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MISSION STATEMENT

The Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission (VBHRC) exists to advocate for the human rights of residents in the City of Virginia Beach.

The objectives of the Commission are:

- To institute, conduct, and engage in educational and informational programs for the promotion of mutual understanding and respect among citizens and the fulfillment of human rights.
- To serve as a forum for discussion of human rights issues, to conduct studies, and to propose solutions for the improvement of human relations in the City.
- To 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.
OUR HISTORY

In the aftermath of civil unrest on Labor Day 1989, the City of Virginia Beach appointed the Fellowship Committee to address the human aspects of the events on that day. As a result, the Committee recommended that a Human Rights Commission be established in the City of Virginia Beach. On February 4, 1992, eleven (11) diverse representatives were appointed by City Council to serve on the Human Rights Commission.

Today, the Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission is a nineteen (19) member commission that works in partnership with liaisons and organizations to support human rights and diversity within the community.
MEET OUR COMMISSIONERS

Sylvia Nery-Strickland, Chairperson
Dr. Virginia Jenkot, Vice Chairperson
Beatriz Amberman
Joe Burnsworth
David Calliott
Cheryll Caalim, Student
Thomasine Cubine
Bro. LaKendrick Coburn El, G.S., D.M (Resigned)
Pearl Renwick, Student
Jamal D. Gunn
Carla Hessletine
Rajeeb Islam (Resigned)
Emiliano Fortunato Oencia
Luis Rivera, MA Ed.
Teresa Stanley
Mark Stevens
Ron Taylor
Frances Knight Thompson
Allison White
Rabbi Israel Zoberman
MEET THE STAFF

LIAISONS

City Council
Mayor Robert Dyer
Councilman Michael Berlucchi

Virginia Beach Police Department
Interim Chief Tony Zucaro

Virginia Beach Sheriff’s Office
Captain Henri Norris
Lt. Lois Thompson (Alternate)

Virginia Beach Public Schools
LaQuiche Parrott, Ed. D.

Virginia Beach School Board
Dottie Holtz

Minority Business Council
Frances Knight Thompson

ADMINISTRATION
Regina S. Hilliard, Human Resources Director
Roderick Ingram, Deputy City Attorney
Stacy Hawks, Interim HR Employee Relations Manager
Dominique McKinnon, HRC Liaison
VOLUNTEERING

Commission members are appointed by City Council to serve on the Commission as volunteers. This fiscal year members of the VBHRC volunteered for approximately 2,739 hours with an estimated savings of $66,640 to fulfill their commitment to advocate for human rights in Virginia Beach.
SUBMITTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislative Packet
For the 2020 General Assembly Session, the Human Rights Commission requested that the City Council include the following seven (7) items in the Legislative Packet:

- Expansion of the Virginia Human Rights Act (Passed)
- Full funding for the STEP-VA program
- Removing barriers to ensure voting rights for all citizens (Passed)
- Limited driver’s privilege card for undocumented immigrants (Passed)
- Non-discrimination in public employment and housing (Passed)
- Funding to fight flooding and support climate resilience (Passed)
- Bring more diversity on the Circuit Court bench
SUBMITTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Age Discrimination
In response to the City of Virginia Beach’s mandatory retirement age policy for law enforcement, the Human Right Commission sent a letter to Mayor Robert Dyer and members of City Council. The Commission expressed their concern that forced retirement based on age is inappropriate “age discrimination”.

Conversion Therapy
During the October 10th Human Rights Commission meeting, Councilman Michael Berlucchi asked for the Commission’s support of legislation that would establish reparative or conversion therapy as an unlawful practice. Conversion therapy, based on discredited and outdated theories, is the harmful practice of attempting to change one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. By a vote of 14-0 with 2 abstentions, the Human Rights Commission voted in favor of the City of Virginia Beach requesting that the General Assembly support legislation that would establish reparative or conversion therapy as an unlawful practice.
SUBMITTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Confederate Statue Removal and Announcement of Elderly Support Committee - June 8, 2020

A letter from the Human Rights Commission was sent to Mayor Dyer and members of City Council regarding the status of the Confederate statue on Courthouse property. The Human Right Commission held seats on the Historic Preservation Commission’s citizen group - the Princess Anne County Confederate Statue Roundtable (PACCSR). It was decided that the Commission could not support the PACCSR’s recommendation and recommended to City Council that the statue be removed.

