

**CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

**ANNUAL REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL  
July 1, 2014-June 30, 2015**



**Changing lives in Virginia Beach  
(365 days a year)**

Prepared by the Department of Human Resources

In Memory  
*Former Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf*



We dedicate this annual report to the memory of former Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf. Mayor Oberndorf gave 30 plus years of service to the City of Virginia Beach. She believed in the power of one person being able to make a difference and in bringing the community and government together.

Her contributions, service and dedication will forever be remembered by the citizens, members, and visitors she embraced by her care and concern for all people.

## ***Executive Summary***

The Human Rights Commission serves as an advisory agency to the City of Virginia Beach City Council. The mission of the Commission is to institute, conduct, and engage in educational and informational programs for the promotion of mutual understanding and respect among all citizens and the fulfillment of human rights.

The Commission also serves as a forum for discussion of human rights issues, conducting studies, and proposing solutions for the improvement of human relations in the City.

We provide assistance to persons who believe their rights have been violated by identifying the appropriate federal, state, or local agency to address the complaint and referring such persons to that agency.

To achieve this mission, we continually meet with citizens of diverse races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and cultures to better understand their needs and concerns about human relation issues.

It is very important that we continue to share this diversity with all citizens so they gain a greater understanding of our differences. It is our hope that citizens will learn, accept, and include those different from themselves so that we will all live more enriching lives.

The 2014-2015 **Human Rights Commission Annual Report** is a testimony to the commitment of all members of the HRC and staff to achieve excellence in human relations. We strive to build an inclusive culture where we focus on increasing community understanding of cultural diversity, and tighten the fabric of understanding for *all* people to live, work, and visit in our great City.

## Homelessness Awareness Week

The HRC and Volunteers of America, in partnership with the Department of Housing and Neighborhood Preservation, the BEACH Community Partnerships, and the Hampton Roads Rotary Club, hosted Homelessness Awareness Week December 15- 21, 2014.

HRC Commissioner Jim Parke and Volunteers of America (VOA) Director Debbie Maloney appeared on WVEC's *13 News at Noon* show to promote this special community event. The community's concern and commitment to this week was demonstrated by their generous donations. Donated items surpassed previous drive collections significantly. Again this year, we give a special "thank you" to Thalia Elementary students who contributed 1,000 toiletry filled stockings for this project! In addition, the drive collected blankets, jeans, socks, towels, and assorted toiletries. These items were distributed to local charitable organizations to be given to those in need of assistance.

The week concluded with the Homelessness Memorial Day Vigil which began with the Director of the Lighthouse Center, Debbie Maloney, delivering welcoming remarks, followed by remarks from Director of Housing and Neighborhood Preservation Andy Friedman and Mayor William D. Sessoms, Jr. who proclaimed Homelessness Awareness Week.

Special recognition was given to Jayla Newson, a five-year-old Virginia Beach resident who created Jayla's Helping Little Hands which prepares and distributes bags filled with items for people who are experiencing homelessness. A musical performance by local artist, Evan Button, a sophomore at Kellam High was well received by an audience of 150 people.

## Human Rights Week Public Forum

In celebration of the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual International Human Rights Day, the City of Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission hosted a community conversation on December 10, 2014 at the Renaissance Academy.

The purpose of this event was to bring citizens together to discuss what they have in common, listen to community concerns, and learn the mutual misunderstandings of the many cultures in our community. Attendees were asked in advance to provide the major concerns in their community that they would like to address in open discussion. The conversations were formatted for the top three topics received which included Education, LGBT, and Living in the Shadows. During the evening conversations, citizens were instructed to discuss what they see or experience in the education community, LGBT community and Living in the Shadows community.

Through open dialogue, participants spoke from and listened with their hearts in a very positive and respectful manner. They learned from each other by sharing their culture experiences.

Special guest speakers were the Honorable Mayor William D. Sessoms, Jr. and District Manager for Congressman Scott Rigell, Shannon Kendrick, who read a congressional letter from Congressman Scott Rigell. Also in attendance were 45 citizens, members of the Human Rights Commission, Councilmember Bob Dyer, Councilmember Amelia N. Ross-Hammond, Superintendent of VBCPS Dr. Aaron Spence, School Board Elect Member Sharon R. Felton,

Commonwealth Attorney Colin Stolle, Police Chief James Cervera, Fire Battalion Chief T. J. McAndrews.

Attendees left with a better understanding of other cultures and a willingness to assist the City by sharing their thoughts, ideas, and ways they could increase civic engagement to build a more inclusive community as we celebrate our diversity. A second conversation took place on May 13, 2015 for further group discussions and to determine how to implement the recommendations. We were very impressed with the civic-minded citizens who are willing to share their talents and experiences to form task forces to address these community concerns. These conversations will continue throughout the year.

### **“Just Faith” Program**

On September 24, 2015, a City Council Meeting ended in raucousness after some people protested plans by Crescent Community Center to build a mosque. The HRC was very concerned by the demonstrated behavior at this meeting and resolved to be a part of the solution.

For the second year, Commissioners Raj Islam and Teresa Stanley continued to coordinate and host sessions based on a nationwide program called “Just Faith” which would bring people of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths together.

The concept for the "Just Faith" program was conceived from a meeting in the year 1219 between Malik al-Kamil, the sultan of Egypt, and St. Francis of Assisi during a brutal crusade. According to a 2006 Catholic Online article and several other sources, as bloody conflicts raged, St. Francis entered the sultan's palace seeking to convert him but instead came away impressed with Islam and its devotion to daily prayer. The sultan found St. Francis to be a noble servant of God and allowed him to preach the Gospel at the palace.

This mutual respect and understanding served as the underlying framework for these sessions, but an 800-year-old sit-down meant nothing locally unless it could be embraced, questioned, and ideas for current application hashed out. This group rotated their meeting locations between the Crescent Community Center and the Church of the Holy Apostles.

The Virginian-Pilot followed this program and published a series of stories about the success of this program. We have received positive feedback and are very satisfied with the success of this program and continue to offer it to our citizens.

At a recent HRC meeting, students of the “Just Faith” program relayed their experiences in the program and expressed their gratitude for the impact the program has had upon them and in the community.

## Human Rights 21st Annual Awards Program

On Wednesday evening, April 29, 2015, more than 140 people, including Mayor William D. Sessoms, Jr., Councilmembers Bob Dyer, Shannon Kane and Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond gathered at the Virginia Beach Convention Center for the Virginia Beach Human Rights Commissions' 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Human Rights Awards Program to honor citizens for their meritorious service in the pursuit of cultural diversity and human rights for all. Also present were City Manager James K. Spore, Deputy City Manager Cindy Curtis, Police Chief James Cervera, Director of Human Resources Regina Hilliard, Director of Human Services Dannette Smith and Director of Housing Andy Friedman. This year's event was titled: "Changing Lives in Virginia Beach (365 days a year)." Through their efforts in our community, these citizens are continually changing and improving our City for the betterment of humankind. This year's Human Rights Award honorees were Dr. Pamela Anne Bro, Hampton Roads Committee of 200+ Men, Inc., and Human Services-Pinkies Program.

For the eleventh consecutive year, the HRC honored the memory of the late Daniel Matthew Stone, former Department of Social Services Director, by awarding the Daniel M. Stone Humanitarian Award. This prestigious honor was given to Police Deputy Chief John L. Bell, Jr. Virginia Beach Sheriff Ken Stolle was the sixth Meyera E. Oberndorf Human Rights Achievement in Government Award recipient. Drive for a Cause (Ray Vittum, Josh Underdown, and Nick Gritta) was awarded the fourth Helen P. Shropshire Human Rights Youth Award.

Lincoln Smith, a volunteer with the ComIT/Multimedia Services was master of ceremonies. Kate Meechan, Executive Director of Volunteer Hampton Roads, delivered the keynote address and Shannon Kendrick, District Director for Congressman E. Scott Rigell, United State House of Representatives, read a letter from Congressman Rigell.

## Human Rights 21st Annual Awards Honorees



Front row Left to Right - Deputy Chief John L. Bell, Josh Underdown, Ray Vittum, Nick Gritta

Back Row Left to Right - Dr. Pamela Anne Bro, Cheryl Molinet, Sheriff Ken Stolle, James Gray

## Beach Weekend Observers

Since the early 1990's, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) has been observing the Oceanfront activities during major holiday weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day. In 2014, the Virginia Beach Police Department requested that the HRC observe the Beach Weekend. Last year the HRC observed along with citizens and submitted a recap of this observation to the Police Department and City Leadership. Again in 2015, the Police Department inquired if the HRC would observe and the HRC accepted and welcomed the observation request along with offering an opportunity for citizens to participate in this civic engagement. The HRC reached out to approximately thirty-five people to add to the pool of observers. The final observers consisted of four citizens and four HRC members with diverse backgrounds, experiences, ages, gender and race.

