

Boston Human Rights Commission Public Meeting Minutes

December 16, 2020 at 5PM via Zoom due to COVID-19

Present: **Commissioners:** Chairwoman Margaret McKenna, Reyes Coll-Tellechea, Ben Goldberger, Leslie Harris, Leonard Lee, Anne Rousseau and Robert MacEachern
Staff: Executive Director Evandro Carvalho and Executive Assistant Susan Helmy
Others: Approximately 7 individuals from the public attended this meeting

A. Introductions

1. Chairwoman Margaret McKenna called the Meeting to order at 5PM with all Commissioners in attendance.

B. Chairwoman McKenna and Executive Director's Reports along with discussions on some of the Commission's Project Initiatives

1. Executive Director Evandro Carvalho reminded the Commission that when Mayor Walsh reinstated the Boston Human Rights Commission last August, he wanted a priority of the Commission to be immigration.
2. Director Carvalho recently attended a City Council Hearing regarding sanctuary safe spaces in the City of Boston. In this hearing, Yusufi Vali (Director of the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement), BPS, BPD and other advocates spoke about how immigrants can feel safe in the City, particularly what the Trust Act does or doesn't do. Essentially, the City Council believes that a "Trust Act 3.0" needs to be created which will help make it current to the times we are in now. Director Carvalho went on to state that he believes that the Commission can become more engaged in the creation of Trust Act 3.0 and potentially become the enforcer of this Act.
 - a. Chairwoman McKenna stated that immigrants might be afraid to come forward but their advocates will come forward. She suggested that BHRC reach out to Yusufi Vali and learn of the current immigrant problems and the role we can take as a Commission.
3. On October 20th, Director Carvalho attended a City Council on a proposal that prohibits employers from using an individual's credit history in determining employment opportunities. The role of the Commission for this proposal is enforcement. The Commission will have the power to investigate and penalize employers that use an individual's credit history in the hiring, termination or promotion of an individual. The Law Department sent a letter to the City Council stating that there were two legal hurdles in this topic: a conflicting state statute and the interference of employer-employee relationships.

C. Digital Divide

1. Director Carvalho continued his report with the issue of the Digital Divide. BHRC learned that the most vulnerable population in this space include older adults, students, immigrants and those in public housing.

2. BHRC also learned that 48,000 households in the City of Boston do not have a desktop or laptop and 38,000 households do not have any internet connectivity.
3. Director Carvalho suggested a plan for the next six months.
 - a. In January, BHRC should host a public Commission meeting where representatives from BPS, BHA and an immigrant organization that can speak to their issues regarding the digital divide.
 - b. After this meeting, a hearing should be conducted containing testimonials from individuals that are dealing with this issue firsthand. This meeting should also include individuals in academia that have collected some research and data on this topic.
 - c. There should then be another hearing or meeting where representatives from Verizon, Comcast, RCN can come and speak to their struggles and concerns.
 - d. Ultimately, BHRC will publish a report of findings and recommendations by the second quarter of 2021.
4. Commissioner Lee spoke this issue not being a new one but one that has been talked about for over 20 years.
5. Commissioner Coll-Tellechea inquired as to whether this information is available with a race and ethnic breakdown. However, this is very hard to find. She also stated the City of Boston developed an energy plan in which all residents are tied to one provider. This energy plan could possibly serve as a model.

D. Boston Police Reform Task Force

1. Chairwoman McKenna opened by reiterating that in a previous meeting, the Commission agreed that it will serve as an oversight to the implementation of Boston Police Reform Task Force recommendations.
2. Chairwoman McKenna suggested that BHRC issue a report to the public entailing the status of the recommendations. However, a thorough read of the final report along with who is responsible for each recommendation is needed.
3. Director Carvalho and Commissioner Goldberger informed the Commission that Mayor Walsh filed an ordinance with the City Council which enacted the Civilian Review Board and the Office of Police Accountability and Transparency (OPAT). The City Council voted and passed this ordinance.
4. Chairwoman McKenna and Commissioner Coll-Tellechea both believe that bringing grad students in from UMASS Boston to help the Commission would be beneficial and effective. Commissioner Coll-Tellechea has also agreed to supervise the grad students.
5. The majority of Commissioners agreed that BHRC should reach out to Police Commissioner William Gross to comment on the status on the recommendation that BPD are responsible for. After reaching out to Commissioner Gross, BHRC should send him a letter. This letter should include a list of all the recommendations he is responsible for and inform him that a report will be drafted and provided to the public on the status of the recommendations.

E. Discussion of the Marginalization and Trauma of Black Males

1. Chairwoman McKenna inquired as to whether there are currently any programs or organizations in Boston that relate to this topic. Commissioner Lee stated that there is a Trauma Team in the Boston Public Health Commission. This Trauma Team however focuses on individuals that have endured extreme stress such as fires and homicides. There are no organizations however that focus on the everyday stress of ordinary black males.
2. Commissioner Lee spoke to acknowledgement and awareness. Acknowledgement is an enormous part of healing and this is why bringing this conversation to the forefront will be beneficial. Commissioner Harris added the fact that these conversations need to be held by black males that have endured the trauma that is being discussed. There have not been any coordinated conversations on this topic.
3. The path for the next year has not been decided. There could be a large seminar, a partnership with an organization or a series of events throughout the year. Chairwoman McKenna suggested that since BHRC has not touched much money in the budget, BHRC could possibly hire consultants to help the Commission devise a plan for next year. However, for now, the new date for the kickoff for this event is January 14th, 2021.

F. Public Comments

1. There was one comment made by Elena Taborda. She received her PhD in Global Inclusion and Social Development this past Spring from UMASS Boston. She defended her dissertation on immigrant rights and human rights as a whole. She offered her help and assistance to the Commission.

G. Votes

1. Two votes were taken during this meeting.
 - a. Unanimous vote of approval of the November 18th 2020 Meeting Minutes.
 - b. Majority vote to adjourn at 6:26pm.