The Human Right Commission also announced in the letter, the development of the Elderly Support Committee to help support this vulnerable population. The Committee is chaired by Commissioner Carla Hessletine who was appointed to Governor Ralph Northam’s Long-Term Care Facility Task Force (LTCF).
PROCLAMATIONS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Mental Health Awareness Month - May 2020**
A Mayoral proclamation to promote public awareness and education on the importance of mental health and erasing the stigmas.

**Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month - May 2020**
A Mayoral proclamation to recognize and celebrate the contributions of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in Virginia.

**LGBTQ Pride Month - June 2020**
A Mayoral proclamation of the City of Virginia Beach’s commitment to fostering an inclusive community that empowers and supports all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Municipal Equality Index**
The index examines how inclusive municipal laws, policies, and services are for LGBTQ people who live and work in their community. Cities are rated based on non-discrimination laws, the municipality as an employer, municipal services, law enforcement, and the city leadership's public position on equality.
In 2019, Virginia Beach scored 77 out of 100, an increase from their previous year’s score of 50.
25th ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY

On October 10, 2019, the Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission hosted their 25th Annual Awards Ceremony to recognize citizens of Virginia Beach who have worked within the community to create and encourage cultural diversity, social awareness, equal opportunity and human rights.

The 25th Annual Awards Honorees:
Arnetta Spikes
Elizabeth Henley-Baumann
Bruce Smith
ViBe Creative District
Mark Stevens and StandUp for Kids- Hampton Roads
Pharrell Williams and Something in the Water Team
Steve Lawson

Meyera E. Oberndorf Human Rights Achievement in Government Awards Honoree:
Virginia Beach Sheriff’s Office

In 2020, the 26th Annual Awards Ceremony will be held on December 10th during Human Rights Week.
25th ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY
SPONSORED EVENTS

Community Conversation Series: Human Rights & Mental Health - December 10, 2019 at The Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)

In partnership with the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, The Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission hosted a public forum that addressed mental health issues within our community. Janet Roach, WVEC 13News Now anchor, previewed her documentary project, “Finding Happiness”, and a panel of experts in the mental health field discussed their work in protecting the human rights of individuals with mental health conditions. There were resource tables from local organizations, such as NAMI Coastal Virginia and I Need A Lighthouse, Inc., available to provide the attendees with information about the mental health resources in our area. The forum was filmed and rebroadcasted on VBTV.
SPONSORED EVENTS

Community Conversation Series: Human Rights & Race Relations - March 31, 2020 at The Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)
In partnership with the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, The Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission planned to host a public forum, the second in the Community Conversation Series, to discuss race relations, their effect on human rights, and the solutions to progress further in respecting and appreciating all cultures.

The event was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Independent Observer Program: Something in the Water 2020 Weekend - April 24 - 26, 2020
After the success of last year’s event, The Something in the Water Festival was scheduled to return to the Oceanfront during College Beach Weekend in 2020. The Virginia Beach Human Right Commission invited community volunteers to participate in the Independent Observer Program to assess the safety, public services and overall atmosphere of the festival.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was postponed until 2021.
SUPPORTED EVENTS

Social Justice University - Coastal Virginia Unitarian Universalists, September 29, 2019
An action-focused, educational briefing was presented by the Legislative Collaborative Table of South Hampton Roads. During the annual event, the presenters and participants reviewed items being proposed to state legislators. This year, the issues at hand were restorative justice, human rights, poverty, environmental justice, mental health, and voting rights.

Virginia Beach Homeless Memorial Service and Vigil - Virginia Beach Housing Resource Center, December 20, 2019
The Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission partnered with the Virginia Beach Housing and Neighborhood Preservation department and the BEACH Community Partnership to commemorate the lives of the men and women who have died homeless.