The mission of this team was to serve as 'welcoming' ambassadors for the citizens and visitors to the Oceanfront during Beach Weekend by providing general information; observing City services; and assessing the atmosphere with regards to safety, friendliness, as well as any signs of discrimination. The observations were submitted in both written and verbal form. A report that reflected the compiled information, to include recommendations, was provided to the Police department for their use.

## Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is a great concern for the HRC. The state of Virginia ranks 8th in the nation for this problem. We have attended several forums and summits to gain more factual information and learn more about this epidemic that has been happening right here in our own backyard. The events we have attended have helped increase our awareness of what this oppression looks like, and has provided us with the tools and resources needed to help make a difference. These forums and summits have been sponsored by Congressman Rigell's Office and the VBPD Crime Prevention Steering Committee. In February, Deputy Chief Billy Dean provided the HRC with a brief overview of the types of human trafficking and a snapshot of what Virginia Beach is experiencing. We learned that prostitution is slightly on the rise. The following arrest information for prostitution and pandering was provided: 2010 60 arrests; 2013 119 and 2014 145 arrests. Prostitution traditionally occurs in four common forms: street level prostitution, massage parlors, escort agencies, and internet. VBPD has focused on the offense of pandering which has resulted in some human trafficking arrests, including arrests for minors. There have been some cases involving victims being brought to the Hampton Roads area and other states for prostitution.

All VBPD Officers have received human trafficking training and are able to identify a possible victim. The VBPD works with victim advocacy programs such as Response, Seton House, and Samaritan House to provide services and shelter for victims of human trafficking. Special Investigations, Vice Squad, and Detective Unit employees continue to investigate cases relating to child abuse, neglect, sexual assault, and internet crimes against children, to include child pornography cases. Counseling by the Bon Secours EAP program is available to these investigators via monthly visits to the detective bureau as well as quarterly visits to special investigations by a counselor, with additional services available as needed.

DC Dean mentioned House Bill #2040 which is an addendum to Human Trafficking code

182355. If this bill passes it will increase the severity of the offense and change the language. Attorney Rod Ingram stated the bill passed the house by 100 to zero.

### **VBPD Neighborhood Surveys**

For the last several years, the VBPD has been conducting Neighborhood Surveys within each precinct. The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the public's feelings of safety and strengthen connections between the police and residents in order to help the department obtain information on what is needed to improve safety in their neighborhood. Several commissioners participated in these surveys by observing the interaction with the VBPD and our citizens.

### **VBPD CALEA Support**

The VBPD had a four day review process to maintain its nationally recognized accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). The HRC submitted a letter of support to CALEA which demonstrated the excellent working relationship with VBPD and expressed the Commissions' belief that they are interested and committed to assuring that the City's diverse citizen population and visitors are served in an equitable manner. This commitment ensures our community is a safe and better place to live, work, and visit for *all* people.

### **Fair & Impartial Policing**

The VBPD offered Fair and Impartial Policing Training by Dr. Lori Fridell and the Department of Justice. Dr. Fridell and the DOJ have advocated and delivered a science based approach to the subject of implicit bias, teaching that biases are present in every person. The training showed that bias in policing is unjust, unsafe, and ineffective, and that with training individuals can be taught to overcome their implicit bias when it comes to law enforcement. The training was opened to mid and senior level management from the Virginia Beach Police Department, as well as Virginia Beach community representatives, activists, and leaders. Additionally, the training was attended by Cliff Rice, HRC Chair, Teresa Stanley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chief and senior law enforcement leadership from Norfolk, Chesapeake, Hampton, Portsmouth, Newport News, and Suffolk.

There are three certified Fair and Impartial Policing trainers for the Virginia Beach Police Department, with an additional four slated to attend training in May 2015. HRC members stated the training was excellent.

### **Citizen Advisory Committee**

Each month, Commissioners attend the VBPD's Citizen Advisory Committee meetings at all of the precincts. We believe this is a "win-win" situation that enables us to promote the efforts of the Police Department and other City departments. Additionally, this attendance brings more awareness about the Human Rights Commission to our citizens and serves as an avenue to hear their thoughts and concerns. Several community partnerships have formed by attending these meetings.

## **VAHR Conference**

The HRC hosted the Virginia Association for Human Rights (VAHR) Annual Meeting and Conference on June 5-6, 2014 at the Holiday Inn at Greenwich. Councilmembers Bob Dyer and Shannon DS Kane welcomed the VAHR attendees.

