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PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

M I N U T E S

TIME: 3:11 P.M.

Monthly Meeting

VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

April 28, 2025

1 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission
2 Monthly Meeting
3 April 28, 2025

4
5 COMMISSIONERS:
6

7 Joel Bolstein, Esquire, Chair
8 Dr. Raquel O. Yiengst, Vice Chair
9 Mayur Patel, Esquire, Secretary - Absent
10 Dr. Rad Agrawal - Absent
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 STAFF PRESENT:
24

25 Amanda Brothman, Director of Communications
26 Alana Burman, Director of Policy, Intergovernmental
27 Affairs and Mediation
28 Desiree Chang, Director of Education
29 Caroline Eister, Director of Fair Housing and
30 Commercial Property
31 Adrian Garcia, Director of Enforcement
32 Amber Harris, Regional Office Director, Philadelphia
33 Darlene Martin, Esquire, Hearing Examiner
34 Sheryl Meck, Supervisor, Civil Rights Division
35 LaDawn Robinson, Regional Office Director, Pittsburgh
36 Heather Roth, Regional Office Director, Harrisburg
37 Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Hearing Examiner
38 Debbie Walters, Administrative Officer
39
40

41 GUESTS In Attendance:
42

43 Laura Dimino, Ph.D., Assistant Director, Center for
44 Rural Pennsylvania
45 Kyle C. Kopko, Ph.D., Executive Director, Center for
46 Rural Pennsylvania
47 Fariba (Faith) Rashidi
48 LiTrena Gordon-Staton
49

1 ***

2 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

3 April 28, 2025

4 ***

5 MEETING CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING STATEMENT

6 The time is now 3:11 p.m.

7 Joel Bolstein, Chairperson of the Pennsylvania
8 Human Relations Commission, welcomed all to the
9 monthly meeting of the Pennsylvania Human Relations
10 Commission. He stated this public meeting has been
11 advertised in accordance with the provisions of the
12 Sunshine Act. And prior to the meeting and keeping
13 with the confidentiality requirements of the Sunshine
14 Act, a closed session was held to discuss compliance
15 matters, management updates, and adjudicative case
16 deliberations.

17 After concluding with the business portion of the
18 meeting, guests will be invited to introduce
19 themselves and any organizations they represent. A
20 guest will have an opportunity briefly to address the
21 Commission. Public comments are welcomed about equal
22 opportunity and Civil Rights issues or problems of
23 discrimination. Any statements expressed during the
24 Public Session by members of the public represent the
25 opinions and beliefs of that speaker alone and not

1 the opinions and beliefs of the Commission.

2 The Commission values the public partnership in
3 promoting equal opportunity and would love to hear
4 about the work of any organizations represented. The
5 Commission cannot hear specifics of any open
6 investigations or cases that it may have to rule on
7 in the future.

8 A quorum was noted to be present.

9 Joel Bolstein, Chairperson, called the meeting to
10 order.

11 ***

12 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

13 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

14 Is there a motion to approve the agenda?

15 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

16 So moved.

17 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

18 Second.

19 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

20 It's been moved and seconded. Is there
21 any discussion? Not hearing any, all in
22 favor of the motion please say aye? Any
23 opposed?

24 [The motion passed unanimously.]

25 ***

1 the agenda, Case No. 202316178.

2 Is there a motion to approve that
3 Conciliation Agreement or Consent Order?

4 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

5 So moved.

6 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

7 Second.

8 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

9 I heard a movement and a second and a
10 third. Is there any discussion?

11 Not hearing any, all those in favor
12 of the motion please say aye?

13 [The motion passed unanimously.]

14 ***

15 REQUESTS FOR PRELIMINARY HEARINGS

16 [Items 4 through 9 on the agenda. The motion would
17 be after reviewing all information to deny the
18 requests for preliminary hearings for Case Nos.
19 201903903, 202002282, 202101685, 202200143,
20 202201402, 202311512.]

21 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

22 Is there a motion?

23 COMMISSIONER JONES:

24 So moved.

25 COMMISSIONER HARDIMAN:

1 So moved.

2 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

3 It's been moved and seconded. Any
4 discussion about any of those particular
5 matters? Not hearing any, all those in
6 favor of the motion please say aye? Any
7 opposed?

8 (The motion passed unanimously.)

9 ***

10 MOTIONS AND OTHER ACTIONS - NONE

11 ***

12 APPROVED FOR PUBLIC HEARING DOCKET - NONE

13 ***

14 MANAGEMENT REPORTS

15 [Executive Director Chad Lassiter welcomed all
16 colleagues. He reported on a Director of Rural and
17 Civil Engagement position available in September.

