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PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

M I N U T E S

TIME: 5:07 P.M.

Monthly Meeting

Plaza Ballroom

Cambria Hotel Pittsburgh Downtown

1320 Centre Avenue

Pittsburgh, PA

September 23, 2024

1 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission
2 Monthly Meeting
3 September 23, 2024

4
5 COMMISSIONERS:

6
7 Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chair
8 Dr. Raquel O. Yiengst, Vice Chair - Absent
9 Mayur Patel, Esquire, Secretary
10 Dr. Rad Agrawal
11 Michael Hardiman, Esquire
12 Curtis Jones
13 Aleena Sorathia - Absent

14
15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

16
17 Chad Dion Lassiter, MSW

18
19 DEPUTY CHIEF COUNSEL

20
21 Morgan Williams, Esquire

22
23 COMMISSION COUNSEL

24
25 Vacant

26
27 STAFF PRESENT:

28
29 Amanda Brothman, Director of Communications
30 Desiree Chang, Director of Education
31 Adrian Garcia, Director of Enforcement
32 Caroline Eister, Director of Fair Housing and
33 Commercial Property
34 Darlene Hemerka, Esquire, Hearing Examiner (via
35 telephone)
36 Amanda Martin, Clerical Assistant III
37 Shery Mack, Supervisor, Civil Rights Division
38 LaDawn Robinson, Regional Office Director, Pittsburgh
39 Zulay Rojas, Special Assistant to Executive Director
40 (via telephone)
41 Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Hearing Examiner
42 Heather Roth, Regional Office Director, Harrisburg
43 Vacant, Regional Office Director, Philadelphia
44 Vacant, Director of Policy, Intergovernmental Affairs
45 and Mediation

1 ***

2 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

3 September 23, 2024

4 ***

5 MEETING CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING STATEMENT

6 The time is now 5:08 p.m.

7 "Welcome to the special public meeting of the
8 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. We are
9 pleased to have 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. There had been a
16 closed session to discuss compliance matters,
17 management updates and adjudicative case
18 deliberations.

19 After concluding the business portion of the
20 meeting I will invite guests to introduce themselves
21 and any organizations they represent. Guests will
22 have an opportunity to briefly address the
23 Commission. We welcome all of your public comments
24 about equal opportunity and civil rights issues and
25 any problems of discrimination that you are

1 encountering. Any statements expressed during the
2 public session by members of the public represent
3 opinions and beliefs of the speaker and not the
4 opinions and beliefs of the Commission.

5 We value the public's partnership in promoting
6 equal opportunity and would love to hear about the
7 work that any of the organizations are doing. The
8 one thing we cannot do is have you address us on the
9 specifics of any open investigations or cases that we
10 might have to rule on in the future.

11 I hereby convene the monthly meeting of the
12 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. We note that
13 we have a quorum present. I call the meeting to
14 order."

15 ***

16 INTRODUCTIONS

17 [Commissioners, Staff, Executive Director, Deputy
18 Chief Counsel were requested to introduce themselves
19 for the record. A quorum of Commission members was
20 present.]

21 ***

22 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

23 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

24 The first item is the adoption of
25 the agenda. I need a motion to

1 adopt the agenda?

2 COMMISSIONER JONES:

3 So moved.

4 COMMISSIONER PATEL:

5 Second.

6 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

7 It's been moved and seconded. All
8 in favor of the motion please say
9 aye?

10 [The motion passed unanimously.]

11 ***

12 MINUTES

13 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

14 We have Minutes from the August 7,
15 2024 public meeting of the
16 commissioners. I need a motion to
17 approve those minutes.

18 COMMISSIONER JONES:

19 I move for the adoption of the
20 Minutes.

21 COMMISSIONER PATEL:

22 Second.

23 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

24 Is there any discussion or any
25 comment on the Minutes?

1 Not hearing any, all those in
2 favor of the motion to approve the
3 Minutes please say aye?

4 [The motion passed unanimously.]

5 ***

6 ADJUDICATIONS-RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSED FINAL
7 ORDERS

8 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

9 I have one adjudication to vote on, a
10 Rule to Show Cause, Nicole Dellaflora
11 Engle, Complainant, vs. GenHydro, Inc.,
12 PHRC Case No. 202316656.

