

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**



COMMISSION MEETING

March 13, 2013
One Judiciary Square, 441 Fourth Street, N.W., Conference Room 1117

ATTENDEES

Commissioners:

Nkechi Taifa, Chairperson
Michael Ward, Vice-Chairperson
Edwin Powell, Secretary
Alexandra Beninda
Earline Budd
Rahim Jenkins
Mathew McCollough
John Robinson
Gabriel Rojo
David Scruggs

Commission on Human Rights Staff:

David C. Simmons, Chief Administrative Law Judge
Eli Bruch, Administrative Law Judge
Dianne S. Harris, Administrative Law Judge
Claire Schulmeister, Law Clerk

Office of Human Rights Staff:

Gustavo Velasquez, Director
Alexis Taylor, General Counsel
Elliot Imse, Policy and Public Affairs Officer

Office of Boards and Commissions:

Darryl Gorman, Director

Members of the Community:

Michael Sindram

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Taifa called the Commission meeting to order at 6:34pm.

II. ROLL CALL

Secretary Powell conducted the roll call. Ten Commissioners were present at the meeting. Since at least eight Commissioners were present, a quorum was reached.

III. SWEARING-IN OF COMMISSIONERS

Commissioners Beninda, Jenkins, Powell, and Robinson were formally sworn-in by Director Gorman.

IV. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY MEETING

The Commission adopted the minutes from the Commission's January meeting.

V. THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OPINION ON THE COMMISSION'S ABILITY TO HOLD HEARING, SYMPOSIUMS, OR COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Commissioner Taifa explained that during the January Commission meeting, several Commissioners expressed an interest in learning more about proposed legislation for providing legal protections to returning citizens. The Commissioners discussed the possibility of holding a hearing, symposium, or community meeting. The Commission then established a subcommittee comprised of Commissioners Jenkins, Powell, and Scruggs to explore options on how the Commission might address this issue.

A few days before the March Commission meeting, the Office of the Attorney General issued a legal opinion prohibiting the Commission from holding any such event. Both Director Gorman and General Counsel Alexis Taylor explained the Attorney General's reasoning identified in the legal opinion to the Commissioners and answered questions and concerns from them.

A full discussion on the Commission's role and function in the District government was held.

VI. REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Director Velasquez gave the report on behalf of the Office and gave a brief overview of its performance.

Director Velasquez provided the Commissioners with detailed statistics on OHR's performance in January and February 2013. Thus far in FY 2013, OHR's total settlement benefits to date are \$772,204. Additionally, OHR found "probable cause" in 5 cases, but found "no probable cause" in 42 cases.

VII. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Chief Judge Simmons delivered the report of the Commission and presented an overview of its performance since the last Commission meeting.

The Commission currently has a docket of 15 Commission cases, 6 OHR cases, and 5 CBX appeals. Additionally, the Commission has 3 cases involving petitions for attorney's fees.

Thus far in FY13, the Commission closed 3 Commission case, 3 OHR case, and 1 CBX case.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

Report on Oversight Hearing before City Council

Chairperson Taifa gave the report on the Oversight Hearing before City Council. At the Oversight Hearing, both Chairperson Taifa and CALJ Simmons testified on behalf on the Commission. Together, they answered several questions from Councilmember Barry pertaining to the Commission's accomplishments and future goals for this fiscal year. They highlighted how the Commission has sought to gain greater visibility in the community. The winning artistic piece from the Youth Human Rights Ambassador program was played for the Council and broadcasted over Cable Channel 16.

Report of the Education Committee regarding Returning Citizens

Commissioner Scruggs presented the report of the Education Committee. The Committee recommended that, consistent with the Commission's normal practice, community members with views on legislation concerning returning citizens be allowed to present their views at the May Commission meeting as part of the Community Comments portion of the meeting. The Commissioners decided not to vote of the Committee's recommendation immediately, but rather to hold an executive session via conference call the following week during which they could further discuss the Committee's recommendation.

Discussion regarding Social Media

Elliott Imse, OHR's Policy and Public Affairs Officer, provided an overview of how using social media can help the Commission gain more visibility in the community. Mr. Imse asked Commissioners to provide

him with photos of them engaging in events relating to the Commission's mission. These photos will then be uploaded and shared on the Commission's website.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

Election of Vice-Chairperson and Secretary

Commissioner Michael Ward was reelected as Vice-Chairperson by acclamation. Commissioner Edwin Powell was also reelected as Secretary by acclamation.

X. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

Michael Sindram spoke about his concerns with the Office and the state of human rights in the District.

XI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

OHR will hold its 12th Annual Housing Symposium on April, 18, 2013 at Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The Commission meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm.