

*In accordance with Virginia Code § 2.2-3708.2, Virginia Code § 15.2-1413 and the City's Continuity of Government Ordinance adopted on March 2, 2021, and Chapter 1289 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly as amended, I hereby call for a **MEETING BY ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION MEANS** of the Human Rights Commission. This meeting was held by electronic means using the WebEx videoconferencing platform because of the COVID-19 Pandemic emergency.*

May 13, 2021
4pm

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss and transact the business of the Commission.

Members Present: Sylvia Nery-Strickland (Chair), Dr. Virginia Jenkot (Vice Chair), Beatriz Amberman, Zakkiyya Anderson, Joe Burnsworth, Thomasine Cubine, Jamal Gunn, Carla Hesseltine, Emiliano "Jojo" Orenca, Luis Rivera, Teresa Stanley, Mark Stevens, Ron Taylor, Frances Knight Thompson, Allison White, Rabbi Israel Zoberman

Staff Present: Dominique McKinnon (HRC Liaison), Stacy Hawks (Human Resources)

Liaisons Present: Councilman Michael Berlucchi, Deputy Chief William T. Dean, Rod Ingram (Deputy City Attorney), Captain Henri Norris, Orelious Walker

I. Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Chair Nery-Strickland at 4:03 p.m.

Roll Call of the Commissioners was taken. Commissioner Rivera and Commissioner Taylor connected to the meeting after Roll Call was taken. Commissioner Calliott, Commissioner Ellis and Commissioner Mancoll were absent.

II. A Moment of Silence for Father Parke and the victims of the May 31st tragedy

Chair Nery-Strickland asked that the Commission observe a moment of silence in honor of Father Parke and the victims of the May 31st tragedy.

She asked if any commissioners had any comments or memories that they wanted to share of Father Parke. Commissioner Rabbi Zoberman spoke on how welcoming Father Parke was to his congregation.

Chair Nery-Strickland asked Commissioner Rabbi Zoberman about his mother living in Israel during the current conflict in the Middle East. Commissioner Rabbi Zoberman prayed for the peace of Jerusalem and for Jews and Arabs to join hands and hearts. He stated that we have to pray and work for peace, and what the Commission does is a step in the right direction.

Commissioner Gunn spoke about Pastor Cox and his appreciating for his words after the 5/31 tragedy.

III. Farewell to Commissioner Anderson

Chair Nery-Strickland announced that this meeting will be the last for Commissioner Anderson and offered her the opportunity to speak to the Commission. Commissioner Anderson informed the Commission that she and her husband purchased their first house in Portsmouth, and they are moving at the end of the month. She is very excited about this big step for her family, but sad to have to leave her

post within the Commission. She expressed her appreciation to be able to serve with the commissioners and that she has learned so much. She promised to stay in touch and will continue to stay involved in what's happening in Hampton Roads. She thanked everyone for welcoming her to the HRC.

IV. Minutes Approval

Commissioner Burnsworth made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 8th meeting. Commissioner Amberman seconded the motion. By a vote of 14-0, the minutes for the April 8th meeting were approved.

V. Human Trafficking Update

Chair Nery-Strickland welcomed Carol Wilson, an FBI victim specialist to the meeting and she provided the Commission with an update on the human trafficking taskforce. The taskforce is an initiative that brings together federal, state and local law enforcement, prosecutors and community organizations to combat human trafficking. They identify victims and prosecute trafficking offenders on a state and local level. She shared some statistics from the Hampton Roads human trafficking taskforce as of December 2020, including the number of cases, the number of arrests, trainings provided to community groups, and outreach events. She reported that the taskforce has seen additional cases during the pandemic and the need for human trafficking services had not decreased.

Carol shared that Samaritan House, the lead non-government non-profit agency on the taskforce, will be breaking ground on a new residential facility called The Hallows in June or July. The Samaritan House staff and former clients participated in developing an education program for the medical community and the victim services committee is working on services for substance abuse and for non-English speaking populations. CHKD, also a member of the taskforce, is building a 14 story, 60 bed mental health facility for psychiatric services for children and to provide psychiatric and comprehensive services to the population of traffic youth. Transitions has joined the taskforce and they have created an anti-human trafficking program, and there will be more human trafficking services on the Peninsula. Seton Youth Shelter, a member of the taskforce, has renovated their girls' shelter and are planning for a new campus in Virginia Beach.