18 Commissioners and staff in attendance were asked
19 to identify themselves and provide a summary of their
20 positions and tenure at the Commission for the
21 record.

22 ***

23 OLD BUSINESS - NONE

24 ***

25 NEW BUSINESS - NONE

1 ***

2 PUBLIC COMMENT

3 Invitation to Present from Caroline Eister, Director
4 of Fair Housing and Commercial Property for PHRC
5 [Caroline Eister welcomed. Laura Dimino, Ph.D.,
6 Assistant Director, Center for Rural Pennsylvania,
7 and Kyle C. Kopko, Ph.D., J.D., Executive Director
8 for Rural Pennsylvania, who provided summaries of
9 their professional backgrounds.

10 Dr. Dimino expressed appreciation for the
11 invitation and began the presentation by providing an
12 overview of the Center's mission and operations. She
13 explained that the Center, established by the
14 Pennsylvania General Assembly in the 1980s, supports
15 rural-focused research through grants and collects
16 secondary data on a wide range of issues. She
17 described recent and upcoming reports on topics like
18 warehouse development and rural hospitals, and
19 highlighted the legislative definition of rural used
20 by the Center.

21 Dr. Dimino introduced the newly formed
22 Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization
23 Commission, explaining its purpose and structure, and
24 emphasized the need to address demographic challenges
25 such as aging populations, low birth rates, and

1 regional disparities in growth.

2 Dr. Kopko added that the Commission's initial
3 meeting focused on local capacity challenges, noting
4 that many rural municipalities lack staffing or
5 financial flexibility to engage in long-term planning
6 or apply for competitive grants. He stated the
7 Commission aims to identify barriers to engagement
8 with government and promote pragmatic solutions to
9 sustain rural communities. He also clarified that
10 while the Center provides data and support, only the
11 Commission makes policy recommendations.

12 Dr. Dimino resumed the presentation, detailing
13 key findings that led to the Commission's creation.
14 She cited slow population growth, a demographic shift
15 to southeastern Pennsylvania, an aging population,
16 and increasing diversity. She shared projections
17 indicating stagnation or decline in many rural
18 counties, with international migration serving as the
19 primary driver of growth. Visual data reflected the
20 common countries of foreign residents, rising
21 diversity in rural and urban areas alike, a decline
22 in birth rates, and changing household structures.
23 She referred to a 2020 census of household
24 composition. She concluded by offering to share
25 slides and data and invited questions.

1 Mr. Lassiter asked how the Commission should
2 address white victimization narratives, demographic
3 change, and related social tensions, referencing the
4 great replacement theory and white rage in rural
5 America.

6 Dr. Kopko responded by stating that while such
7 theories exist, they appear exaggerated in the
8 context of rural Pennsylvania. Based on
9 conversations with local leaders, he observed a
10 growing recognition that demographic change is both
11 real and necessary for community sustainability. The
12 U.S. Census Bureau projected that the entire country
13 will begin to show a population loss around 2070.
14 The trends reflect more in Pennsylvania and the
15 Northeast in general. He emphasized that sharing
16 data and visuals helps initiate productive
17 conversations, and that the demographic trends
18 affecting Pennsylvania are part of broader national
19 patterns.

20 Mr. Lassiter emphasized that the Pennsylvania
21 Human Relations Commission (PHRC) has been addressing
22 issues tied to white nationalist groups, white
23 supremacy, and anti-Semitism, particularly in rural
24 parts of the state. He highlighted the Beloved
25 Community initiative, which seeks to foster inclusive

1 dialogue across 55 of 67 counties. Mr. Lassiter
2 noted that many issues identified during these visits
3 stemmed from classism, lack of infrastructure, and
4 transportation rather than racism alone, though the
5 presence of hate-based ideologies remains a serious
6 concern. He stressed the need for Pennsylvania to be
7 welcoming to all residents, warning that failure to
8 do so contributes to systemic discrimination in
9 housing and other areas. He reiterated that data
10 from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania helps PHRC
11 engage in more informed dialogue with stakeholders.

12 Dr. Dimino added that highlighting success
13 stories of inclusive rural communities is essential,
14 as they demonstrate that diversity and growth can
15 coexist effectively. Sharing these narratives could
16 help encourage other communities to adopt more
17 welcoming approaches.

