

MINUTES

CHICAGO COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS (CCHR)

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING

March 9, 2023

Attendance

Commissioners Present:

Karina Ayala Bermejo

Jamie Brown

Marta Cerda

Tommy Choi

Dan Goldwin

Mirna Holton

Margaret Kulujian

Esther Nieves

Dr. Terrell Odom

Mike Takada

Butch Trusty

Kim Waller

CCHR Staff Present:

Kenneth Gunn

JoAnn Newsome

Daniel Serrano

Maria Balderas

Call to Order

First Deputy Commissioner Ken Gunn welcomed all to the meeting. He announced that Commissioner Andrade was not present because she was attending a mayoral cabinet meeting. A quorum was established but there were no actions to vote on.

Mayoral Election and Its Implications

First Deputy Commissioner Ken Gunn explained that depending on the administration, commission appointments will continue until the end of their respective terms. The board is appointed and as such serves at the mayor's discretion. The new mayor may ask the commissioners to resign. When Mayor Lightfoot's administration came in, the board members continued and served out their terms, and then a new slate of commissioners was appointed.

Jaime Brown asked if there is a legal requirement for term positions to resign if asked to? She was under the impression that term positions alternate intentionally, so no executive has full say over any of the independent commissions. First Deputy Commissioner Gunn explained that it is a protocol and like any other appointed position, the executive can ask a member to step down. CCHR membership is structured, everybody has rotating terms. Members start with three-year terms, but these terms are staggered.

Status of Filling Vacancies

The First Deputy Commissioner gave an update on the open positions. Two Human Relations Investigator II positions are officially open and posted on the City's website. He will send a link to the job description. One will focus on fair housing complaints and the other primarily on employment discrimination complaints. The deadline for applying is March 23, 2023. The director of compliance for employment has been identified and is going through background screening. She will begin in two weeks. In addition to the investigators and the director, there will be a public information officer position opening as well.

Overview of Program Statistics 2019-2022

First Deputy Commissioner Gunn went over program statistics in a PowerPoint presentation. The first slide covered Discrimination Complaints received between 2019 to 2022, pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. The report also covered Investigations Completed in a year. There was a bit of a dip during COVID, but the numbers picked up in 2022. The First Deputy Commissioner continued with Hate Crimes reported. The number of hate crimes in 2019 was over 80. Then they dropped during COVID. In 2022, there were 184 because CCHR is still getting reports from last year. The issue of understaffing at CPD has been addressed in the last few months. CCHR has not seen numbers like these in 25 years and has taken a close look at them to see where they came from and what groups are being impacted.

Mirna Holton asked what informs that significant increase? Is it that more people are coming forward, which is positive? Or is it simply that the incident and the prevalence has just increased, and not just people reporting. She feels it is important for the commissioners to be proactive about understanding and analyzing hate crimes.

Mike Takada asked if these incidents meet the official definition of a hate crime. First Deputy Commissioner Gunn explained that these are recorded hate crimes based on the officers' initial information. Upon further investigation they may conclude that it is something else.

Butch Trusty asked if the Commission, at the staff level, has done anything differently in terms of informing the public or training the CPD on understanding hate crimes and how they should be investigated. First Deputy Gunn noted this is addressed through outreach, the hate crimes committee, and events such as the Unity Brunch.

IGR Director Danny Serrano elaborated on the challenges in addressing hate crimes, CPD staff shortages and case backlogs. The Commissioner communicated these concerns with the superintendent of police, deputy mayor for public safety, and ultimately Mayor Lightfoot. As a result, additional staff were assigned to the CPD Civil Rights division.

Karina Ayala Bermejo noted the importance of mental health in the discussion of hate crimes. Could there be preventative discussions, conflict resolution, that would be helpful to avoid some of the hate crimes. Is the Commission seeing any trends or zip codes where hate crimes are happening more? How can the commissioners use this data to predict where they might be able to make a difference before a hate crime happens? The Council on New Americans has seen an increased target on migrant newcomers to Chicago. She invited CCHR staff to collaborate in addressing the community tension at the Wadsworth Home where asylum seekers are being housed. She can help facilitate an introduction to Pastor Phelps of the Concorde Baptist Church.

IGR Director Daniel Serrano agreed to collaborate with the Council on New Americans to provide on-site presentations at the Wadsworth Home. IGR has been conducting Know Your Rights presentations to the newcomer community. He noted the IGR workshops on bullying and the conflict resolution workshops. First Deputy Commissioner Ken Gunn noted the importance of the mental health issue. CCHR has brought in mental health experts to present to CCHR staff.