Carol reported that they have a Coordinated Crisis Response hotline and a new public information campaign including the "Can You See Me" and "If It Doesn't Look Okay, It's Probably Not" billboards. Online exploitation has gone up since the pandemic and the taskforce has been doing a lot of education for kids and parents on safety measures to take when online.

Commissioner Amberman asked about human trafficking and immigrant labor. Carol reported that there have been concerns about labor trafficking in the Eastern Shores area and the expansion of human trafficking services into the Eastern Shore is hoping to address that. One of their goals is to expand outreach efforts to different populations who speak different languages and may be experiencing labor trafficking.

Commissioner Hesseltine asked if there has been an uptick with human trafficking with short term rentals. Carol reported that she has not experienced cases of human trafficking with short term rentals. She would have to reach out to the other agencies within the taskforce for that information as victims aren't always ready to come forward to law enforcement yet, but will work with other agencies like Samaritan House. She stated that hotels are still a concern as a mechanism that is used for trafficking, especially for adults.

Commissioner Stanley asked if the Commission could get copies of the resources that she spoke of to help get that information out to people who don't know how to report human trafficking. Carol stated that she has many resources that she would be happy to share with the Commission. She also offered to do a more in-depth presentation on more specific areas of human trafficking.

VI. Chairman's/Committee/Liaison Reports

Awards Committee:

Chair Nery-Strickland called for the Commission to go into closed session pursuant to the exemption from open meetings allowed by § 2.2-3711 (A)(11) of the Code of Virginia for the following purpose: discussion of nominees for the annual HRC Awards Program. Vice Chair Jenkot made a motion to enter into closed session. Commissioner Amberman seconded the motion. By a vote of 16-0, the Commission entered into closed session.

The HRC reconvened into open session to certify that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this certification applies; and (ii) only such matter as was identified in the Motion convening the closed meeting was heard, discussed, or considered. Commissioner Amberman made a motion to certify the closed session. Vice Chair Jenkot seconded the motion. By a vote of 16-0, the Commission certified the closed session.

Commissioner Burnsworth made a motion to accept the slate of nominees for the Annual Awards Ceremony as presented and discussed. Commissioner Amberman seconded the motion. By a vote of 16-0, the slate of nominees for the Annual Awards Ceremony was approved.

Commissioner Hesseltine asked if in the future, there could be a discussion about whether supporting human rights is a part of an awardee's job or an extra effort outside of their job. Chair Nery-Strickland suggested that, that discussion be a part of the HRC Retreat in July, rather than the Awards Committee meeting, so all commissioners could have input.

By-laws Committee:

Commissioner Burnsworth reported that the By-laws Committee met and discussed taking a holistic review of the by-laws as there are many new commissioners since the last time they were reviewed and approved. He stated that after speaking with Chair Nery-Strickland, he suggests that this review of the by-laws occur at the HRC Retreat.

COVID-19 Taskforce:

Commissioner Amberman reported that there have been multiple conversations throughout the state regarding how vaccination opportunities are being provided to underserved communities. She stated that when FEMA came into the area, they reached out to her. Based on the concerns from the community about vaccination opportunities, FEMA made accommodations allowing people to walk-in for vaccinations, register for an appointment to get vaccinated, and receive a vaccination by providing their site with documentation showing their name and address, rather than an ID. She added that considering the conversations that are occurring in the community and with the governor, the concerns about access to vaccinations still exist. Commissioner Stevens reported on his employee's experience with the vaccination site at the Convention Center. He stated that based on the difficulties his employee experienced with getting a vaccine, he and Vice Chair Jenkot went to visit the site. They were told that the obstacles his employee experienced were not occurring, but then they witnessed a minority family having difficulties getting the vaccine. He and Vice Chair Jenkot were able to assist the family in getting the vaccine of their choice. Commissioner Stevens stated that he and Vice Chair Jenkot were taken on a tour of the vaccination site with Chief Hutchinson, the liaison between the fire department and the company managing the site, and they met with the vice president of the company. He reported that the site operates based on a contract that states walk-ins received the Johnson and Johnson vaccine and

that they do not assist with registration for the vaccine. He stated that with a minority family going to the vaccination site, not knowing what is happening and then being told that they can only get the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, it may not be discriminatory, but it appears that way. He added that people are still confused about how and where they can get a vaccination. Vice Chair Jenkot reported that she sent an email to the Commission detailing what she and Commissioner Stevens experienced at the Convention Center and as of last night, she received an email from Paul Drummond, Chief Operations Officer for the Virginia Beach Department of Public Health. He apologized for the difficulties and thanked them for their advocacy for the community. The department is in flux, trying to figure out how to give second doses once pop-up clinics close. She reported that they are working to get permission for the Convention Center to offer first doses and to allow people to register there. Commissioner Amberman reported that the conversations that she has been involved in statewide are focused on the 4 billion dollars that the state is going to be receiving and the grants they have applied for to address health equity issues.