The conference was attended by 20 commissioners from across the state of Virginia. Our HRC shared their community outreach efforts for this year. The keynote was provided by Congressman Robert “Bobby” Scott on the topic of the Voting Rights Act. Delegate Glenn Davis also provided his viewpoints on this topic. The VAHR agreed, on this, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Voting Rights Acts of 1965, to adopt a letter and a resolution to go on record in support of eliminating as many voting rights barriers (*e.g. support of automatic registration at age 18, early voting periods, etc.*) as possible to ensure all citizens of our democracy can exercise their precious right to vote.

The purpose of the VAHR is to produce a medium for the exchange of ideas and information among the various statutory commissions, councils and agencies. The VAHR works to inform the public and public policymakers about issues of concern in the field of human rights, encourages and assists in the creation of statutory human rights commissions in jurisdictions where such bodies do not exist, and strengthens the state and local commitment to the recognition and preservation of human rights.

## **VBPD Community Town Hall Meeting**

On March 31, 2015, Chairman Rice and Bonnie Beni were invited by Police Chief Jim Cervera to participate in a meeting with community leaders to discuss community concerns. This collaborative brainstorming session was successful and another meeting took place on May 14, 2015 to develop a format for a future VBPD Town Hall Meeting. After the initial meeting, Bonnie Beni provided Chief Cervera with several proposals for a forum and this information has been provided to the community leaders to review before the next meeting.

## **Meeting with Mexican Embassy**

Commissioner Amberman serves many roles and responsibilities in our community. She has served as an Adviser to the President of Mexico, through the Institute of Mexicans Abroad. It was through this connection that she received a request from the Mexican Embassy, Consular Section.

The Consul of Mexico, in Washington, D.C. visited Norfolk on May 20-21, 2015 in his official capacity to welcome a Mexican Ship, and he met with City officials in Norfolk as the host city and requested a meeting with City officials in Virginia Beach.

On May 20th, Beatriz Amberman, Bonnie Beni, Sheriff Ken Stolle, Jobynia Caldwell, director of VBCPS Equity Affairs and Gay Thomas, director of VBCPS Social Services met with the Hon. Juan Carlos Mendoza Sanchez and Rocio Vazquez Alvarez to discuss concerns and to exchange information. This meeting was very insightful and all who attended left knowing more about the challenges and successes we experience in our communities. Additionally, on May 21st, Chief Cervera and his command staff met with the Hon. Juan Carlos Mendoz Sanchez to discuss policing concerns and community outreach efforts.

## Legislative Agenda Submitted

The HRC submitted two legislative agenda items to City Council for consideration: expand the Virginia Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and for the General Assembly to provide meaningful increases for funding for mental healthcare services and housing for 2016 Legislative Package. Additionally, the HRC presented a resolution to City Council requesting that the General Assembly and Governor accept and implement the full expansion of Medicaid, as provided by the Affordable Care Act.

## Monthly Public Meetings

The HRC conducts monthly meetings to discuss human rights issues facing the community and to keep informed. We periodically request presentations on various topics from external sources. These meetings are held on the second Thursday of every month at 4 pm. In an effort to reach out to the community, we continue to have our monthly meetings at the Municipal Center or MEO Central Library.

Again this year, some judges from our judicial system ordered citizens convicted of crimes with a racial component to attend our monthly meetings. The judges determined the number of meetings the citizens were required to attend with staff verifying their attendance at the required meetings.

## Ancillary Duties

Designated Commissioners visited the City's Correctional Facility on a regular basis to do a "walk through review" of the services and atmosphere. Each Commissioner observed and provided a written statement to the Commission after their visit addressing the following:

- Interaction of correctional officers with the inmates
- Living conditions (i.e. adequacy of space of inmates)
- Rehabilitation activities/programs
- Discrimination of any type to the inmates

In October 2014, several Commissioners, along with the HRC chairperson met with Sheriff Stolle to have an annual dialogue about community concerns. Sheriff Stolle shared his concerns about the mental health and medication services needed while citizens are incarcerated and when they are released. We discussed the formulation of the Re-entry program in Virginia Beach and how this will help many of our citizens.

We believe Sheriff Stolle and his team are doing an outstanding job addressing the complexity of issues and challenges they face on a daily basis. They accomplish this in a very efficient and effective manner through high standards and excellence.

The Commission also visited the Oceanfront during Fourth of July, Labor Day, Memorial Day and other non-holiday days to monitor services offered by the City. We observed and assessed the atmosphere with regard to a safe and friendly environment. Again, the designated Commissioners reported positive observations.