Adjudication Update

Deputy Commissioner JoAnn Newsome gave the Adjudication update. In terms of discrimination complaints received last year, it was 49 and this year it is 64. This was due in large part to a 52% increase in housing complaint filings. There were 11 last year at this time. This year there are 23, and most of them are housing complaints and voucher source of income discrimination complaints. The employment complaint numbers are the same, they are at 9. In public accommodations complaints, there is a slight increase over last year. Last year it was 29, this year 32, and most of those are disabilities complaints in public accommodations. In terms of investigations completed, this year to date there are 32, whereas last year there were 43. This is due to two things. Last year one of the investigators was promoted and an investigator left earlier this year, which is why CCHR is hiring two investigators. Deputy Commissioner Newsome then provided a status on the hearing process. There are five cases in the settlement phase and are scheduled for settlements anywhere between now and in early April. There are 11 cases in the hearing phase. Some cases were just pushed forward from hearing because they were not able to settle at the conference stage. Two of those hearings are complete and the hearing officers are writing recommended decisions. Once the hearing officers issue a recommended decision the parties have 28 days to file objections, and at the end of the objection stage, Adjudication decides on the objections. At that point the cases will be ready for the commissioners. She will notify the commissioners who will be on the next panel which won't be until the May meeting. Four of the cases in the hearing phase settled within the last two weeks.

Unity Summit

Inter Group Relations (IGR) Director Daniel Serrano gave an update on the Unity Summit. A survey was distributed to all participants of the Unity Brunch. The purpose of the survey was to get a sense from people of what they would want to see in the Unity Summit. The Unity Summit will provide a forum to go a little deeper into the subjects and think about solutions. Some of the survey questions were: How do prejudice, discrimination, and hate crimes impact your community? What topics, panels, and programs do you want to see in the Unity Summit? Who are some of the presenters that you want to hear from? Which organizations that did not attend the Unity Brunch would you like us to invite to the Unity Summit? And what actionable steps would you like to take from the Unity Summit? Some of the topics people want to talk about are how classism, institutional racism, and economic segregation impact Chicago. What is a hate crime? They want to talk about the impact on the immigrant community. They want to hear more about peace circles. The school to prison pipeline, and media stereotypes. They would like to hear from the philanthropic community. They want representation from the LGBTQ plus community. Somebody suggested a celebrity speaker from Chicago who might have been impacted by hate and discrimination. They want to talk about gun violence, police violence, mass, incarceration, and how these things intersect with the problems of prejudice, discrimination, and hate. They want to see toolkits for community-based organizations, specific instructions on how to report a hate crime, workshops, grants on equitable economic growth, collaborations with colleges on databases, and other resources that can be accessed. The Unity Summit program is being developed and staff are discussing how to incorporate some of these things. He is going to send the commissioners the survey. He invited the commissioners to collaborate on crafting the Unity Summit.

Advisory Council Reports

Karina Ayala Bermejo reported on behalf of the New Americans Advisory Council. The main priority has been around the wage theft issues that recent arrivals have been experiencing. The council is also addressing mental health in the immigrant communities. The council has talked about ensuring that the transition of its

work is not lost in the transition of the mayor. The council has been doing more outreach to ensure it has a more diverse representation across countries of origin and that all voices are represented. They have a list of five individuals to recommend to the city council, at the appropriate time, to be appointed.

Esther Nieves reported on behalf of the Advisory Council on Equity. She was out and was not able to attend the meeting, but she will be in contact with her advisory council colleagues and send the board a note.

Dr. Terrell Odom reported on behalf of the Veterans Advisory Council. The Director of Veterans Affairs position will be posted. The caregiver course is an initiative between the University of Chicago Medical Center, the Crown Family School, City Colleges of Chicago, Elizabeth Dole Foundation, and the Gerson Foundation. The Chicago Caregiver course is for caregivers of veterans, police, first responders, and trauma victims. Meghan Hickey from CBS News is interested in recording a one-hour segment and the Chicago Sun times did a story. The caregiver course is free of charge for those interested in participating.

Butch Trusty reported on behalf of the LGBTQ Advisory Council: The council is scheduled to meet next week. The Council has a couple of priorities for this year. One is to focus on housing and housing stability in the LGBTQ community, and the second is putting together a position description and doing some fundraising for a liaison position. It is time to start planning for Pride Month in June.

New Business

First Deputy Commissioner Ken Gunn reminded everyone that the governor's Public Meetings Act relaxed restrictions will end. The Commission must start meeting in person after May 11. He reminded them to complete the Board of Ethics and the Cook County financial Interest Statements. Both are due in May.

Karina Ayala Bermejo shared that the Snap benefits increase during the pandemic are ending. She invited Commission members to volunteer at an Instituto del Progreso Latino food distribution event, which are held every third Wednesday of the month.

Public Comment

No public comments.

Motion to Adjourn

With no further discussions, Ken Gunn asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Karina moved and it was seconded by Dan Goldwin. All were in favor.