13 I'm going to ask Hearing Examiner
14 Shehadeh-Cope to give us a brief summary
15 and then we will ask for a motion.

16 RECOMMENDATION

17 [Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Hearing Examiner, noted that
18 on or about March 13, 2024, Complainant filed an
19 Amended Verified Complaint against Respondent. In
20 her complaint, Complainant alleged that Respondent
21 discriminated against her based on her sex when after
22 being notified of her pregnancy gave bonuses and
23 company shares to all their employees except for her,
24 reassigned her duties to other employees and excluded
25 her from meeting their work events.

1 On July 10, 2024, the prosecuting attorney for
2 the PHRC petitioned for a Rule to Show Cause
3 indicating the Respondent had not filed an Answer to
4 the Verified Amended Complaint, which was served on
5 Respondent on March 18, 2024, along with a Notice to
6 the effect.

7 PHRC Counsel asserted that by correspondence
8 dated May 29, 2024, PHRC staff reminded Respondents
9 of their obligation to answer the complaint.

10 On July 10, 2024, a Rule to Show Cause was issued
11 directing the Respondents to respond on or before
12 July 30, 2024. To date, Respondents have not
13 responded to the Rule to Show Cause.

14 Accordingly, it was recommended that the PHRC
15 find probable cause and enter a judgement of
16 liability regarding the allegations of the complaint.
17 And it was further recommended that the Commission
18 direct conciliation efforts to be attempted by the
19 parties. Should conciliation efforts fail, it was
20 recommended that the parties be informed that a
21 public hearing may be held on the issue of damages.]

22 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

23 We heard the summary from the
24 Hearing Examiner. Is there a motion
25 to approve the Order?

1 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

2 So moved.

3 COMMISSIONER AGRAWAL:

4 Second.

5 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

6 It's been moved by Commissioner
7 Hardiman, and seconded by
8 Commissioner Agrawal.

9 Is there any discussion? Not
10 hearing any, all those in favor of
11 the motion to approve the Order
12 please say aye?

13 [The motion passed unanimously.]

14 ***

15 CONCILIATION AGREEMENTS/CONSENT ORDERS - None.

16 ***

17 REQUESTS FOR PRELIMINARY HEARING

18 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

19 We do have three requests for
20 Preliminary Hearing, Items 6, 7 and
21 8 on the agenda, Case Nos.
22 202300848, 202311507 and 202317218.

23 Is there a motion to accept the
24 Recommendation to Deny the Request
25 for Preliminary Hearing or some

1 other motion? Is there a motion?

2 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

3 So moved to accept the
4 recommendation to deny the Request
5 for Preliminary Hearing.

6 COMMISSIONER JONES:

7 Second.

8 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

9 It's been moved and seconded. Is
10 there any discussion about any of
11 these three matters? Any recusals?

12 On that motion, all in favor
13 please say aye?

14 [The motion passed unanimously.]

15 ***

16 MOTIONS AND OTHER ACTIONS - None

17 ***

18 APPROVED FOR PUBLIC HEARING DOCKET - None.

19 ***

20 PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - None.

21 ***

22 MANAGEMENT REPORTS

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

24 [Chad Dion Lassiter, Executive Director, reported
25 that PHRC is working with PASSHE regarding a

1 Diversity Summit touring 30 communities thus far for
2 listening and learning, which will inform all on how
3 PHRC leads the Commonwealth on varying issues making
4 up multiple thought processes in various communities.

5 DEI trainings continue for many organizations and
6 many peers who make up various departments in the
7 Commonwealth. He reported planning for the Fall
8 Lunch and Learn done virtually. On October 1, 2024,
9 a PHRC social justice lecture series will be held in
10 partnership with Temple University Beasley School of
11 Law with Professor Melissa Murray. On October 9,
12 2024, the Fourth Annual Peace and Justice event will
13 be held in partnership with Penn Live Patriot News.
14 October 24, 2024, HBCUs Have Always Mattered.

15 Executive Director Lassiter encouraged people to
16 follow on X, Facebook, IG, Linked-In. He noted
17 continued promotion of social justice ambassadors and
18 advisory council members.

19 Regarding funding, ED Lassiter reported the PHRC
20 currently has 92 positions, 88 are filled and is
21 interviewing for Chief Counsel, Regional Director,
22 Philadelphia, and Director of Policy and Governmental
23 Affairs and HRR-1 position.

24 He reported the Civil Rights Division is
25 currently involved in public issues in the space of

1 commercial property, public accommodations, fair
2 housing, education, and employment.]

