

Erie County Human Relations Commission (ECHRC) – Commissioners Meeting

Minutes – October 27 2020

Call to Order/Roll Call:

The Meeting was called to Order by Commission chair Shawnta Pulliam-Brown via zoom at 6:02 PM.

The chair and commission welcomed new commissioner Jeff Pinski

Commission Members Present: Shawnta Pulliam-Brown, Mary Jo Campbell (V-Chair) Christine Mitchell (Sec.); Michael Martin, Jeff Pinski.

Commission Members Not Present: Tracy Leet, John Steiner, Willy McAdory.

ECHRC Staff Present: Tony Logue, Wayne Harbison, Attorney Sunwabe.

County Council/Erie County Ellen Schauerma joined at the end.

City Council None

Advisory Board None

Approval of Commissioners Minutes / Notes:

Approved August minutes by Commissioner Martin and Campbell

Public Comment none

Director's Report:

Director Logue clarified that the audit in the director report meant audit of cases.

Director Logue welcomed commissioner Pinski and congratulated him on his career with the Erie Times News and his new book.

The case count is now at twelve with two new cases. A fact finding on an employment case was recently concluded and hopefully will result in a settlement.

Chair Report / Commissioners Comment(s):

Resignation of lead panel attorney:

On September 30th Email from Doug Smith stating that Attorney Spry our Panel Attorney notified him that he will no longer be able to perform the work for the HRC, and a formal letter will be forthcoming.

I'd like to address a very important concern, that Prior to Attorney spry resignation Sec. Mitchell and myself were reaching out to him and sent him at least 4 emails, to schedule hearing dates but he never responded back to any of our emails. That began in July, and we received the resignation information on September 30th

Address Director. Logue:

Mr. Logue as our director, we need you to direct and follow up with staff I feel you should have stepped in on the first follow up email to Attorney Spry to get the hearing dates scheduled, as you were aware we were not getting a response from Attorney Spry, as our Director it's your role to ensure that the staff under you, are fulfilling their obligations and completing task, so I'll say again, the Commission really needs you to be on top of situations like this because we should not have had 4 unanswered follow up emails for 3 months and then a resignation

I really want to stress that scheduling timely and fair hearings are pivotal. Our goal is to give our clients, timely, fair hearings that ensure the rights of all citizens. We are a judicial governing body Therefore, Moving forward, we are going to set the hearing dates, the Panel Attorney and the Hearing Panel **it's going to be the responsibility of the complainant and respondent, to make sure they attend the scheduled hearing, with the date we provide them, if they cannot make that date it needs to be an extreme emergency WITH documentation provided, not they have a meeting at work our hearing dates take precedence, just like any other court system.**

Panel Attorney Ad:

Requesting status of attorney hiring Director Logue In response to the resignation of our lead panel attorney, there was an ad placed in the ETN as well as the Erie County Legal Journal. No applicants to the advertisements so far. Mr. Smith will follow up. Mr. Smith stated he would reach out to Attorney Sunwabe of his availability to pick up a hearing or two can we update on that because the hearing panel has provided all available dates. Attorney Sunwabe did not have any information on those in process cases. Attorney Sunwabe is now physically located in Arlington, VA and extremely time limited and cannot pick up any new cases quickly. Director Logue will work with Attorney Sunwabe to see if/when he can make those dates from our provided dates and locations. Commissioner Martin recommended expanding the hearing panel to have increased availability. Commissioner Martin and Chair Pulliam-Brown and Vice Chair Campbell proposed increasing the rate from the current \$125 an hour. Director Logue will approach Mr. Smith on increase in rate on attorney position.

Annual Report:

In January of this year, I noticed while reviewing our ordinance, that we are required to provide an annual report to both City and County Council, I also found out that an annual report had never been submitted from the inception of this office, in which I found very surprising and disappointing at the same time, so I brought the need to create an annual report to our Commissioners, Director and County Council, the initial report was not approved, so I called a Working Session in August to get us all on one accord and working together. This process took a lot longer than the chair wanted it to but we have been able to work together on the report, and I think what we have now is a really good start of future reports to come. **The big picture** is that we are starting to do things the correct way, and that is what matters most. The report is due at the end of 2020.

Annual Report should be listed as 2019 submitted 2020. No changes or amendments noted. Put the 2019 annual report on County Council Website for public view.

Annual report needs:

Cover page. Name, logo, date, bottom right respectfully submitted: Erie County Human Relations Commission.

We agreed to distribution via email, and hard copy to head city and county.

The annual report is due November 17th

Motion by Commissioner Martin and Campbell to approve the report for distribution unanimously approved.

Old Business:

Training on the general hearing and investigation process will be coming from the state. The chair will be meeting with them on November 5th to set at date. 1st Thursday of the month proposed. Zoom to be available for any that cannot attend.

We should hear back from county council on the co-mingling issue.

New Business:

Adjournment:

There was a motion to adjourn by commissioners Campbell and Martin and the meeting was adjourned at 6:46 p.m.