



Human Rights Commission
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**DRAFT VERMONT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES
September 26, 2024**

PRESENT: Commissioners: Nathan **BESIO**, Acting Meeting Chair (remotely); Bruce **WILSON**; Kevin **CHRISTIE** (remotely); Donald **VICKERS**, Alternate (remotely).

ABSENT: Dawn **ELLIS**; Joan **NAGY**.

Staff: Big Hartman, Executive Director & General Counsel (“**ED**”); Mitch Rotbert, Senior Counsel (minutes); Attorney Investigator Poupore (“**Poupore**”); Vanessa Bonebo, Executive Staff Assistant; Faith Orr, Clerk.

Attorney Investigator Flynjac (“**Flynjac**”) entered the meeting remotely at 2:26 p.m.

BESIO called the meeting to order at 9:22 a.m.

BUSINESS MEETING

Executive Director Report

At 9:26 a.m., **ED** commences their report to the Commissioners. **ED** reports their observations after having taken over the intake in late June/early July, including the overwhelming need of those in our statewide community who are most vulnerable. At this time, there are roughly 60 persons waiting to hear from the Commission on the intake of their cases. According to **ED**, there is now a “desperate need” for the Commission to secure funding to perform its statutory mission.

ED intends to seek new positions as part of the budget adjustment process for FY 2025 (occurring in this fiscal quarter) and in the Commission’s budget presentation for FY 2026, which is due for submission at the same time. **ED** asks that there be Commissioner engagement to help move the legislators to provide the funding that the Commission needs. **WILSON** asks **ED** to identify how much is needed. **ED** estimates that the Commission needs another \$50,000 to make budget for FY 2025 and another \$500,000 for new positions (approximately 6) for FY 2026. **ED** points out that the Commission needs additional funding simply to meet its 2025 budget; in addition, the Commission needs additional staff, including more investigators and one paralegal. **BESIO** asks that **ED** provide the Commissioners with specific events and persons to address as part of the budget effort. **ED** responds that, within the month, **ED** will provide more details. **CHRISTIE** observes that even the Commission’s allies need to understand the depth of the current

need. **ED** envisions that Commissioners and Staff will together be broadcasting a consistent and persistent message to the legislators. **VICKERS** inquires on bringing other allies into the fight, e.g., Legal Aid. **ED** reports that Staff is coordinating with various stakeholder groups, agencies, and organizations across the state.

EXECUIVE SESSION

At 9:44 a.m., **VICKERS** moves to go into executive session to discuss confidential cases. **CHRISTIE** seconds. **Unanimous vote in favor (4-0).**

At 11:24 a.m., **BESIO** takes the Commission out of Executive Session.

BUSINESS MEETING

Executive Director Report (continued)

BESIO inquires about the cessation of the State's motel voucher program. Discussion on efforts to monitor and address the voucher program.

ED reports on training in Woodstock on HHB prevention for educators.

ED reports on development by Staff of set of curricula on HHB best practices, one set for students, another set for parents, and another set for educators/administrators. HRC Director of Policy, Education, and Outreach Amanda Garces is taking the lead on this effort.

ED reports on case data presented to the Commissioners and asks for feedback from the Commissioners. **BESIO** approves the new data presentation as it shows the kind of work that Staff is working on.

ED reports on current caseload. Commission currently has 95 open cases, and two active investigators. Thirty-five cases under investigation are housing cases; and more of these are going reasonable grounds. A lot more court cases, as well. None of this addresses the thirty or so additional cases that Commission is now considering.

ED reports on VT Digger article concerning the hearing in the Supreme Court yesterday in *HRC v. Town of St. Johnsbury*. **ED** reports that highlighting the need of persons with disabilities is necessary and that publicity needs to be expanded to all those protected by the Commission's statutory mandate.

Minutes

At 11:52 a.m., **CHRISTIE** moves to accept as written the minutes of the Commission meeting held August 22, 2024. **BESIO** seconds. **Unanimous vote on the motion (2-0).** **WILSON** and **VICKERS** abstain (not present at August 2024 meeting).

Executive Director report (continued)

At 1:04 p.m., **ED** begins discussion on recent PDCA's for Commissioner ratification.

ED reports a Pre-Determination Conciliation Agreement resolving HRC Case No. PA24-0015. Commission votes to approve the PDCA.

ED reports a Pre-Determination Conciliation Agreement resolving HRC Case No. PA24-0005. Commission votes to approve the PDCA.

ED reports a Post-Determination Conciliation Agreement resolving HRC Case No. PA22-0001. Commission votes to approve the PDCA.

EXECUIVE SESSION

At 1:18 p.m., **VICKERS** moves to go into executive session to discuss confidential cases. **CHRISTIE** seconds. **Unanimous vote in favor (4-0).**

At 3:21 p.m., **BESIO** takes the Commission out of Executive Session.

BUSINESS MEETING

In HV24-0004, HUD Case No. 01-24-4387-8, **VICKERS** moved the Commission to find that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Respondent discriminated against the Complainant based on race, color, and receipt of public assistance in violation of the Vermont Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act, 9 V.S.A § 4503. **WILSON** seconded. **Unanimous vote in favor of the motion (4-0).**

In HV24-0003, HUD Case No. 01-24-4346-8, **VICKERS** moved the Commission to find that there **are not reasonable grounds** to believe that the Respondents discriminated against the Complainant based on disability in violation of the Vermont Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act, 9 V.S.A § 4503. **CHRISTIE** seconded. **Unanimous vote in favor of the motion (4-0).**

In HV23-0015, HUD Case No. 01-23-3791-8, **VICKERS** moved that the Human Rights Commission finds that **there are not reasonable grounds** to believe that the Respondent discriminated against the Complainant based on race or color, in violation of the Vermont Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act, 9 V.S.A § 4503. **WILSON** seconded. **Vote in favor of the motion (3-1).**

In PA23-0019, **VICKERS** moved that the Human Rights Commission find that **there are not reasonable grounds** to believe that the Respondent discriminated against the Complainant based on race, color, or national origin in violation of the Vermont Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act, 9 V.S.A § 4503. **WILSON** seconded. **Unanimous vote in favor of the motion (4-0).**

At 3:27 p.m., **VICKERS** was excused.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 3:27 p.m., **CHRISTIE** moves to go into executive session to discuss matters about which premature general public knowledge would clearly place the Commission at substantial disadvantage. **WILSON** seconds. **Unanimous vote in favor of the motion (3-0)**

At 3:33 p.m., **BESIO** takes the Commission out of Executive Session for the purpose of discussing matters about which premature general public knowledge would clearly place the Commission at substantial disadvantage.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:34 p.m.

NEXT MEETING Thursday, October 24, 2024.

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont, this day 26th day of September 2024.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Big", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Big Hartman, Esq.
Executive Director & General Counsel