3 ***

4 DEPUTY CHIEF COUNSEL - No Report

5 ***

6 HEARING EXAMINER - No Report

7 ***

8 REGIONAL DIRECTOR - PITTSBURGH REGIONAL OFFICE - No
9 Report

10 ***

11 REGIONAL DIRECTOR - HARRISBURG REGIONAL OFFICE - No
12 Report

13 ***

14 REGIONAL DIRECTOR - PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL OFFICE
15 [Executive Director Lassiter reported the
16 Philadelphia Regional Office is in the process of
17 getting ready to interview for a regional director
18 and will be working with a Commissioner to bolster
19 Philadelphia Advisory Councils by utilizing
20 individuals, who are block captains.]

21 ***

22 DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

23 [Amanda Brothman, Director of Communications,
24 provided updates on the Communications Division. She
25 noted events held included a Fair Housing and Power

1 Hour Fair Housing attended by 69 people in August.
2 She reported two events will be coming up in
3 September. Thus far, 68 people have registered to
4 attend one of the Power Hours, 380 people have viewed
5 the registration, 82 people have registered for the
6 Lunch and Learn on Title IX, and 298 have viewed it.

7 Ms. Brothman noted an increase in attendance at
8 these events, almost doubled, and quadrupled in the
9 amount of people viewing events.

10 She noted the PHRC On the Road Tour continues. A
11 Lunch and Learn will be coming up soon and another
12 one in October and November. Hispanic Heritage Month
13 kicks off this Friday, September 27, 2024, and four
14 events are scheduled for the months of September and
15 October 2024. The Social Justice lecture series
16 event will be held at Temple University and Peace and
17 Justice in PA at Central Penn College in October
18 2024.

19 Ms. Brothman noted a Neo-Nazi weekend march held
20 recently in Harrisburg. Community members and
21 organizations throughout the Commonwealth were asked
22 to sign on to the PHRC message of anti-hate.

23 She reported, by the end of the year, a new No-
24 Hate will be included in the state report and the
25 drafts, which have already been started.]

1 ***

2 DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

3 [Desiree Chang, Director of Education, provided
4 highlights from the Education Division including the
5 developments with Title IX. She noted that
6 regulations put into effect on August 18 of 2023
7 provided protections to students based on sex, race,
8 and religious creed. While developments of Title IX
9 continue to occur, protection is still being afforded
10 to those students.

11 A press release was released in conjunction with
12 the Office of Attorney General and Education Law
13 Center putting forth that information and assuring
14 residents and students of the Commonwealth that they
15 are and have been protected.

16 A Lunch and Learn will be held this Thursday,
17 September 26, 2024, virtually featuring Kristina
18 Moon, lead attorney from the Education Law Center,
19 Philadelphia Region, who will be speaking to the
20 Title IX developments.

21 In July 2024, Ms. Chang reported out of the
22 Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights
23 Quarterly Convening regarding harassment and bullying
24 guidance and other topics.

25 She referred members to an updated Education

1 Division Public Facing Infographics in her report.]

2 ***

3 DIRECTOR OF CIVIL RIGHTS

4 [Shery Meck, Supervisor, Civil Rights Division, noted
5 a Civil Rights Outreach Coordinators (CROC) edition
6 of the community tour, which gets out in the
7 community ahead of time getting flyers to different
8 businesses and people to help spread the word that
9 PHRC is coming to hear concerns. Additional events
10 included National Night Out and the Luzerne County
11 Resource Fair.

12 Civil Rights Division is also working on
13 community response plans for different areas and
14 teaching about the PHRC, the PHRA that protects them
15 and their rights and listening to the concerns of the
16 community.

17 The Interagency Civil Tension Reduction Task
18 Force held its first meeting in September 2024 for
19 agencies across the central region of Pennsylvania to
20 share information and collaborate on ways to act.]

21 ***

22 DIRECTOR OF FAIR HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

23 [Caroline Eister, Director, Fair Housing and
24 Commercial Property, reiterated the Fair Housing
25 Empower Hours are held the last Wednesday each month.

1 The October 2024 event will concern fair housing
2 fundamentals, and the November 2024 event will be
3 regarding fair housing and national origin and
4 December's event will be LGBTQ+ and housing rights.

5 She announced the Housing Equality Conference
6 will again be held in Pittsburgh in the spring of
7 2025 at the David L. Lawrence Center.

8 She reported that PHRC has released Emotional
9 Distress Damages and Housing Guidance. Additional
10 information will be provided to those interested.]