18 Chair Bolstein discussed the stark rural-urban
19 contrasts within counties such as Bucks and
20 Montgomery and pointed out how zoning, lack of public
21 services, and limited job opportunities affect these
22 areas. He stressed that many rural residents fall
23 under PHRC's protected classes, such as those with
24 disabilities and the elderly, and emphasized the
25 importance of recognizing how these individuals

1 experience discrimination, including through lack of
2 transportation and housing. Chair Bolstein urged
3 that if the Center's research touches on these
4 issues, it should be shared with PHRC to align with
5 its mission of protecting against discrimination.

6 Dr. Kopko confirmed that the Center for Rural
7 Pennsylvania does produce research relevant to the
8 PHRC's mission, including data on healthcare access,
9 demographic trends, and political engagement. He
10 highlighted persistent healthcare access issues, such
11 as maternity care deserts, and encouraged direct
12 engagement with rural communities to build trust and
13 understanding. He noted that the Center frequently
14 testifies before the legislature and aims to frame
15 issues in ways that can resonate across party lines,
16 acknowledging that policy change is a slow process
17 requiring repeated messaging.

18 Chair Bolstein further remarked on the challenges
19 of community engagement in rural areas, noting low
20 turnout for events despite interest. He suggested
21 collaboration with the Center on seminars and
22 conferences to better connect their data to PHRC's
23 work. He cited Hazleton as an example of a growing
24 but under-resourced community and criticized how
25 education funding based on property taxes perpetuates

1 inequity. He expressed hope that the legislature
2 would use the Center's data to direct resources to
3 high-need areas.

4 Dr. Kopko responded that while their work often
5 raises awareness, policy shifts are gradual. He
6 cited the Center's long-term work on the opioid
7 crisis as an example of how persistent advocacy can
8 eventually lead to legislative change. He emphasized
9 that the Center avoids pushing policy but focuses on
10 providing factual, nonpartisan data to inform
11 decision-makers.

12 Mr. Lassiter concluded by emphasizing the need
13 for open discussions about race and privilege in
14 rural communities. He cited case studies
15 illustrating the racial binary and internalized
16 hierarchies among marginalized groups. He stressed
17 that the PHRC addresses these issues through a
18 framework of empathy and inclusion, not blame.
19 Lassiter described the Beloved Community model as a
20 way to engage all people—regardless of race or
21 ideology—by acknowledging both the privileges and the
22 discrimination that exist across racial lines. He
23 thanked the Center for their partnership and
24 expressed eagerness to collaborate further on
25 infrastructure, transportation, and inclusion

1 initiatives across Pennsylvania.]

2 ***

3 PUBLIC COMMENTS

4 Comments from the Public

5 [Ms. Fariba (Faith) Rashidi expressed frustration
6 with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission
7 (PHRC), alleging mismanagement, lack of
8 professionalism, and poor communication. She claimed
9 that multiple attempts to contact PHRC over the span
10 of several months were ignored, and when she finally
11 received a response, she was told to wait over five
12 months for an interview. She criticized PHRC's
13 delayed processes and shared that her case was closed
14 without investigation, only to be referred to the
15 EEOC. She also stated her attempt to attend a public
16 comment meeting in Philadelphia was unsuccessful due
17 to a scheduling discrepancy, arriving shortly after
18 the meeting had ended despite being told it was still
19 in progress.

20 Ms. Eister and Ms. Williams reminded Ms. Rashidi
21 not to discuss specific case details, citing legal
22 concerns and the Commission's procedural rules. They
23 clarified that her comments were welcomed but needed
24 to remain general in nature.

25 Mr. Lassiter acknowledged the seriousness of Ms.

1 Rashidi's concerns and requested clarification about
2 the communication she received from PHRC staff. He
3 offered his email to follow up directly and expressed
4 appreciation for her feedback. He emphasized that
5 the Commission welcomed criticism and was not
6 avoiding difficult conversations but reiterated the
7 legal limitations on discussing individual case
8 specifics in a public setting.

9 Ms. Rashidi expressed continued frustration with
10 the PHRC, asserting that both the PHRC and EEOC were
11 ineffective in handling her case and accusing them of
12 favoring employers and their attorneys over employees
13 facing discrimination. She stated her case was
14 closed without proper investigation and redirected to
15 the EEOC, and she questioned the difference in
16 authority between the two agencies. She claimed to
17 have proof from a law firm supporting her allegations
18 and criticized the system as broken, citing stress
19 and anxiety caused by the agencies' inaction and poor
20 communication.

21 Mr. Lassiter sought clarification on Ms.
22 Rashidi's claims and asked permission for the
23 Commission's Deputy Chief Counsel to respond. He
24 emphasized the agency's commitment to ethics,
25 neutrality, and respectful treatment of complainants,

1 while acknowledging the importance of criticism and
2 the need for improvement. He confirmed that PHRC
3 leadership would follow up with Ms. Rashidi and noted
4 her suggestions, including training and educating
5 employers to prevent mistreatment and misuse of
6 public resources.

