

**Cambridge Human Rights Commission
Thursday, October 16, 2025
Virtual Public Meeting**

Present: Chair Mercedes Evans and Commissioners Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, Sue Mapel, Beverly Sealey, Olinda Marshall, Caroline Palavicino Maggio, Samuel Myers and Stephen Curren and Judith Laguerre.

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Director of Operations Sarah Binney, Attorney Investigator Vanessa Carr, Outreach Worker Catiana Jean Pierre

Absent: Chair Stefanie Haug

1. Call to Order

- Chair Evans called the meeting to order at 6:10pm.

2. Public Comments

- Catiana Jean Pierre, outreach worker with the Community Engagement Team for the Haitian Community, joined to learn more about community resources and to stay informed.

3. Review and approval of September 2025 Minutes

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the meeting in September 2025. Commissioner Mapel moved to approve the minutes; Commissioner Sealey seconded. All Commissioners voted to approve the minutes.

4. Staff Reports

- ED Almonte
 - ED Almonte has returned from parental leave and is temporarily working part-time.
 - Commissioner Smith has resigned from the Commission. Staff will post the vacancy and reach out for Commission volunteers when it is time to interview applicants.
 - The HUD Liaison for CHRC has been furloughed due to the shutdown. CHRC might lose funding due to removal of substantial equivalency with the current federal Fair Housing ordinance. CHRC will still have the authority to investigate discrimination under the city ordinance. There is no specific information, ED Almonte will continue to provide updates to Commissioners. Chair Evans asked about how funding changes factored into the city's budget planning. Commissioner Sealey suggested that the Mayor or the City Manager join an upcoming CHRC meeting to discuss budget changes with Commissioners.

- o ED Almonte suggested having a town hall event for members of the public to ask questions and give feedback in order to inform the Commission's functions. Chair Evans expressed concern for safety at the event. Commissioner Padamsee Forbes suggested ensuring that we are able to provide answers to questions asked at the event. Chair Evans suggested that it could be a good opportunity to inform the public of the Commission's function.
 - o There will be a proposal about a process for inviting guest speakers to Commission meetings by the November meeting. Chair Evans expressed interest in having the opportunity to provide feedback before the process is finalized. ED Almonte confirmed that there will be a feedback process.
- DOO Binney
 - o **Bystander Trainings:** The Cambridge Commission on Immigrant Rights and Citizenship (CIRC) and the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants will host two free virtual workshops with practical tools for bystanders to intervene and de-escalate situations. They will discuss ICE enforcement basics, community support roles, and what to do if detention occurs. They will take place on **Wednesday, October 29 and Wednesday, November 5 from 6:00pm-7:00pm.**
 - o **Fall Fest:** The Cambridge LGBTQ+ Commission, CHA Sexual and Reproductive Health, and the Boston LesBiGay Urban Foundation will be hosting Fall Fest on **Wednesday, November 12 from 5:00pm-8:00pm.** This event will feature activities, crafts, and games for families, community resource tables, free STI testing, and fall-themed refreshments. CHRC could request a table for outreach if Commissioners are available. DOO Binney will send out information, and interested Commissioners can volunteer. Commissioner Myers asked about how to discuss federal funding while tabling. Al Carr suggested emphasizing the Commission's continued work investigating discrimination in spite of federal changes.
- Al Carr
 - o Case Updates
 - 9 New Intakes
 - 1 New Case filed; 3 pending
 - Housing/Familial Status and Retaliation – C alleges LL pushed back against de-leading the apartment after learning C's wife had a baby and suggested the

family move out.

- o Determinations

- Lack of Probable Cause Determinations (2)

- Housing/Source of Income Discrimination

- o Allegations: C alleged that R's ignored his maintenance requests and fabricated a reason to evict him because of his status as a voucher recipient.
 - o Outcome: C demonstrated that he was subjected to unfavorable conditions but failed to show that it was because of his source of income.

- Housing/Disability Discrimination

- o Allegations: C alleged that R's failed to accommodate her disability by rejecting her reasonable accommodation request to move to an accessible unit on the first floor.
 - o Outcome: C did not present any evidence that she submitted a reasonable accommodation request to transfer units because of her disability.

- o Mediation Successes

- Housing: Source of Income Discrimination

- Allegations: R's told C, via email, that she could not apply to rent the property because the LL's do not accept housing vouchers.
 - Outcome: R's agreed to anti-discrimination training, review of their policies regarding housing vouchers, and monetary compensation in the amount of \$14,000.

- Pending: Public Accommodations/Disability Discrimination
 - Allegations: C alleges that R's would not allow her to enter the gym with her service animal.
 - Outcome: R's agreed to review their service animal policy, attend anti-discrimination training, and display the city's notice of non-discrimination in their Cambridge offices.
- o Other updates
 - Al Carr attended the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies in Anchorage, Alaska.
 - Members of the LGBTQ+ Commission and the Human Rights Commission will be forming a new working group to discuss how to do outreach about Cambridge's newest protected classes, family structure and relationship status. The working group is meeting on Wednesday, October 22. Anyone interested can reach out to staff for the zoom link.

5. Old Business

- Reasonable Accommodations in Housing: Free Workshop for Disabled Residents – Monday, November 3 from 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM at the Main Library Community Room
 - o CHRC is collaborating with the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) to host a workshop for people looking to learn more about the reasonable accommodation process. This event was developed in response to the high rates of disability discrimination complaints. This workshop will cover what reasonable accommodation means, what documentation is necessary, what housing providers are allowed to ask for, and how to get support with the process. Chair Evans suggested outreach to MCAD and state disability offices. DOO Binney shared that CHRC and CCPD will both be doing outreach to their networks. Commissioner Sealey suggested outreach through Cambridge NAACP, food pantries, the Cambridge Community Center, and the Margaret Fuller House. DOO Binney can print flyers for Commissioners to distribute. Commissioners should reach out to

DOO Binney with any requests for flyers.

6. New Business

- Outreach opportunities – Commissioner Mapel suggested having HRC tabling participation at citywide events such as MLK Day of Service and Cambridge Pride.
- Commissioner Laguerre shared about connection with organization that can provide training to commissioners about civil rights, community engagement, and the causes of discrimination.

7. Adjournment

- Commissioner Marshall moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:24. Commissioner Mapel seconded.