

MINUTES
OLMSTED COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 2017

- 1) Commissioner Dooley called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm in the Olmsted County Government Center, Room 104. Present: Commissioners Dooley, Witz, Belisle, Julius, MacLaughlin, Osowski, Ramaker, Skolnick, Umpierre. Youth Commissioners DeGrand and Uhm. County Commissioners Thein and Wright. MCS Director Moore. Organizational Development Coordinator Buzard and Director, Intergovernmental Relations Mueller. Absent: Commissioners Linkenmeyer, Mohamed and Mustafa.
- 2) Welcome to speaker and/or guests: there were no guests.
- 3) Public Comment: Commissioner Dooley read a letter from State Senator Senjem. Commissioner MacLaughlin assisted with getting the letter of support from the OCHRC added to the testimony on every Senator's desk for the hearing for Senate File 2161. Commissioner Dooley stated that Paul Fleissner sent a letter of appreciation as well. "Dear Human Rights Commissions, thank you much for your generous letter of support for our mental health initiative. It is so important and I cannot tell you how vital your support and interest is to us. This is not at all a "me" or an "I" effort. It is a "we" effort. Thank you so much for being a part of the we team. It is a huge undertaking but together we will make Minnesota a better place for those who struggle with mental illness. Best regards, Dave [Senator Senjem]." Commissioner MacLaughlin asked if the issue passed, and Commissioner Belisle reported that it did not, but Senator Senjem told Commissioner Belisle and her staff at Mental Health Day on the Hill that the Senator considers the issue "the fight of his career" and will bring forward again. Commissioner Wright requested a copy of the letter sent, and Commissioner Dooley said she would send around later. Commissioner Wright followed up with statements about the impact letters have coming from the Commission, and that such correspondence can be a template for the future. Commissioner Skolnick requested "as a matter of procedure" that such correspondence be included in meeting minutes so we can see what we've done. Commissioner Dooley stated she would send the letter to Commissioner Belisle for the meeting minutes. See below.
- 4) Approval of the agenda: Commissioner Witz made a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Julius seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion carried.
- 5) Approve/Amend April minutes: Commissioner Witz made a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Umpierre seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion carried.
- 6) Informational Items:
 - a) Presentation by Kamau Landis, President, Rochester for Justice, on the continuing work of the Rochester School District's Community Focus Team's efforts to address racial disparities at Rochester Public Schools. Mr. Landis is the President and Founder of Rochester for Justice. Per Commissioner Dooley, the work of the Team is in regards to reports of disparities in discipline at RPS. Rochester for Justice has done several events to increase community dialog, from a perspective that to create healthy communities you need to "laugh, sing or dance and eat together." He noted that Rochester for Justice "got pigeonholed" as the Black Lives Matter group of the community, and wanted to differentiate themselves as an organization, and work on issues beyond police brutality seen in other communities. Right now the focus is on the response to the [Department of Education] Office of Civil Rights, their study of RPS and subsequent report. The Office found disparities in discipline for black and brown students in RPS schools. Minority students face more suspensions and expulsions for infractions that white students do not. The District entered in an Agreement with OCR as a "plea deal" so they wouldn't be found in violation of student's civil rights. Rochester for Justice demanded one response be the creation of a Community Response Team of parents, teachers and the District to find where things are being overlooked in the response, and address things that have been going on in the community for many years. The early meetings brought over 120 people with diverse backgrounds, but quickly "became disenfranchised" by District leadership. Over the last two years, leadership "pushed the Team away from

