

Cambridge Human Rights Commission
Thursday, June 4, 2026
Virtual Public Meeting

Present: Commissioners Olinda Marshall, Fiqir Worku, Beverly Sealey, Samuel Myers, Judith Laguerre, and Caroline Palavicino-Maggio

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Attorney Investigator Vannessa Carr, Superintendent Fredrick Cabral, and Program Manager Ester Farah.

Absent: Chairs Mercedes Evans and Stefanie Haug, Commissioners Sue Mapel, Stephen Curran, and Yasmin Padamsee Forbes.

Members of the Public: None

1. Call to Order

- Executive Director Almonte called the meeting to order at 6:07pm.

2. Public Comments

- No public comment.

3. Welcome our new Program Manager, Ester Farah!

- New Program Manager Ester introduced herself and her background. Commissioners introduced themselves.

4. Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes.

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the meeting in May 2026. Commissioner Myers moved to approve the minutes; Commissioner Marshall seconded. All voted in favor.

5. Staff Report

- **ED Almonte**
 - Three new program managers started in June. ED Almonte is helping with the search for the Executive Director of the American Freedmen Commission, and an Equity and Inclusion trainer is being hired.
 - Department is moving to the first floor and switching with the Human Resources Department. The move is most likely happening in August.
 - The Commission should expect to receive an email for a Department of Equity and Inclusion Commission Celebration on June 22nd from 6 – 8 PM. The event is a chance for all Commissions under the Equity and Inclusion Department to come together, meet one another, and get to know each other.
 - Our budget for FY27 was approved! The new fiscal year begins on July 1, 2026.



- **AI Carr**
 - Outreach/Programming - N/A
 - Case Updates
 - 10 New Intakes
 - New Cases (2) - Pending
 - Housing
 - Source of Income Discrimination: C alleges R's tried to take advantage of her and not return her security deposit because she has a housing choice voucher.
 - Race/Source of income/Family Status Discrimination: C alleges that R's failed to properly address the bed bugs problem in his unit because he is a Black, single father using a housing choice voucher.
 - Determination
 - Lack of Probable Cause Determinations (0)
 - Mediation Successes
 - Pre-Determination Settlement Agreement (1)
 - Employment: Disability Discrimination
 - C alleged that R's unreasonably denied her reasonable accommodation request to stim in the workplace.
 - Respondents agreed to allow C to stim using a fidget spinner, review their reasonable accommodation policy and submit their anti-discrimination training to CHRC for review and approval.

6. Old Business

- **“Sexual Orientation” Definition Update**
 - The Law Department reviewed the definition, and now we need to vote on it. The new proposed definition is: “Sexual orientation means an actual or perceived enduring emotional, romantic, or physical attraction, or lack of attraction, to others based on sex or gender. For example, sexual orientations may include, but are not limited to, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, omnisexual, pansexual, queer, or asexual.”
 - Commissioner Myers asked what role the Commission's vote plays in the law enforcement process. ED Almonte explained that it is in an advisory capacity. The final decision will be made by the Council and Staff Legislature.
 - Commissioner Marshall moved to accept, Commissioner Worku seconded, all voted in favor.



- **Updated Guidance Document about Commissioner, Staff Roles and Guest Speakers**
 - ED Almonte shared that she updated the guidance documents using Commissioner feedback. She asked if the Commission would like to vote.
 - Commissioner Marshall and Commissioner Laguerre requested more time to review. The documents were tabled for a new Commission meeting.
- **Commission Retreat Planning**
 - ED Almonte suggested using one of the meetings in the fall as a retreat, but noted that we cannot discuss Commission business during the retreat.
 - Commissioner Myers stated that they are in favor of doing a retreat.
- **Training Request: Lawyers for Civil Rights**
 - ED Almonte reached out to an attorney from Lawyers for Civil Rights and is still waiting to hear back. ED Almonte will follow up, as well as Commissioner Laguerre.

7. New Business

- **Updated HUD Guidance – Emotional Support Animals**
 - Many HRC housing cases involve requests related to emotional support animals. Al Carr provided an update on recent federal changes, including the distinction between emotional support animals, also known as assistance animals, and service animals. Service animals are specifically trained to perform tasks related to a person's disability and, under federal law, are limited to dogs. HUD recently changed its guidance and will no longer accept housing discrimination cases involving emotional support animals; HUD will only accept cases involving service animals. The HRC will continue to investigate cases involving emotional support animals under local protections. However, we will no longer submit emotional support animal cases to HUD for review.
- **Co-Chair Elections**
 - ED Almonte stated it's time for two new co-chairs! She provided an overview of the expectations of chairs, including leading meetings and helping create each agenda. Commissioner Sealey stated that she would like to nominate Commissioner Marshall and Commissioner Myers. Commissioner Myers said he would love to chair. Commissioner Marshall is open to chairing as well. Commissioner Worku moved to have them as co-chairs; Commissioner Sealey seconds, and all voted in favor. ED Almonte thanked Commissioners Evans and Haug for the amazing



contributions as chairs over the last year.

- **Future Meetings – Virtual? Hybrid?**

- ED Almonte discussed returning to hybrid meetings in the fall and the Commission was in favor. She reminded the Commissioners that the policy is that if 3 or more Commissioners can meet in person, the meeting will be held in a hybrid format and dinner will be provided. Commissioner Marshall stated that if there is interest, there's no issue. Commissioner Myers stated making meetings hybrid would promote being together and learning about the new folks in the commission. Commissioner Sealy flagged that since the move to Mass Ave, parking is a concern compared to the previous location on Inman Street. She also mentioned flexibility during colder months.

- **July and August Meeting Break Reminder**

- ED Almonte reminded Commission of our summer break. Meetings start back up in September. Commissioners expressed that attending and supporting events within the City is great way to get more involved outside of Commission meetings.

8. Adjournment

- Commissioner Marshall moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:02. Commissioner Laguerre seconded.