11 ***

12 DIRECTOR OF ENFORCEMENT

13 [Adrian Garcia, Director of Enforcement, reported the
14 Enforcement Divisions continues to work with all of
15 its colleagues on matters of policy and procedures.
16 He reminded those in attendance that this is an
17 enforcement entity, which means investigators
18 investigate cases on a neutral basis and not on part
19 of the Respondent nor the Complainant.]

20 ***

21 OLD BUSINESS - None

22 ***

23 NEW BUSINESS

24 [Chair Bolstein referred to the Calendar of Meeting
25 Dates for 2025 for further review and discussion.

1 Meeting dates include January 27, 2025; February 24,
2 2025; March 24, 2025; April 28, 2025; May 19, 2025;
3 June 23, 2025; July 28, 2025; August 25, 2025;
4 September 22, 2025; October 27, 2025; November 24,
5 2025 and December 22, 2025.

6 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

7 I need a motion to approve the Schedule
8 of Commission Meetings for 2025.

9 COMMISSIONER JONES:

10 I move the Schedule for Commission
11 Meetings for 2025 be approved.

12 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

13 Second?

14 COMMISSIONER PATEL:

15 Second.

16 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

17 It's been moved and seconded. Any
18 comments or discussion on that?

19 Not hearing any, all those in favor
20 of that motion please say aye?

21 [The motion passed unanimously.]

22 ***

23 [Chair Bolstein stated he feels very privileged to
24 work with the other Commissioners and Staff at PHRC.
25 He explained the PHRC investigates a complaint of

1 discrimination that has been filed. He reported on
2 heavy caseloads. Chair Bolstein talked about a
3 regulatory package enacted in 2023 that made LGBTQ a
4 protected class in Pennsylvania as well as the
5 Fairness Act.

6 He noted regulations included protection from
7 discrimination based on hair styles and religious
8 creed. All were asked to review the regulations.]

9

10 PUBLIC COMMENT - SPECIAL GUESTS

11 [Regional Director Robinson noted the public session
12 focused on veterans' housing insecurities. Speakers
13 from various organizations were present to speak
14 individually about their programs, initiatives, and
15 missions of their organizations. Speakers included
16 Becky Verduzco, Case Manager and Outreach Coordinator
17 for Soldier On. Jonathan Backers, founder and CEO of
18 Alliance of Male Empowerment Networks (AMEN). John
19 Norman, President of EX Properties and Audrey Caixeta
20 and Sean Buzzard for Veterans' Leadership Program.]

21

22 SOLDIER ON

23 [Becky Verduzco, Soldier On, introduced her coworker
24 Jasmine, and thanked Ms. Robinson for the invitation
25 to speak. She commented the PHRC could be beneficial

1 to her organization, which has had several veterans
2 denied housing opportunities based on different
3 reasons.

4 Ms. Verduzco noted the home office of Soldier On
5 is located in Massachusetts and offers programs in
6 New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. She referred
7 to the Supportive Services for Veterans Families
8 (SSVF) grant, which provides financial assistance and
9 case management to veterans at risk of homelessness
10 or are homeless. She indicated there is no brick-
11 and-mortar office in Pennsylvania, but stated being
12 completely mobile and will go to wherever the veteran
13 is.

14 Ms. Verduzco visits as far north as Erie, east to
15 Potter, and south to Greene and Fayette Counties.
16 She discussed criteria for eligibility into the
17 program and has opened up recently to allow
18 reservists to be eligible as well.

19 Ms. Verduzco noted the program has a 24-hour
20 intake hotline to access. Once a call happens, the
21 matter is assigned to a case manager, a meeting is
22 arranged with the veteran, and services are offered,
23 such as support with income, employment, and
24 healthcare. Commissioners, staff, and public had
25 questions. Jasmine commented there are so many

1 veterans that are not aware of this program, and she
2 is always giving out literature and information as to
3 what the program has to offer. Ms. Verduzco
4 commented that it has been "really special" to give
5 back to veterans.

6 Executive Director Lassiter thanked both for
7 their efforts with this population.]

8 ***

9 ALLIANCE OF MALE EMPOWERMENT NETWORK (AMEN)

10 [Jonathan Backers, founder and CEO of AMEN, addressed
11 the group by first providing a brief summary of his
12 personal and professional backgrounds. He indicated
13 the program is one that infuses men with a sense of
14 hope, sense of rebounding as everybody deserves a
15 second chance regardless of what the circumstances
16 may be. He talked about the most recent project,
17 Bridge of Hope, a partnership between private
18 landlords, the veterans' leadership program, and AMEN
19 that provides a system of supportive services with
20 regard to mental health, financial literacy, and
21 basic life skills. He talked about a curriculum he
22 referred to as "Spirit of Re" created so that men
23 understand that they first have to get a good self-
24 reflection of who they are.