the OCR report.” The intent of the Community Focus Team was to continue to bring issues from students and parents to leadership that they continue to overlook. Per Mr. Wilkins, after a year and a half, the District made a presentation to the [RPS] School Board without membership and representation from the Team, and stopped communicating with the Team, and membership declined under the leadership of Dr. Brenda Lewis [Assistant District Superintendent]. Commissioner Belisle noted “for the newer Commissioners” that Dr. Lewis spoke to the OCHRC after the Office of Civil Rights report was released to the District, and copies of the report are available. One example Mr. Wilkins spoke on is that the District stated that the AVID program [a program to address the achievement gap for students] was the idea of the Community Focus Team, which it was not. He also discussed training for teachers and staff “trickling down” from administrators and principals. Commissioner Julius noted as a Paraprofessional, there is not training coming down to staff from leadership. There was general discussion about issues around training, bias among teachers and school staff and their response to students and families. There was also general discussion of the role of the Team to be a whistleblower or watchdog for parents and teacher to continue to bring issues of racism and other rights violations to the District, and how such issues are currently addressed by the District’s administration. Commissioner Julius noted how, as staff members, there is fear about retaliation for speaking out and being vocal on issues, and appreciated “putting the voice back in your hands.” The Team has reorganized with additional leadership and stakeholders from the School Board and other groups. There was general discussion of how decisions are being made on the Team. Commissioner Wright asked about steps to achieve goals and Commissioner Skolnick asked if there is anything we can do as a Commission. There was discussion about teacher training, looking for gaps that address low-income students specifically and analyzing data to continue to bring light to disparities. There was also discussion about politics on the School Board and how difficult it is to affect change with the system of teacher tenure and training, and asking leadership “to report to us” as Mr. Wilkins put it. There was also discussion about the community perception that the schools have no problems. The issue of availability of data was also discussed at length. Commissioner Ramaker suggested contacting program directors at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs MPA program who are working on racial inequity in Public Policy and ask about a capstone project to continue the work of the OCR report. Commissioner Dooley requested the Commission get “ideas on paper” and organize “a focus group” on the issue.

- b) Discussion of County and City of Rochester's Social Media Policies: Ms. Buzard sent around copies of the County’s social media policy and Commissioners remarked on the differences between the County and the City’s policies, related to employees, volunteers and personal social media accounts. Commissioner Dooley reiterated from the last meeting that the OCHRC is governed by the County policy, but three Commissioners are also on City Commissions or Committees as well, as well as “anyone who would consider” volunteering for the City. She stated that the City is supposed to be offering training and stated she’d have someone from Human Resources come to the OCHRC to discuss the matter. There was general discussion about the City policy and how volunteers may respond. Commissioner Wright noted that the Library Board sent it back to Human Resources for more information, as did Rochester Public Utilities, as noted by Ms. Buzard. Commissioner Umpierre noted that the real question is why the City put the policy in place to begin with, and there was discussion about a volunteer on the Zoning and Planning Commission. Commissioner Umpierre noted that many cities and counties have social media policies and discussed a situation addressed by the OCHRC and Rochester Human Resources in the past. There was general discussion about “creating a watchdog” in the City and how individuals may respond. There was also discussion about recent social media posts about upcoming demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, and false information associated with them. Commissioner Belisle brought up direct impact on protected classes, interplay between county and city issues, and focusing on “high impact issues on high numbers in protected classes” such as the immigrant ban, health care and other issues. There was follow up discussion about the impact that other Commissioners see that the policy creates on marginalized people, and how they communicate and bring awareness through social media, and how they express dissent. Commissioner MacLaughlin noted that the Commission might not have much impact on the policy, and the best way to address would be “for a city employee to sue the city.” Commissioner Wright noted that a statement from the Commission to the effect that we cannot

understand the policy at all and it hinders dissent. Commissioner Dooley stated that she'd like to invite the City's Director of Human Resources to the OCHRC to provide the training previously offered and explain the policy, and partner with the Library Board and RPU to request more information, and asked if "we could agree by consensus that we'd like clarity on the policy." Commissioner Dooley stated she was going to ask them to come to the July meeting. Commissioner Belisle noted the Commission passed a motion to request the Olmsted County Sheriff to speak, and also previously discussed having Dr. Sharrone Hayes from Mayo Clinic's Office of Diversity and Inclusion speak in August. Commissioner Dooley stated she had sent an email to the Sheriff to speak about grant applications to serve as agents of ICE in July.

- c) Upcoming State Department Visit to Rochester on June 8: Commissioner Dooley asked if Commissioners are on the email list for the State Department of Human Rights. (<https://mn.gov/mdhr/>) Commissioner Lindsey is coming on June 8th for a luncheon meeting. The OCHRC could provide funds for the luncheon. The event is to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Department of Human Rights and have a panel discussion on workforce inclusion issues. Commissioner Dooley entertained a motion to support any Commissioner who would like to attend with funds to cover the luncheon. Commissioner Witz made the motion. Commissioner Osowski seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion carried.
- d) Q&A for Mediation Services: there were no questions. Director Moore noted that MNDHR is taking on a case for investigation referred from Olmsted County based on disability and housing. Commissioner Dooley noted that Commissioner Lindsey stated at his last visit to Rochester that issues related to disability are the number one complaint they address in Minnesota.

7.) Treasurer's Report: Commissioner Julius reported that there are no changes. The report was distributed. Commissioner Witz made a motion to approve the report. Commissioner Osowski seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion carried.

8.) Action Items

- a) Support for Pridefest: Commissioner Julius noted that Pridefest is "doing things a bit different this year" and the OCHRC normally pledges \$250 in support for the event, but she suggested a \$200 sponsorship to obtain a table and chairs to attend the event. The event will be Saturday, July 22nd at Soldier's Field. Commissioner Julius made a motion to table the issue to the next meeting. Commissioner Witz seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion was tabled.
- b) Publicity for upcoming presentation by Attorney Phil Durand of OutFront Minnesota. Commissioner Dooley noted that the rate for advertisement in the paper is \$800, and suggested Commissioners post the event on Facebook and other social media. Commissioner MacLaughlin suggested a flyer and Ms. Buzard stated she could prepare one, as well as add to Olmsted County's site. Commissioner Dooley made a motion to advertise the event with free venues. Commissioner Julius seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion carried.
- c) County and City Social Media Policies: Commissioner Dooley noted she "is comfortable with the County policy" and would request to the City that they clarify their policy" for us. Commissioner Skolnick made a motion that we ask for such clarification. Commissioner MacLaughlin seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion carried.
- d) OCHRC By-laws changes: Commissioner Dooley passed out copies of the OCHRC bylaws with proposed changes marked in red and blue. The first change is to the location of the office of the Commission, and the second is to add secretary "or a designee of the Commission" to keep minutes to give us freedom to use transcription software. There was general discussion about if there were previous changes ratified and the process of requirements for notice for approving amendments. Commissioner Dooley "considered them minor changes" and the Commission will vote on the amendments in two weeks, on June 15th.

9.) Updates from Commissioners: there were no updates from Commissioners.

10.)Adjourn: Commissioner Witz made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Julius seconded. All in favor; none opposed. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm.

April 22nd, 2017

**To the Honorable David Senjem
Minnesota State Capital**

RE: SUPPORT FOR SF 2161

Dear Senator Senjem,

On Thursday evening the members of the Olmsted County Human Rights Commission had the privilege of hearing Paul Fleissner, Director of Social Services for Olmsted County, speak to us about the county's initiative to provide a pathway to prosperity. To say that the Commission was impressed by this work would be an understatement. In fact, the Commission unanimously voted that we send a letter voicing our support of SF 2161 which is an essential and necessary component of the infrastructure needed to bring about meaningful change in the way our district addresses mental health crisis.

We recognize that the Senate is always constrained to accomplish all the good works that they may wish to do as a result of limited funds. Providing the support to appropriately and adequately address mental health concerns, we believe will not only help keep children in schools, families together and individuals actively contributing to our community, but it will save our district and the State of Minnesota dollars which may otherwise be spent on incarceration or other undesirable outcomes.

Thank you for having the courage and commitment to bring SF2161 forward and it is our hope that you and the other dedicated legislators on your committee will give it your full support. If the Commission could be of assistance in other way, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Best regards,

Nora Dooley

Nora Dooley, PhD
Chair, Olmsted County Human Rights Commission
Olmsted County Government Center

SF 2161