own personal experience involving racial
4 and social discrimination. He commended colleagues
5 from AJC who presented and shared real data.

6 Chair Bolstein provided further comments
7 regarding the matter. He reiterated that PHRC be
8 contacted regarding any discriminations.]

9

10 [Andrae Holsey, President Blair County Chapter NAACP,
11 presented in front of Commission members and provided
12 handouts of the NAACP's 100th Anniversary
13 Celebration. He provided a brief summary of his
14 professional background, noting he has served as
15 president of the Blair County Branch of the National
16 Association for the Advancement of Colored People
17 (NAACP) for the last three years. He provided a
18 history of the NAACP Branch and talked about the
19 mission of the Blair Branch being to achieve equity,
20 political right, and social inclusion by advancing
21 policies and practice that expand human civil rights,
22 eliminate discrimination, and accelerate the well-
23 being, education and economic security of all black
24 people and all persons of color.

25 Mr. Holsey referred members to information

1 regarding some investigations that were conducted,
2 noting the operation of the Our Town investigation
3 being the most significant and discrimination within
4 the criminal justice system, including four different
5 law enforcement agencies within Blair County,
6 including the funding of the Blair County District
7 Attorney. He discussed a nonprofit's private round
8 table meetings and organizations that fall under
9 their realm, and every meeting is held in private.
10 Mr. Holsey spoke about an ethnic intimidation matter
11 in an area school district and an active complaint
12 currently in the Altoona School District and other
13 area school districts. He noted the existence of the
14 Ku Klux Klan within the area.

15 Mr. Holsey urged the Commonwealth to take the
16 most aggressive and public response possible to the
17 discrimination and corruption that has seen effects
18 of the state of race relations within the county. He
19 referred to a letter from PHRC offices in 2008
20 addressed to Donald Witherspoon with hard copies of
21 the original legislation of the Human Relations Act
22 and updates on the PHRC's Guide for Complainant, so
23 it will become the national standard of the NAACP.
24 He discussed action points pursued by the NAACP Blair
25 County Chapter.

1 Chair Bolstein indicated all school cases and
2 hair style cases fall under the jurisdiction of the
3 PHRC. Employment discrimination falls under the
4 jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania,
5 but PHRC statute gives authority to conduct
6 investigatory hearings to expose discrimination.

7 Mr. Holsey noted engaging with Children and
8 Youth, the Department of Human Services, and the
9 Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. He
10 had further discussion regarding the Blair County
11 Prison moving African American inmates to another
12 block, which was a former dog kennel, and noted other
13 grievances filed to the Prison Board. It was noted
14 the PHRC will work with the NAACP regarding these
15 matters.

16 It was noted that Derek Johnson, President, and
17 CEO of the NAACP, would be coming to the region for a
18 PHRC social justice lecture series.]

19 ***

20 ADJOURNMENT

21 [The meeting adjourned at 5:09 p.m.]

22 ***

23 [The next meeting is scheduled for June 17, 2024.]

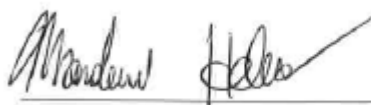
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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the foregoing summary minutes of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, was reduced to writing by me or under my supervision, and that the minutes accurately summarize the substance of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission meeting.



Madeline Helmstetter,

Minute Clerk

Sargent's Court Reporting Service, Inc.



M. Joel Bolstein, Chairman



o/b/o Commissioner Mayur Patel

Mayur Patel, Secretary