## Presentations

To keep informed, we periodically request presentations from staff and other sources on various topics. The following were provided during the past year:

- **September 11, 2014 - MEO Central Library**

Bobby Melatti, Beach Events spoke to the Commission and talked about the events his group organizes. He asked for feedback from the HRC posing the following questions: is event programming at the oceanfront meeting the needs of the citizens of VB? And does it meet the needs of tourists and citizens in ratio and proportion to who those visitors are? The HRC provided some suggestions.

- **October 9, 2014 - MEO Central Library**

Sgt. Lisa Clark of the Sheriff's Office provided an overview of the educational program and success rate in the City Correctional Facility.

- **November 13, 2014 - Municipal Center, Bldg. 19**

Ms. Denise White and Ms. Mary Dees provided information about Virginia Beach Enrollment and Residency Requirements.

Virginia Beach Police Department provided an overview of the summer activities and community outreach efforts.

- **May 14, 2015 - Municipal Center, Bldg. 19**

Dr. Gail Mottola, Let's Open Doors provided an overview of the program to assist citizens.

- **June 11, 2015 - Municipal Center, Bldg. 19**

Shelby Goldsmith and Elizabeth O'Parka from Human Resources presented the HR Strategic Workforce and Employment Plan.

## Community Events

- Human Trafficking Forums by Congressman Rigell's Office, FBI and VB Crime Prevention Steering Committee
- Together We Can Foundation Awareness Breakfast Meetings
- National Night Out on August 5, 2014 in Green Run, Kempsville Lake, Lake Edwards, Lake Christopher and Larkspur Communities
- Welcome reception for Dr. Aaron C. Spence, VBCPS Superintendent on September 17, 2014 at Kellam High School
- Hampton Roads Diversity and Inclusion Consortium Conference on October 9, 2014
- All Nation Community Culture Celebration Parade sponsored by the Seatack Civic

League on October 18, 2014

- NAACP Freedom Banquet on November 2, 2014
- Seatack Community Gala on November 9, 2014 at the Virginia Beach Resort Conference Center
- Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Breakfast on January 20, 2015
- Point-in-Time Count, January 29, 2015
- Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities Humanitarian Dinner on March 27, 2015 at the Norfolk Marriott
- Urban League of Hampton Roads Events
- Hampton Roads Diversity and Inclusion Consortium Quarterly Meetings

### Human Rights Inquiries

One of the objectives of the Commission is to provide assistance to residents who believe their rights have been violated. The Commission does not have legal authority to act on the claims. Rather, the role of the Commission is to assist the person with identifying the appropriate agency (at the local, state, or national level) that can address the claim.

Listed below are the inquiries received from our citizen's in the last year:

Type of Inquiry	Number of Inquiries	Agency Referral	
Education	3	State Council of Higher Education for VA, VBCPS, VBPD	
Employment	5	City of VB (HR, P&R, VBPD), Legal Aid Society, EEOC, VA Council on HR, VB NAACP, Department of Labor	
Housing	1	Department of Housing	
Other	7	Human Services, Legal Aid Society, EEOC, Department of Labor, VA Council on Human Rights, Commonwealth Attorney's Office, Judicial Inquiry & Review Commission, City of Suffolk Social Services, VA Board for People with Disabilities, Better Business Bureau	
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## City Committees

Commission members serve on various committees:

- Affordable Housing
- Virginia Beach Arena Citizens Communication Committee
- Bringing an End to Homelessness (BEACH)
- Citizen Advisory Committees (All four precincts)
- Light Rail Committee
- Mayor's African American Roundtable
- MAPP Leadership Committee - Public Health Department
- Resort Advisory Commission
- Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations
- Sustainability Planning Committee
- VBPD Minority Policing Workgroup
- Virginia Beach City Public Schools Equity Council

## Appointments/Resignations

During this fiscal year, City Council appointed Ron Taylor, Michael Berlucchi and Mary Mathena.

At the June 11, 2015 meeting, the HRC reappointed Cliff Rice to serve as Chair, Vivian Blaize as Vice-chair, and Teresa Stanley as Second Vice-chair.

Due to personal reasons, the following commissioners resigned during this report period; Rev. E. Ray Cox, Sr., and Dr. Agnes Moon.

## HRC Volunteer Hours

Commission members are appointed as volunteers by City Council to serve on the Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission. This budget year we have volunteered approximately **530** hours with an estimated savings of **\$24,000** to achieve our mission to the citizens of Virginia Beach.

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**Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission**  
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