Nominating Committee:

Commissioner Orenica reported that the Nominating Committee meet earlier in the week and decided to ask the five candidates for office to speak to the Commission, answering the question:

Why do you want to serve in the officer's position that you are seeking, and how are you equipped to serve our Commission and the community in such a position?

The candidates for Vice Chair: Beatriz Amberman, Carla Hesseltine and Ginger Jenkot and the candidates for Chair: Rabbi Israel Zoberman and Sylvia Nery-Strickland each took 3 minutes to answer the question and commissioners were given the opportunity to ask them questions. Commissioner Orenica reported that the Nominating Committee would be meeting again to review what the candidates presented and form a slate of nominees for the election in June.

Forums/Dialogue Committee:

Commissioner Burnsworth reported that the Forums/Dialogue Committee met and discussed efforts to hold public conversations, specifically around the topics of racial tension and equity. The committee decided to follow the format of the forum that was planned for last year, but was cancelled due to COVID-19. The committee will be reviewing the speakers that were going to participate and the questions that the participants and audience were going to discuss. He reported that Vice Chair Jenkot has been in contact with MOCA, the site for the originally scheduled forum, and the committee will come back together to discuss adjustments to the plan for the forum. He added that Commissioner Thompson spoke about a fishbowl format for the forum and the committee is looking to see if that can be combined with a panel format for the public discussion.

Season for Non-Violence Collective:

Commissioner Stanley reported on the success of the Seeds of Hope Art Project that the Season for Non-Violence Collective partnered with other community organizations to create. She thanked everyone that participated in the different projects that were completed to help de-stigmatize mental illness and educate the community on mental illness. A mural was unveiled, there was a proclamation from the Mayor, Councilman Berlucchi spoke and a rock garden was created, which have spread through the community.

Mental Health Taskforce:

Commissioner Cubine reminded everyone that May is Mental Health Awareness Month. She reported that the Mental Health taskforce is working with IAB to enhance the mental health outreach initiative and they are working with NAMI on housing. She added that she and Vice Chair Jenkot are serving on the Marcus

Alert stakeholder's group for the new legislation passed by the General Assembly. The new legislation is requiring the State Department of Behavioral Health and the criminal justice department to work together with community stakeholder to develop protocols for responding to mental health crises in the community. The group has been meeting along with Angie Hicks of the Department of Human Services and Deputy Chief William T. Dean to review the mental health services already available in Virginia Beach and made recommendations on what they think should be included in the protocol. They will continue to meet and their recommendations will be a part of the response to legislation requiring that this program be developed. She stated that she will have Staff Liaison McKinnon send out a summary on the Marcus Alert. Commissioner Rivera thanked Commissioner Cubine for lifting the banner of mental health and helping to educate so many on the issue.

Hampton Roads Black Caucus:

Commissioner Taylor reported that the Hampton Roads Black Caucus will be sponsoring job fairs in different communities in Virginia Beach. They are starting at Twin Canals Apartments and employers in different industries will be there to offer people employment. He said that he is working with the Department of Human Service to have them present to provide people with access to childcare assistance. They are also working to help people with getting transportation to work. He reported that the Hampton Roads Black Caucus has plans to hold job fairs for the Friendship Village, Atlantis, Bayside and College Park apartment communities. May 22nd is the first job fair at Twin Canals Apartments from 11am to 1pm.

Deputy Chief William Dean thanked Commissioner Cubine for her summary on the Marcus Alert and he thanked her and Vice Chair Jenkot for being on the panel for the Marcus Alert.

Commissioner Stanley announced that the Pastors/Leaders Community Police Relations Table would be meeting that evening at 7pm. She also spoke on the pay parity for the Public Defender's Office that the HRC supported and reported that the city budget included a \$500,000 line item to address the pay parity. She thanked Councilman Berlucchi for stepping up to champion the issue that is a small measure towards equal justice for the city.

VII. Adjournment

Chair Nery-Strickland adjourned the meeting at 6:00pm.

Next Meeting:
Thursday, June 10, 2021 @ 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting