

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**



**COMMISSION MEETING**

January 8, 2014  
One Judiciary Square, 441 Fourth Street, NW, Conference Room 1114

**ATTENDEES**

**Commissioners:**

Nkechi Taifa, Chairperson  
Michael Ward, Vice-Chairperson  
Edwin Powell, Secretary  
Motoko Aizawa  
Rahim Jenkins  
Mathew McCollough  
Denise Reed  
John D. Robinson  
David Scruggs

**Commission on Human Rights Staff:**

David C. Simmons, Chief Administrative Law Judge  
Eli Bruch, Administrative Law Judge  
Dianne S. Harris, Administrative Law Judge  
Christina Cobb, Law Clerk

**Office of Human Rights Staff:**

Monica Palacio, Director, Language Access

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Taifa called the Commission's January meeting to order at 6:34pm.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Secretary Powell conducted the roll call. Nine Commissioners were present at the meeting. Since at least eight Commissioners were present, a quorum was reached.

**III. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER MEETING**

The Commissioners adopted the Commission's November meeting minutes.

#### **IV. REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

Director Monica Palacio, OHR's interim director, gave the report on behalf of the Office and gave a brief overview of its performance since the last Commission meeting.

Since the beginning of the fiscal year, OHR docketed 65 cases, 82 cases were closed, and mediation settlements reached \$547,024.

Director Palacio told the Commissioners about the Director's Inquiry regarding race and disability discrimination in the taxicab industry.

OHR is launching a new advertisement campaign to ensure District restaurants, hotels and other designated public accommodations have gender neutral single-stall bathroom signage.

OHR's oversight hearing before City Council will be scheduled between mid-February and early March. Also, Director Palacio's confirmation hearing will be held on February 3<sup>rd</sup>.

#### **V. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

Chief Judge Simmons delivered the report of the Commission and presented an overview of its performance since the last Commission meeting.

The Commission currently has a docket of 7 Commission cases, 3 OHR cases, and 5 CBX appeals.

Since the beginning of the fiscal year, the Commission closed 4 Commission cases, 1 Office case, and 1 CBX case.

The Commission is working together with Office to secure legal representation for Complainants whose case gets certified to the Commission.

The Rules Committee will meet with Director Palacio in early January to move forward with revisions to Chapters 2-4.

CALJ Simmons met with the Montgomery County Commission on Human Rights and had a discussion about the contours of the D.C. Human Rights Act and our mission. Chairperson Taifa suggested the Commission have more contact and involvement with other area human right commissions.

CALJ Simmons mentioned that many former clerks have used their experience at the Commission as a stepping stone to secure prestigious clerkships or gain employment at big law firms.

#### **VI. OLD BUSINESS**

#### A. Feedback on the Human Rights Award Gala

The Awards Gala was held on December 5<sup>th</sup> from 5:00pm to 8:00pm at the Kaiser Family Foundation, Barbara Jordan Conference Center. Approximately 130 people attended the event, including the mayor, attorney general, two area law school deans, and a magistrate judge.

Professor Edgar Cahn was presented with the Cornelius “Neil” R. Alexander Humanitarian Award and gave an inspiration speech.

This year, the Human Rights Youth Ambassador program taught human rights law, local and international, in 13 District public and charter high schools. 162 students participated in the program and 112 projects were submitted.

Commissioner Budd and Judge Harris were acknowledged for selecting an excellent menu for the event.

Secretary Powell proposed holding a moot court competition on a human rights legal issue in future years. Secretary Powell also proposed awarding a “Chairperson’s Award” to a Commissioner who excelled in their performance.

Chairperson Taifa and other Commissioners would like to see more media coverage of the event.

### **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

#### A. Election of Officers

Michael Ward was elected Vice-Chairperson, and Edwin Powell was elected Secretary.

### **VIII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

No community comments were received.

### **IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, a panel discussion on the use of criminal background records in employment decisions will be held at the ATU Local 689.

Councilmember Tommy Wells proposed a bill on limiting the use of criminal background records in employment decisions.

### **X. ADJOURNMENT**

The Commission’s January meeting was adjourned at 7:43pm.

## **XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Commission held an Executive Session closed to the public.