25 He introduced John Norman, who is responsible for

1 helping to launch the Bridge of Hope pilot program by
2 taking some of his private property and making it
3 available for those who need assistance, including
4 veterans, and used his own funds to provide the
5 renovation necessary. Mr. Backers noted working with
6 the assistance of the Pittsburgh Landbank and Rising
7 Tide for acquisition of properties, and there are
8 landlords in the process of fixing up some of their
9 properties to become a part of the Bridge of Hope
10 coalition. Preston Moore commented that Land Bank
11 properties should be listed by real estate agents as
12 nobody knows these properties exist.]

13 ***

14 EX PROPERTIES

15 [John Norman, President/Owner of EX Properties,
16 provided a brief summary of his personal and
17 professional backgrounds. He noted being involved
18 with the veterans in the Pittsburgh area and has been
19 working with Mr. Backers to provide quality housing
20 for the veterans. He noted being in the process of
21 applying for grants to continue his efforts.

22 Mr. Backers commented that Mr. Norman "reached
23 into his own pocket and made renovations" to a three-
24 bedroom apartment with three veterans now occupying
25 that space. Disappointed that the program could not

1 obtain necessary grants, Mr. Backers indicated
2 fundraising will be conducted to try to get more
3 veterans into housing.

4 Mr. Norman will continue to work with the VLP and
5 Mr. Backers regarding this matter. There was further
6 discussion regarding the possible use of foreclosed
7 units in the Pittsburgh area.]

8 ***

9 VETERANS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

10 [Audrey Tomas Caixeta and colleague Sean Buzzard
11 presented before the Commission for discussion
12 regarding the Veterans Leadership Program located in
13 Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York, with brick-and-
14 mortar offices located in Erie, Johnstown, and
15 Pittsburgh. She noted that the program will be
16 moving to Braddock where veterans would be housed at
17 one site and more supportive services could be
18 offered.

19 Events offered include a monthly food
20 distribution, which is typically the second Monday of
21 the month. A standdown event is held in October to
22 provide a lot of onsite services, resources, and
23 community partners for veterans.

24 Mr. Buzzard, a retired veteran of the Air Force,
25 stated after retirement he came to work for the VLP

1 to help veterans with their transition from military
2 back to the civilian world.

3 Mr. Buzzard noted he manages support service
4 programs, including the Fox Suicide Prevention Grant
5 Program (Fox SPGP). He noted participation in over
6 36,000 outreach or education events. Over 10,000
7 veterans have been screened, and 6,800 veterans are
8 now enrolled in that Fox SPGP. The program also
9 assists with utilities and nutritional support, as
10 well as legal services and job issues.

11 Mr. Buzzard outlined the Joy Riders Program,
12 which are electric support bikes with a wheelchair
13 seat on the front for veterans with mobility issues.

14 There are also employment fairs and programs for
15 those veterans seeking a better job.

16 Ms. Tomas Caixeta stated the PA Service
17 Coordination Center, which aids, is also available.
18 The SSVF Grant, grant per diem housing, and HUD
19 housing are additional supportive services. There
20 was further discussion concerning veterans court to
21 help veterans with criminal records upon completion
22 of the program.]

23

24 [Chair Bolstein thanked all presenters in attendance.
25 He noted the Commission is very much in favor of

1 projects to increase the amount of affordable housing
2 available in the Commonwealth.]

3 ***

4 ADJOURNMENT

5 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

6 Motion to adjourn.

7 COMMISSIONER AGRAWAL:

8 Second.

9 ***

10 [The meeting adjourned at 6:33 p.m.]

11 ***

12 [The next meeting is scheduled for October 28, 2024.]

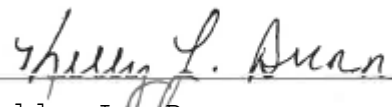
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CERTIFICATE

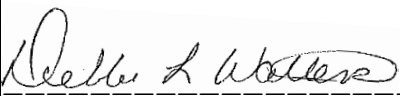
I hereby certify that the foregoing summary minutes of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, was reduced to writing by me or under my supervision, and that the minutes accurately summarize the substance of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission meeting.



Kelly L. Dunn,
Minute Clerk
Sargent's Court Reporting
Service, Inc.



M. Joel Bolstein, Chairman



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