7 Ms. Williams, representing PHRC legal counsel,
8 responded directly to the accusation of favoritism by
9 stating that the PHRC conducts neutral investigations
10 and does not collaborate with outside counsel in
11 favor of any party. She invited Ms. Rashidi to
12 submit her evidence for review.

13 Ms. Rashidi concluded by reiterating the need for
14 PHRC to improve its accountability and oversight of
15 mediators and investigators. She urged the agency to
16 honor its mission by protecting civil rights and
17 ensuring fair treatment for all, particularly those
18 without financial or institutional power.]

19

20 [An additional public comment, echoing Ms. Rashidi's
21 concerns was brought to the Board by Ms. LiTrena
22 Gordon-Staton. Ms. Gordon-Staton stated she related
23 strongly to the concerns raised by the previous
24 caller. As a retired Army combat veteran living in
25 Mechanicsburg, she described her own frustrating

1 experience with the PHRC after filing a racial
2 discrimination complaint related to an incident at a
3 large car dealership. She said her case, processed
4 through the Harrisburg regional office, took six
5 months for an initial response and involved two
6 investigators over two years. She expressed concern
7 that neither investigator contacted her or her
8 husband to ask questions or request additional
9 evidence, despite her having video and witness
10 statements. She felt the process was superficial,
11 citing a lack of engagement and communication. Her
12 case was eventually closed in September 2023 with a
13 finding of insufficient evidence, which she
14 questioned due to the lack of direct investigation.

15 Mr. Lassiter responded by affirming Ms. Gordon-
16 Staton's right to critique the agency and emphasized
17 PHRC's commitment to improvement and responsiveness.
18 He acknowledged the serious impact of discrimination
19 on people's lives and reiterated that the agency's
20 goal was not just to appear effective but to be
21 genuinely impactful.

22 Director Garcia thanked Ms. Gordon-Staton for her
23 courage and offered to speak with her directly to
24 explain the agency's process and review the handling
25 of her case. He emphasized the importance of making

1 sure complainants feel heard and understood and
2 proposed a follow-up conversation.

3 Ms. Gordon-Staton agreed and emphasized that one
4 of her main concerns was the lack of direct
5 communication from investigators during her case.
6 She said the case closure letter only cited
7 insufficient evidence, despite her providing
8 documentation and statements. She expressed that
9 investigating without speaking to the complainant was
10 a red flag. She confirmed she had previously reached
11 out to a PHRC staff member and was open to Director
12 Garcia contacting her.

13 Ms. Gordon-Staton concluded by thanking the PHRC
14 for its efforts but highlighted that current
15 political and social climates have made it harder for
16 individuals facing discrimination. She stated making
17 a complaint requires courage and is often done to
18 help the broader community, not just oneself. She
19 reiterated the emotional toll of racial
20 discrimination and urged the agency to recognize and
21 respond to these realities with humanity.

22 Mr. Lassiter thanked Ms. Gordon-Staton for her
23 courage and emphasized PHRC's commitment to servant
24 leadership, responsiveness, and ethical service. He
25 described the agency's mission to combat the

1 paralysis of silence and acknowledged the emotional
2 impact of the testimonies shared. He expressed that
3 her words would motivate the agency to reflect and
4 act more effectively, inviting her to return for
5 future discussions.

6 Ms. Gordon-Staton responded with appreciation for
7 Mr. Lassiter's words, stating they made a significant
8 emotional impact.

9 Ms. Rashidi reentered to request that the PHRC
10 investigate law firms and their connections with
11 state and governmental agencies to determine if
12 favoritism influenced case outcomes. She suggested
13 examining how many cases were handled in favor of
14 employers.]

15 ***

16 ADJOURNMENT

17 CHAIR BOLSTEIN:

18 Motion to adjourn

19 COMMISSIONER YIENGST:

20 So moved.

21 COMMISSIONER JONES:

22 Second.

23 [The motion passed unanimously.]

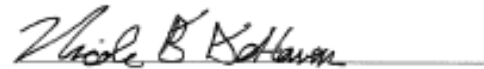
24 ***

25 [The meeting adjourned at 4:54 p.m.]


CERTIFICATE

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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.



Nicole B. DeHaven,
Minute Clerk
Sargent's Court Reporting
Service, Inc.



M. Joel Bolstein, Chairman



o/b/o Commissioner Mayur Patel

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