



**Cambridge Human Rights Commission
Thursday, December 2, 2021
Zoom Virtual Public Meeting**

Present: Chair Yasmin Padamsee Forbes Stefanie Haug, Olinda Marshall, Sabrina Selk, Katie Stack, and Joshua Stadlan

City Staff: Executive Director Jennifer Mathews, Attorney Investigator Carolina Almonte, Project Coordinator Crystal Rosa, and Deputy Superintendent Fredrick Cabral

Absent: Commissioner Bonita Cox and Mercedes Evans

Documents Used:

- November 4, 2021, Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Padamsee Forbes called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. Chair Padamsee Forbes started off the meeting by inviting members of the Commission to share a memorable moment from the holiday weekend.

2. Public Comment

No one was recording the meeting and no public was present to comment.

3. Review and approval of November 2021 Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the meeting on November 4, 2021. Commissioner Haug moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Marshall.

4. Staff Reports

Attorney Investigator Case Report

AI Almonte updated the members of the Commission on the latest cases. Since the November meeting, six new cases opened, three cases closed, and two cases remain pending. AI Almonte provided the Commission with a summary for each case.

Housing Discrimination complaint based on race, national origin, and source of income: The complainant has a Section 8 voucher and claims that he was denied a housing opportunity due to his voucher and based on comments about his race and national origin. The respondents dispute his allegations and have alleged that the reason for the denial is related to the complainant's credit.

Public Accommodations Discrimination complaint based on race: The complainant is an Asian woman who went to a restaurant in Cambridge. She alleges her party and other parties with Asian guests were seated in a downstairs dining room, while White diners were seated upstairs where the ambiance was much nicer. The complainant is alleging that Asians were seated downstairs as a deliberate policy.

Employment Discrimination complaint based on sexual orientation and retaliation: The complainant is a woman in a same-sex marriage. She was terminated from a store in Cambridge where she worked with her wife. The complainant claims she was treated differently from employees in opposite-sex relationships. The store has a policy that prohibits managers from dating employees whom they supervise or those whose careers they could influence. The complainant alleges this policy was enforced against her, as a manager, but not against other managers in opposite-sex relationships. The complainant also alleges that her boss falsely accused her of falsifying her wife's timesheet, and that her employment was terminated after she informed her boss she was planning on filing a complaint with the Human Rights Commission.

Employment Discrimination complaint based on race and disability: The complainant was terminated from a Cambridge food service establishment at which he claims he was the only Black employee. He claims he was terminated because he enforced the store and City mask policy by refusing service to a hostile patron who refused to wear a mask. He alleges that employees outside of his protected class were not terminated after enforcing the mask policy. He also alleges he was in the process of requesting reasonable accommodations in the workplace when terminated.

Public Accommodations Discrimination complaint based on race and national origin: The complainant claims that he was treated differently from other music agents at a concert venue in Cambridge. He claims that he was not told about the venue's COVID-19 policy and the venue canceled his client's performance because the complainant was not vaccinated. The complainant alleges that the venue's COVID-19 policy was not enforced against another agent outside of his protected class, and that the policy was enforced by an all-White venue staff.

Housing Discrimination complaint based on disabilities and source of income: The complainant has multiple disabilities and has requested many reasonable accommodations that he alleges the respondents have not provided. He also claims that the respondents are discriminating against his source of income as a voucher holder by not agreeing to certain terms and/or complying with certain requirements.

IA Almonte provided updates regarding her participation in city collaborations. IA Almonte is part of a working group on Credit Alternatives. There are three subcommittees with different areas of focus. One subcommittee is focused on tenants and credit, with the question of how to help tenants improve their credit for their housing search. Another subcommittee is working with housing managers to find credit alternatives to prevent housing denials. IA Almonte is working in the third subcommittee focused on system change, which is reviewing city ordinances that prohibit the use of credit. IA Almonte also represented the Commission as part of the *Housed In Cambridge* campaign during the library drop-in hours, which was well attended by the public.

Executive Director Updates

- With the help of Commissioners Stadlan and Stack, and Chair Padamsee Forbes, ED Mathews has completed a review of CHRC applicants and is almost done with interviews. The hope is to have recommendations sent to the City Manager for appointment before the appointment process changes January 1, 2022.
- CHRC staff produced a *Housed In Cambridge* Zoom webinar presentation by IA Almonte on Fair Housing & COVID-19. Specifically, the presentation focused on issues of harassment, discrimination based on source of income and race. The webinar was simultaneously interpreted in Spanish and subtitles in multiple languages will be added once the recording is edited. Links to the recording will be sent to the Commission by email.
- Community Dispute Settlement Center Conciliation Training Update – Tentative schedule is for the end of January or early February. ED Mathews will send out a Doodle poll to schedule two days of 2.5-hour class, or three days of 2-hour class. The training will be virtual and include 1 to 1 role-playing practice.
- ED Mathews has reached out to the Community Learning Center Director, John Galli, to discuss reviving the outreach partnership.
- The City Manager signed a letter in support of state legislation – Family Mobility Act, which would allow MA drivers licenses/ID cards regardless of immigration status. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council has led the advocacy for cities to sign on to the letter. Legislative overview will be shared with Commissioners.

Project Coordinator Updates

- PC Rosa announced the upcoming *Housed In Cambridge* webinars. PC Rosa has been coordinating logistics for the program. On December 7th, Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) staff will provide information on the steps to renting to a voucher holder. On January 18th, staff from Just-A-Start and Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee will provide information to assist anyone trying to improve their credit score.

Ad Hoc Workgroup/Task Force on Homelessness

Deputy Superintendent Cabral provided an overview of the work by the task force, which he and ED Mathews are both on. The City Manager appointed staff to work with consultants and subject experts to report back to the City Council with an action plan for addressing homelessness and supporting the unhoused in Cambridge. Discussions and ideas are wide-ranging. One example from recent meeting is idea for a drop-in center in Central Square. The effort is being led by Councilor Marc McGovern. Report and recommendations are in development.

6. New Business

Issues or Concerns in Cambridge

The Commission was asked to consider and provide feedback regarding issues or areas of concern on which members might want more information from appropriate City staff. The Commission was encouraged to think about it for the next meeting. There was interest in learning more about other states offering driver's licenses to undocumented residents. There was interest for information on how to get involved and learn more from the City's climate change working group. And due to the recent events at CRLS, there was an ask to follow up with Cambridge Public Schools regarding the student walkout because of allegations of sexual assault at the school.

Commissioner Stack moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:57 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Stadlan.

The next Commission meeting will be on Thursday, January 6, 2022, virtually on Zoom.