ViBe Peace Pole Dedication - Virginia Beach Oceanfront Public Library, January 17, 2020
The Human Rights Commission and the ViBe Creative District partnered together to dedicate a ViBe Peace Pole at the Oceanfront Library. The dedication was a kick-off for the International Season of Nonviolence that commences on January 30th. The pole bears the message of “May Peace Prevail on Earth” and symbolizes the hopes and dreams of all humans, a standing vigil of silent prayer for peace on earth.
SUPPORTED EVENTS

Day For All People 2020 - Virginia General Assembly, January 22, 2020
The annual event, sponsored by Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, invites people from all over the Commonwealth to participate in a day of meeting with local legislators to make their voices heard on human rights issues.

The Art of Humanity: In Honor of the Season for Nonviolence - April 4, 2020
Sponsored by the ViBe Creative District, in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission and community partners, the annual event celebrates the closing of the Season of Non-Violence, January 30, 2020 to April 4, 2020. The Art of Humanity event and the Season of Nonviolence encourages all people to help promote peace in the world with non-violent choices and actions. Unfortunately, the event was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Community Testing - Virginia Beach Central Library & Virginia Beach Convention Center, May 26, 2020
The Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations, Virginia Latino Leaders Council, The Urban League, District Health Department, and Sentara Healthcare came together to provide underserved communities with free COVID-19 testing.
COMMITTEE WORK

Awards Committee
Mission - to assist in the coordination and execution of an awards program, to solicit nominations for awards, vote on a recommended slate of honorees to be presented to the full body for vote.

By-Laws/Policy Committee
Mission - to review by-laws and policies and make recommendations for additions/changes to the full body for discussion and vote.
In 2020, the By-Law/Policy Committee created an On-Boarding Packet for new Commissioners.

Community Alliance Partnership (Independent Observers Program)
Mission - to observe Oceanfront and/or other areas on highly-populated weekends and holidays to evaluate diversity and inclusivity and to make recommendations to HRC via reports or completion of surveys which will be forwarded to the City.

Elderly Support Committee
Mission - to ensure our elderly population’s rights are not violated.

Forums/Community Dialogue Committee
Mission - to assist in the coordination and planning of HRC forums, approved by the full body.

Joint Oceanfront Committee
Mission - a joint endeavor with the Resort Advisory Commission (RAC) to monitor activities at the Oceanfront to ensure and promote inclusivity, fairness, and diversity and to make recommendations to City Council.

Mental Health Committee
Mission - to identify mental health issues that impact individuals’ human rights and define a response.

Nominating Committee
Mission - to receive letters of intent in May and vote on a recommended slate of officers to be presented to the full body for vote in June.

Public Information Committee
Mission - to assist in the creation and maintenance of HRC printed materials and digital presentations and assist in the monitoring of social media and website.
LIAISONS ACTIVITIES

- BEACH (Bringing An End To All City Homelessness) - Teresa Stanley
- City Manager’s LGBTQ Work Group - Ginger Jenkot
- Center for the Study of Religious Freedom at Virginia Wesleyan University - Raj Islam, Teresa Stanley
- Hampton Roads Black Caucus - Ron Taylor
- Legislative Liaison - Jamal Gunn
- Mayor’s African American Roundtable - Ron Taylor
- Pastors Leaders Community Police Relations - Teresa Stanley
- Princess Anne County Confederate Statue Roundtable - Rabbi Israel Zoberman
- South Hampton Roads Legislative Collaborative Table - Teresa Stanley
- Virginia Beach Vision Oceanfront Task Force - Teresa Stanley
- Virginia Association of Human Rights Commission - Ginger Jenkot
MONTHLY MEETINGS

July 11, 2019 - Municipal Center, Building 19
Nina Goodale with the City of Virginia Beach Office of Cultural Affairs presented future projects that they would like the Human Rights Commission to support. Raquel Cepeda, Partner Specialist with the U.S. Census Bureau requested help from the Human Rights Commission in reaching out to communities to educate them on the importance of the upcoming Census.

