



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



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### Cambridge Human Rights Commission January 2, 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, and Diane Smith

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

**Absent:** Commissioners Sue Mapel, Olinda Marshall, and Yasmin Padamsee Forbes

**1. Call to Order:**

- Chair Evans called the meeting to order at 6:04pm.

**2. Public Comment**

- No members of the public joined for public comment.

**3. Review and approval of November 2024 Minutes**

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the last Commission meeting in November 2024. Chair Haug moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Myers seconded.

**4. Staff Reports**

- ED Almonte
  - Congratulations to Commissioners Laguerre, Padamsee Forbes, and Curran who have been reappointed to the Commission for new terms.
  - CHRC is scheduled to move to a new office in Spring 2025.
  - Governor Healey signed the petition for Cambridge Fair Housing Ordinance amendments. This means that the new protected classes—Relationship Status and Family Structure—have been approved and are ready to be ordained by the Council. Chair Evans requested an in-depth review of these protected classes at a future Commission meeting. Chair Haug suggested a press release to publicize these changes. Chair Evans asked about Somerville’s experience with incorporating these protections. ED Almonte shared that the City of Somerville does not have the

same investigative powers as CHRC, so complaints of discrimination in Somerville are investigated by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination.

- The Commission on Immigrant Rights and Citizenship (CIRC) is hosting Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings. Upcoming trainings will be facilitated by the Political Asylum/ Immigration Representation Project (PAIR) and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) in collaboration the City. Different KYR trainings will be tailored for community members, city staff, and outreach workers. If any Commissioners have communities that would be interested in KYR presentations, such as schools or faith-based communities, they should reach out to staff who can support with scheduling a presentation.
- The City has been receiving a lot of questions about Sanctuary City status. ED Almonte is working with other City departments on relevant materials to educate the public. ED Almonte attended a training about best practices for Sanctuary Cities.
- The LGBTQ+ Commission is hosting a Family Law Webinar on Tuesday, January 29 from 12:00pm-1:30pm focusing on topics such as Second Parent Adoption, and Estate Planning.
- The LGBTQ+ Commission is planning two Name Change Clinics with the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) and the City of Somerville in February and March.
- The LGBTQ+ Commission is partnering with the Cambridge Health Alliance for an HIV Stigma Workshop and STI Testing Clinic in February at the Main Library.
- AI Lawrence Case Report
  - 7 New Intakes
  - 2 New Cases (to be filed)
    - Housing (2)
      - 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"

- Recent LOPC Determinations:
  - Housing: discrimination based on race
    - Allegations: neighbor v. neighbor. C alleged neighbor made inappropriate comments around her, slammed doors and hissed at her because she is a Black woman
    - C could not provide documentation that she informed the property manager of discrimination and thus failed to prove case
  - Housing: discrimination based on age, source of income and disability.
    - C alleged that R's refused to renew his lease stating his subsidized portion of the rent as a form of discrimination.
    - R's wrote addendum to lease to accommodate C's request and R's argued it was their standard business practice.
- Investigations
  - Employment: discrimination based on gender identity and race
    - Allegations: management was made aware of transphobic comments and misgendering in the workplace but did not take action to correct it.
    - Reviewing document production and drafting determination
  - 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
- 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
  - Source of Income Discrimination case (conciliated by Commissioner Haug)

- 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
- Chair Evans suggested a summary of common types of complaints submitted to the Commission and the Outcomes to better see patterns.
- DOO Binney – Housed IN Cambridge will host Housing Information Drop In Hours in February. The Office of the Housing Liaison, Multiservice Center, and Community Development Department Housing Division will be present to answer housing questions.

#### 5. **Old Business**

- Sexual Orientation Definition – ED Almonte shared that the Law Department is going to review the suggested definition and we will hopefully have an update next month. This will be added to the agenda again in February.

#### 6. **New Business**

- Fair Housing Presentations - CHRC will host upcoming Fair Housing information sessions:
  - A presentation about Source of Income Discrimination on February 25, 2025
  - A Fair Housing training for city employees in March
  - Annual Fair Housing Day in April
- FY25/26 Idea Brainstorm
  - Commissioner Myers asked about the parameters for HUD fund usage.
  - Chair Evans suggested sending Commissioners to Fair Housing conferences.
  - Chair Evans proposed a partnership with the Cambridge Commissions for Persons with Disabilities. We could develop a specific brochure about disability and Fair Housing, responding to the high number of disability-related complaints.
  - Chair Haug suggested outreach efforts for Older Adults in Cambridge to know their housing rights. Commissioner Sealey suggested a collaboration with the Council on Aging.
  - Chair Evans emphasized the importance of getting the word out to people who do not know they can file complaints.
  - Commissioner Sealey asked about creative ways that we can distribute Commission materials and proposed distribution to local service providers. Commissioner Curran suggested a mailer.

ED Almonte will talk to the Communications Office about how to distribute a mailer.

- Chair Haug discussed the overlap between Human Rights and Transportation.
- HUD will be doing its biannual performance review in the spring.

**7. Adjournment**

- Commissioner Curran moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:01pm. Chair Haug seconded.

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