



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



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### Cambridge Human Rights Commission February 6, 2025 Virtual Public Meeting on Zoom

**Present:** Chairs Stefanie Haug and Mercedes Evans, and Commissioners Caroline Palavicino Maggio, Judith Laguerre, Sam Myers, Stephen Curran, Beverly Sealey, Sue Mapel, Olinda Marshall, and Diane Smith

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Director of Operations Sarah Binney, Attorney Investigator Vanessa Lawrence, and Superintendent Frederick Cabral

**Absent:** Commissioner Yasmin Padamsee Forbes

**1. Call to Order:**

- Chair Haug called the meeting to order at 6:02pm.

**2. Public Comment**

- No members of the public joined for public comment.

**3. Review and approval of January 2025 Minutes**

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the last Commission meeting in January 2025. Commissioner Curran moved to approve the minutes. Chair Evans seconded.

**4. Staff Reports**

- ED Almonte
  - CHRC is not receiving a HUD Partnership Grant this year, but the budget still has funds from previous grants, so the Commission will still be able to fund outreach events.
  - The Commission is no longer able to dual file cases regarding gender identity discrimination with HUD. The city is still able to investigate these cases via the city Fair Housing Ordinance. Chair Evans suggested putting out communications to the community to let them know that the Commission can still take these cases. Commissioner Curran asked if this is temporary or permanent. ED Almonte explained as of now, it is temporary but she will continue monitoring any changes.
  - Commissioner Curran asked about how changes in federal funding would affect city operations. ED Almonte is checking in on city

partners to see how funding cuts have affected them. The Finance and Budget departments are working on a plan for addressing internal funding changes.

- Commissioners are required to take the State's Conflict of Interest Training every 2 years and acknowledge receipt of the training every year.
- ED Almonte and AI Lawrence presented about the work of CHRC for the Worcester Human Rights Commission.
- AI Lawrence
  - 12 New Intakes
  - 5 New Cases (4 more to be filed)
    - Housing (4)
      - National Origin discrimination
        - Discrimination based on national origin, ethnicity and race. C alleges that R's denied her housing application and acted rudely towards her because she is of African descent and Native American; not Haitian
        - Discrimination based on national origin and religion. C alleges that he/his family are being harassed by neighbors/threatened violence in order to get them to move out. C alleges he has been told that "they hate you, your religion, don't want you living here"
      - Race
        - C alleges she is being treated differently than her white roommate because her requests for repairs are being ignored, her room did not come with standard furniture, and she feels as though the situation is unlivable.
      - Disability
        - C is a disabled and requested to be moved from a unit that requires her to walk up/down stairs to a first floor unit. R's have failed to offer C an accessible unit.
    - Employment (1)
      - Disability Discrimination
        - C went out on leave because of injury sustained on the job. Worker's comp was

denied. When she returned to work, she was treated differently and written up for being late. C believes she's being discriminated against because of her leave request.

- To be filed:
  - Housing; Source of income
  - Housing; Disability
  - Housing; Sexual harassment
  - Employment; Age
- Determinations
  - Recent LOPC Determinations:
    - Employment
      - C alleged that she was being discriminated against based on race/ancestry, gender identity, national origin, and disability when she was terminated from her employment. Investigation revealed that C was terminated for failing to meet job expectations/requirements.
- Investigations
  - Employment: discrimination based on national origin and sexual harassment
    - Allegations: C alleges R's gave him more work, treated him poorly, underpaid him and made sexually inappropriate comments in the workplace because of his national origin/not from the US
    - Rebuttal recently submitted
  - Public Accommodations: discrimination based on disability
    - Allegations: C alleges that she was denied entry to a gym because she had her service dog with her.
    - Reviewing position statement
    - Mediation Successes/Movement
  - Source of income and family status discrimination case
    - Allegations: R wouldn't let C apply because her family size (5) was too big for the apartment, even though that's what her voucher provides for
    - PDSA includes (1) CHRC source of income training, (2) MCAD Housing Discrimination 101 Training, and (3) monetary compensation of \$3,000

