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**PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

**M I N U T E S**

TIME: 3:26 P.M.

Held at  
Honors Suite  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

July 22, 2024

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission  
July 22, 2024

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, Esquire - Absent

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Chad Dion Lassiter, MSW

DEPUTY CHIEF COUNSEL

Morgan Williams, 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  
Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Hearing Examiner  
Heather Roth, Regional Office Director, Harrisburg  
Robert Lindsey, Regional Office Director  
Ashley Walkowiak, Director of Policy,  
Intergovernmental Affairs and Mediation  
LaDawn Robinson, Regional Office Director, Pittsburgh  
Zulay Rojas, Special Assistant to Executive Director  
Debbie Walters, Administrative Officer

ALSO PRESENT:

Montgomery (Monty) Wilson, Esquire, Community Legal

1 Services, Inc.  
2 Arthur (Art) Lyons, Center for Economic Policy  
3 Analysis  
4 Ira Goldstein, Reinvestment Fund  
5 Colin Weidig, Reinvestment Fund

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8 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

9 July 22, 2024

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11 MEETING CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING STATEMENT

12 The time is now 3:26 p.m.

13 "Welcome to the public meeting of the  
14 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. We are  
15 pleased to have you join us.

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

1           After concluding with the business portion of the  
2 meeting, we will invite guests to introduce  
3 yourselves and any organizations you represent.  
4 Guests will have an opportunity to briefly address  
5 the Commission. We welcome your comments about equal  
6 opportunity and Civil Rights issues or problems of  
7 discrimination. Any statements expressed during the  
8 public session by members of the public represent the  
9 opinions and beliefs of the speaker and not the  
10 opinions and beliefs of the Commission.

11           We value the public's partnership in promoting  
12 equal opportunity and would love to hear about the  
13 work of organizations represented; however, the  
14 Commission cannot hear specifics of open  
15 investigations or cases they may have to rule on in  
16 the future."

17           Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chair, convened the  
18 monthly meeting of the Pennsylvania Human Relations  
19 Commission. He noted there was no quorum present, so  
20 no voting would be conducted on the adoption of the  
21 agenda, approval of the public meeting minutes from  
22 June 17, 2024, or the Requests for Preliminary

1 Hearings. Each of those items would be carried over  
2 to the next monthly meeting.]

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4 PRESENTATION

5 [Caroline Eister, Director of Fair Housing and  
6 Commercial Property, introduced Ira Goldstein,  
7 Reinvestment Fund; Arthur Lyons, Center for Economic  
8 Policy Analysis; and Montgomery Wilson, Esquire,  
9 Supervising Attorney at Community Legal Services,  
10 Inc. She noted the group would present on Looking at  
11 Evidence of Systemic Racial and Ethnic Bias in  
12 Philadelphia Real Estate Tax Assessments.

13 Mr. Wilson introduced himself. He noted another  
14 presenter, Colin Weidig from Reinvestment Fund, was  
15 also present.

16 Mr. Wilson indicated the legal agency of his  
17 employment is pro bono, and clients have been coming  
18 in for years inquiring if properties are being over  
19 assessed in minority neighborhoods which Mr. Wilson  
20 could not prove. He noted meeting Mr. Goldstein in  
21 Philadelphia, who stated he could prove it, which  
22 resulted in a debate with the Philadelphia Office of

1 Property Assessment. Both found there were areas of  
2 residential properties in Philadelphia with data  
3 inaccuracies and more likely to occur in minority  
4 African-American neighborhoods.

5 Information was taken to the Office of Property  
6 Assessment, which did not note a problem, and  
7 suggested improvements made in the last two years  
8 were not considered. After a review of data, Mr.  
9 Wilson determined there were still "hot spots" in  
10 Philadelphia where more inaccuracies would be found.

11 Mr. Weidig indicated, at the time of the first  
12 study properties in Philadelphia were underassessed,  
13 being assessed of 80 to 87 percent of their market  
14 value and getting a bit of a deal on assessments.  
15 Generally, lower-valued properties were over  
16 assessed. He noted the three measures that were  
17 examined included median ratio, coefficient of  
18 dispersion or COD, and price related differential.  
19 He referred to his chart for an explanation of each.  
20 Mr. Weidig indicated each of these inaccuracies were  
21 in places with either black or Hispanic residents.

22 Mr. Lyons noted two datasets were established

1 with one from inside the assessment system and the  
2 other outside. He provided an explanation and the  
3 statistics for each. He indicated standards are set  
4 by the International Association of Assessing  
5 Officers, and he compared the two datasets to the IAA  
6 standards. He referred to statistics on various  
7 tables and maps included in the presentation.

8 Mr. Lyons summarized by stating the Office of  
9 Property Assessment or OPA has improved city-wide  
10 accuracy of assessments for small, residential  
11 properties, noting that commercial or industrial  
12 properties were not included in these statistics.  
13 Hot spots remain where the measures of quality are  
14 not within the standards set by IAA. Mr. Lyons  
15 stated a higher-priced home in these neighborhoods  
16 are more likely to be underassessed, and lower priced  
17 homes are likely to be over assessed. Meaning, the  
18 owner of a lower-priced home in a predominantly black  
19 low-income neighborhood is paying more than their  
20 fair share compared to their neighbor with a higher  
21 valued home.

22 Mr. Wilson summarized the key takeaways by

1 noting, one, the OPA has significantly improved its  
2 accuracy based on changes made in their systems from  
3 2019 to 2023, but there are still problems in the  
4 minority and low-income neighborhoods, which are  
5 outside of those standards and inaccurate.

6 Mr. Wilson indicated Mayor Parker is convening a  
7 task force to review the systemic racial bias  
8 assessments. Recommendations to consider are as  
9 follows: An independent third study be done each  
10 year. Data used for the study needs to be made  
11 public. And there should be a similar study  
12 examining systemic bias in the appeals process.

13 There was discussion whether actual funding and  
14 education in those areas had been cross referenced.  
15 Chair Bolstein commented that the PHRC has  
16 jurisdiction over discrimination in the area of  
17 housing, and this issue of real estate assessments  
18 could fall within its purview and may be able to help  
19 by way of a policy. Mr. Wilson suggested that an  
20 introduction of a policy by PHRC, which sets out  
21 requirements for all municipalities in Pennsylvania  
22 with this kind of systemic bias, "would really

1 advance the ball statewide on this problem." A  
2 comment was made that lack of frequent reassessing  
3 turns into a systemic form of bias against lower-  
4 income people who tend to be minority.

5 Chair Bolstein stated training could be provided  
6 to Philadelphia assessors to at least understand  
7 whether or not there are biases that would cause the  
8 assessors to act in certain ways. He noted PHRC  
9 would like to continue to work with the assessment  
10 group. He opined, at some point, assessments may be  
11 done using artificial intelligence, and if assessors  
12 do not consider their unconscious bias, they could be  
13 writing algorithms in a way that cause  
14 discrimination.

15 Chair Bolstein thanked the group for their  
16 presentation and urged anyone with suggestions on how  
17 to "weed out" any discriminatory aspects to contact  
18 the Director of Housing at the PHRC.]

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20 ADJOURNMENT

21 [The meeting adjourned at 4:14 p.m.]

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1 [The next meeting is scheduled for August 26, 2024.]

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4 CERTIFICATE

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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.



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14 Lauren Gusherowski,

15 Minute Clerk

16 Sargent's Court Reporting

17 Service, Inc.

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M. Joel Bolstein, Chairman



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o/b/o Commissioner Mayur Patel  
Mayur Patel, Secretary