August 8, 2019 - Municipal Center, Building 19
Mary Kate Andris, Ed. D, President of the YWCA South Hampton Roads, presented an overview of the various outreach programs that the YWCA is involved in including Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART). The YWCA proposed a collaboration with the Human Rights Commission to create a forum to address the topic of racism.

September 12, 2019 - Municipal Center, Building 19
Family members of the victims of the May 31st shooting spoke to the Commission to voice their concerns over how the City of Virginia Beach handled the events related to the shooting. Virginia Beach Police liaison, Deputy Chief Zucaro, provided an overview on the investigation.

September 26, 2019 - Municipal Center, Building 19
The special meeting was called due to scheduling conflicts that prevented the Commissioners from completing the full agenda of the September 12th meeting. The Commission heard remarks from officers with the Virginia Beach Police Department, Max Gonano - President of the Virginia Beach Fire Department and Virginia Beach Sheriff Ken Stolle regarding the city’s mandatory retirement age of 65. The Commission agreed to draft a letter stating that they feel forced retirement based solely on age is inappropriate “age discrimination”.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

October 10, 2019 - Municipal Center, Building 19
Councilman Michael Berlucchi asked for the Commission to support legislation that would establish that conversion therapy for the LGBTQ community is an unlawful practice. By a vote of 14-0 with 2 abstentions, the Human Rights Commission voted that the City of Virginia Beach request that the General Assembly support legislation that would establish reparative or conversion therapy as an unlawful practice.

November 14, 2019 - Municipal Center, Building 19
Chairwoman Sylvia Nery-Strickland announced the Retreat/Work Plan schedule.
The Committees provided updates on their work. The Forums/Dialogue Committee spoke on their plans for the upcoming forum, Community Conversation Series: Human Rights and Mental Health on December 10, 2019 and the next forum, Race and Racism on March 31, 2020. The Oceanfront Committee stated that they will be partnering with other committees on the Something in the Water Campaign for 2020.

December 12, 2019 - STIR Office
The meeting was split between facilitating the regular Human Rights Commission monthly meeting and the Human Rights Commission’s Retreat. Orelious Walker and Carrie L. Brandt, analysts from the City’s Strategy, Transparency, Innovation and Resiliency (STIR) office were the facilitators for the HRC Retreat. The facilitators conducted several group exercises to start the development of the HRC’s 2020 Work Plan.
MONTHLY MEETINGS

January 9, 2020 - STIR Office
The second session for the Human Rights Commission Retreat, facilitated by Orelious Walker and Carrie L. Brandt, established the Committees, Task Forces, and Liaisons lists.

February 13, 2020 - Municipal Center, Building 19
Orelious Walker, analyst from the City’s Strategy, Transparency, Innovation and Resiliency (STIR) office presented the Human Rights Commission’s 2020 Work Plan that outlines the goals for the Commission in the next fiscal year. The Commission voted to adopt the HRC’s 2020 Work Plan as a living document to be edited at any time by vote until June 30, 2020.

March 12, 2020
• Cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic

April 9, 2020
• Cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic

May 14, 2020
• Cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic

June 11, 2020
• Cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic
HUMAN RIGHTS INQUIRIES

Type of Request/Complaint
- Employment 6%
- Housing 6%
- Public Accommodation 6%
- Other 82%

Basis of Request/Complaint
- Race 5%
- Color 3%
- Gender 26%
- Disability 13%
- Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity 34%
- Unknown 19%

State Agencies
- Human Rights - Attorney General of Virginia
- Virginia Department of Behavioral Health
- Virginia Fair Housing Office

Local Agencies
- HRC Commissioners
- Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia
- Virginia Beach Human Services
- Virginia Beach Police Department
For more information visit:
www.vbgov.com/hrc
www.facebook.com/HRC4VB

Contact the Human Rights Commission at:
hrc@vbgov.com
757.385.1158

Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission monthly meetings are open to the public and held at 4 p.m. the second Thursday of each month. Go to www.vbgov.com/hrc for schedule of locations.