- \*waiting on C to figure out tax implications of settlement money
- Source of Income Discrimination case (conciliated by Stefanie)
  - Allegations: R denied C's application because she did not meet the income requirement even though her application stated that she would be using a voucher
  - PDSA includes (1) monetary compensation of \$7,000, (2) internal training on application review, (3) fair housing training, and (4) amendments to the application
  - \*Agreed to by all parties. Waiting on R's attorney to review PDSA
- Source of Income discrimination case
  - Allegations: R's charged C for rent owed and began the eviction process after Metro Housing Boston withheld/paused payment on the voucher because R's failed inspection.
  - Parties would like to settle with (1) the acknowledgement that C does not owe any money and (2) a check to C for money owed to him.
- DOO Binney
  - CHRC and the Center for Housing Justice and Policy at Suffolk University will be presenting a webinar about Source of Income Discrimination. This webinar will be targeted at housing providers. It will be on **Tuesday, March 4 at 12pm.**
  - Al Lawrence and DOO Binney went to a meeting of the Community Engagement Team along with other housing-focused city departments. They presented on the scope of complaints the Commission takes, the complaint process, and answered questions from outreach workers about cases.
  - The annual Fair Housing Month event will be split into two parts. A panel discussion will happen at the end of April, and the housing fair will be in early May.
  - CHRC will also present a training on Fair Housing for city employees.

## 5. Old Business

- Sexual Orientation Definition – Law department provided a suggestion for updated definition with removal of outdated terms: “Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation shall include both discrimination based on actual

knowledge of sexual orientation as well as discrimination based on supposition or assumption of an individual's sexual orientation, which can include assumptions based on someone's gender expression or identity."

Commissioner Curran expressed concern about enforcement under this definition. Commissioner Sealey recommended looking at Fenway Health's definitions and Commissioner Myers suggested using GLAD's definitions. ED Almonte explained that ultimately, after input from Commissioners, Staff, and Law Department, this will be voted on by City Council, but she will share an alternative with the Law Department for their review.

- Commission for Persons with Disabilities – Brochure/Partnership - Last month, the Commission discussed the possibility for partnership with the Commission for Persons with Disabilities on a brochure about disability discrimination. ED Almonte suggested that this project should happen after Fair Housing Month.

## 6. New Business

- Updates from other Commissions:
  - Updates from the Commission on Immigrant Rights and Citizenship (CIRC):
    - CIRC has presented 2 hybrid Know Your Rights trainings at the Community Learning Center with interpretation into 7 languages. Upcoming, CIRC will have a Know Your Rights training for direct service workers and a training for CRLS students. There will also be a KYR training open to the public on **March 4, 2025 at 6pm at the Cambridge Public Library**. CIRC is partnering with De Novo, MIRA, and PAIR. These organizations provide Immigration Attorneys to give the presentations.
    - ED Almonte is working with the Law Department on guidelines for what to do if ICE comes to city buildings. These guidelines will be distributed to employees. Superintendent Cabral explained that Cambridge Police do not enforce immigration law except in criminal cases. The Police could assist with communication in the case of ICE entering city buildings.
    - ED Almonte asked Commissioners to think about how CHRC could create materials or programs relating to National Origin Discrimination. Commissioner Smith expressed concern about ongoing funding for sanctuary cities.

- DOO Binney is working with the Public Information Office to update the CIRC website with Know Your Rights Resources.
- Updates from the LGBTQ+ Commission
  - Caitlyn Egleson, an attorney and Commissioner from the LGBTQ+ Commission, did a presentation about Legal Protections for the LGBTQ+ Family focused on Second Parent Adoption and Estate Planning. The workshop was recorded and will be posted on the LGBTQ+ Commission website.
  - The LGBTQ+ Commission is also planning STI Workshop and Testing Clinic with CHA and Name Change Workshops at the library with Mass Trans Political Coalition.
- DOO Binney suggested that Human Rights Commissioners support other Commissions with outreach efforts by sending flyers to their organizations and networks. Commissioner Sealey suggested outreach at LGBTQ+ Healthcare centers.

#### **7. Adjournment**

- Chair Evans moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:24pm. Commissioner Curran seconded.

**The next meeting will be on Thursday, March 6, at 6:00pm.**