



**Cambridge Human Rights Commission
Thursday, March 2, 2023
Virtual Public Meeting**

Present: Chair Judith Laguerre, and Commissioners Mercedes Evans, Josh Stadlan, Kaileigh Callender, Stephen Curran, Olinda Marshall, Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, Stefanie Haug, Deputy Superintendent Fred Cabral.

Members of the Public: Kathy Watkins, Emily Ding, Justin Saif, and Carolyn Mathews.

City Staff: Attorney Investigator, Carolina Almonte and Director of Operations, Sarah Binney.

Absent: Commissioners Katie Stack, Sabrina Selk, and Bonita Cox.

Documents Used:

- February 2, 2023, Minutes.

1. Call to Order:

- Chair Laguerre called the meeting to order at 6:06pm.

2. Public Comment

- No one was recording the meeting. The four members of the public, Kathy Watkins, Emily Ding, Justin Saif, Carolyn Mathews, introduced themselves. Each member of the public shared that they were joining to learn more about Section 8 vouchers and source of income discrimination, as well as opportunities for testing.

3. Review and approval of February 2023 Minutes

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the meeting on February 2, 2023. Commissioner Evans moved to approve the minutes with the most recent edits. Commissioner Curran seconded. Chair Laguerre called for a vote. Minutes were approved unanimously.

4. Introduction of Director of Operations – Sarah Binney

- Sarah Binney introduced herself and discussed her previous work experience. Commissioners shared their background and their time serving on the Commission.

5. Staff report

- **Miscellaneous updates:**
 - AI Almonte shared that Elizabeth Speakman, Interim Director of the Cambridge Community Safety Department, has agreed to speak at the

April Commission meeting. The Department is working to create an alternative response pilot program, which will send a team out for non-violent and behavioral health crisis calls in response to 911 calls. Ms. Speakman will join us on April 6, 2023, to share more about the mission and scope of the Department.

- **March Educational/Outreach Program:**
 - AI Almonte shared that on March 29, 2023, she, along with the Massachusetts Transgender Coalition, will present on sexual orientation and gender identity protections. CHRC's portion of the presentation will focus on housing discrimination protections and rights of the LGBTQ+ communities. Tre-Andre Carmel Valentine, the Executive Director of MTPC, will present on broader issues faced by trans and nonbinary communities, with a focus on how MTPC provides direct support in the areas of employment, education, health care, homelessness, identity documents, and incarceration. The event will be in the Sullivan Chamber in City Hall, as well as on zoom, from 6:00pm - 7:30pm. Commissioners were encouraged to share widely with their networks.
- **Pre-Determination Settlement Agreement Training**
 - AI Almonte shared that in light of the recent updates to the Rules of Procedure, she will prepare a training on best practices and typical public interest provisions included in settlement agreements to share with the Commissioners. Previously, the Chair was the only authorized party to review and sign Pre-Determination Settlement Agreements, but now the rules allow for any Commissioner to review and sign. AI Almonte will send out a poll in the coming weeks.
- **Attorney-Investigator Case Report.**
 - AI Almonte provided case updates. There are 13 cases currently pending. Of the 13 cases, 5 cases are involving housing discrimination, 5 cases are involving public accommodations discrimination, and 3 cases are involving employment discrimination. 4 cases were recently closed. Of the 4 closed cases, 1 was administratively closed, 1 was withdrawn, and 2 were resolved by a lack of probable cause finding. Commissioners Evans and Haug reviewed and signed the two lack of probable cause determinations. We currently have 3 cases relating to disability discrimination that will be filed soon.

6. Old Business

- **Update from Commissioners on Board/Commission Connections**
 - Commissioner Evans was scheduled to attend a meeting with the Bicycle Safety Commission but did not receive the zoom address. She will try to connect with them again.
 - Chair Laguerre met with the Public Health Commissioner for the City, who shared that he would be happy to join a Commission meeting in the future and present on healthcare disparities in the City.

- **Fair Housing Month Event (April 29) - Volunteers for outreach and welcome table**
 - AI Almonte updated Commissioners on the “Fair Housing for All” event scheduled for April 29, 2023, from 11:00am to 2:30pm at the Cambridge Public Library. AI Almonte shared that the event will consist of tabling from community partners, as well as two panels. CHRC will speak on the “Understanding Housing Rights” panel alongside the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination and the Attorney General’s Office. The second panel will be a discussion about opportunities for legislative advocacy. CHRC plans to share flyers for the event and requested Commissioner volunteers to inform the public of our work at the CHRC table.
 - Commissioners Callender and Curran volunteered for a 2-hour slot.

7. New Business

- **Voucher-related Review**
 - [Article on Section 8 Voucher Program Changes](#)
 - [Article on Continued Housing Discrimination](#)
- **Attorney-Investigator Overview of Vouchers & Payment of Rent Over Voucher Amount**
 - AI Almonte provided an overview of Cambridge Housing Authority’s (CHA) Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, which is made up of Tenant-Based Vouchers and Project-Based Vouchers. AI Almonte discussed the 120-day timeline provided to mobile voucher holders to locate housing and the requirements that these units meet minimum standards for health and safety.
 - AI Almonte also explained that the rent for a unit must be reasonable in comparison to rents charged for similar, unassisted apartments in the area. A rental subsidy is paid directly to the housing provider on behalf of the participating family by CHA, and it is determined by the person or family’s income. Typically, voucher holders pay 30% of their income toward rent.
 - The Payment Standard is the maximum rent that a participant is allowed to pay for rent. Payment Standards were recently increased in December 2022 and they are based on zip codes. If a voucher holder wants to pay more rent than the Payment Standard covers, they need express permission from CHA. However, the additional portion a voucher holder pays cannot be greater than 40% of their income.
 - AI Almonte shared that in terms of typical complaints that are filed with the Commission, most are regarding refusal to rent or refusal to negotiate for rent based on source of income. The Commission also receives complaints regarding different terms and conditions where Complainants

allege that they are being treated differently compared to market rate tenants.

- Commissioner Stadlan asked about the use of credit scores in making tenancy determinations regarding voucher holders. Housing providers can consider credit scores for all applicants, including voucher holders, when renting units, as long as the tenancy screening process is equally applied to all prospective renters.

8. Federal Human Rights Developments

- Commissioner Stadlan discussed a recent article about the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s decision to turn its enforcement attention to artificial intelligence tools used by employers to hire workers, which has been shown to introduce discriminatory decision making. About 80% of companies use AI assisted software in employment screenings. Commissioners discussed the importance of considering AI discrimination in future employment complaints filed with the Commission.
- Commissioner Stadlan also shared the Biden Administration’s “Blueprint for Renter Bill of Rights.” The Blueprint highlights the importance of principals and best practices for tenant protections for a well-functioning society.

9. Adjournment

- Commissioner Marshall moved to adjourn at 7:26pm, Commissioner Stadlan seconded.

The next Commission meeting will be on Thursday, April 6, 2023, virtually on Zoom.