



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
Monday July 26, 2010
REGULAR MEETING
City Hall, Council Chambers & Room 1027
First Floor, 301 W. Second Street, Austin, TX 78701

MEETING MINUTES

Chair Lisa Scheps called the Board Meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Board Members in Attendance:

Lisa Scheps - Chair
Elizabeth Brenner
Tom Davis
Delia Perez Meyer

Human Resources Staff Present:

Yamile M. Ortiz, EE/FHO Admin. Support
Enrique Serrano, EE/FHO Acting Manager

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting of April 26, 2010 were approved after two corrections and changes were made; Commissioner Meyer motion, Commissioner Davis second on a 4-0 vote.

CITIZENS COMMUNICATIONS

None

ITEM I

Announcement and acknowledgement of Charles H. Gorham, Administrator Equal Employment / Fair Housing Office – EE/FHO service and retirement.

Commissioner Lisa Scheps talked about the retirement of Charles Gorham former Administrator for the EE/FHO and the Executive Liaison for the Human Rights Commission. Commissioner Scheps along with the commissioners expressed their gratitude and thanked him for his many years of service.

ITEM II

The Equal Employment/Fair Housing Office - (EE/FHO) - Community Outreach update.

Carla Scales, Assistant Director for the Human Resources Department for the City of Austin stated her purpose is to raise community awareness of the office of EE/FHO. She informed that this Agency is charged with enforcement of the City Ordinances and Federal Laws prohibiting discrimination in employment and/or housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, genetics, sexual orientation, gender identity and familial status.

Ms. Scales mentioned that under the leadership of the Director, Mr. Mark Washington, the agency is moving forward with multiple initiatives. One is the Community Outreach plan, which is to increase the public awareness of the Agency.

Ms. Scales also mentioned the possibility of moving the EE/FHO from One Texas Center located at 505 Barton Springs Rd, suite 720, to the Snell Building located at 1050 East 11th Street. The department has submitted a proposal to City Council to be approved. Ms. Scales expressed that this possible new location will better serve the needs of the community because it will be more accessible.

ITEM III

The Equal Employment/Fair Housing Office (EE/FHO) Contracts update.

Ms. Scales stated that since the EE/FHO is the Liaison for the Human Rights Commission it is important to give an update of the office contracts. She informed the commissioners and the public that EE/FHO covers Employment and Housing Discrimination.

The Employment Section has a contract with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Office (EEOC); the fiscal year is from October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010. The case contract is 233 cases; as of July 26, 2010 Employment had completed 78% of case contracts and 85% of Intake contracts. The Housing Section has a contract with United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD). For the fiscal year 2010 which runs from July 1, 2009, to June 30, 2010, the Housing Section had completed 66 cases. The office also takes care of walk-in citizens that come to the office, and to date 572 intakes were serviced.

ITEM IV

Presentation by Pastor Larry Ball and youth from the Hungry for God Home to discuss their programs and their work around the Community Youth Court.

This item was tabled.

ITEM V

Presentation by a representative from Members of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, and the Members of the Texas Moratorium Network

Mr. Scott Cobb, President of the Texas Moratorium Network, gave a brief update since the last time he attended to the meeting on September 29, 2009. On the same day the Human Rights Commission passed the Death Penalty Resolution calling the Austin City Council to pass the Resolution supporting a Moratorium on executions in Texas. Mr. Cobb mentioned since September 2009, twenty one more people have been executed; fifteen during this year 2010 and six by the end of 2009; he added Texas continues to lead the nation in the number of executions.

Mr. Cobb stated that two more issues have demonstrated the need to have a Moratorium in Texas. One of them was the Official Public Warning issued by the State Commission of Judicial Conduct to the presiding judge of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals in a death penalty case. The judge denied access in open court to the right to be heard to a person who was scheduled for execution.

The other issue was the Willingham case; which may have been a case of wrongful execution. Scientific studies showed that the science was faulty and that it was a case of no negligence from

the fire investigators because there was no valid evidence to prove the facts. More information will follow after the Texas Forensic Science Commission will meet again in Houston on October 2010 to give final findings in this case. Mr. Cobb also mentioned the case of Timothy Cole who died in prison and later he was exonerated; this case supports the Resolution.

Mr. Cobb added that the City of Austin community is getting involved in the death penalty issues. He also invited and informed the public and the commissioners to go the Carver Library on Wednesday July 28, 2009, at 7:00 pm to meet with a group called the Death Penalty Free Austin, who is joining the Texas Moratorium Network. He mentioned that more organizations want to work together to go to the next session of the Legislature in 2011 to call for a moratorium to pass the resolution.

Commissioner Meyer requested Mr. Cobb to comment on two questions. One was related with the Sanders case and the other was related with the DNA lab in the Austin Police Department. On the Sanders case Mr. Cobb commented that there is a \$750,000 law suit still pending against the City of Austin. He mentioned that even though this case was not a death penalty case, it is a problem within the Criminal Justice System that is why the moratorium on executions needs to pass to avoid wrongful dead law suits and wrongful executions law suits. Local tax payers are the ones who are affected for what goes wrong on the judicial criminal justice system.

About the Austin Police Department DNA lab case, Mr. Cobb mentioned that this case is still pending because of the contamination of DNA samples. He also added that there was a problem with DNA labs statewide problem that should be addressed at the state level and the moratorium will be one of the ways to solve this problem.

ITEM VI

Update on the proposal to host the 2011 International Association of Official Human Rights Agency (IAOHRA) conference in Austin.

Commissioner Scheps spoke of the 2011 Conference and informed the public and the commissioners that the Austin Sheraton Hotel will be hosting the conference; more information will be coming. She informed the public and commissioners that two of them are going to attend the conference in Mobil, Alabama; from August 29, 2010, to September 1, 2010, and they will be hosting a reception to motivate members and organizations to come to the next 2011 Conference in Austin. More information will be discussed during the non-voting session.

ANNOUNCEMENTS / STAFF BRIFFINGS

Commissioner Scheps commented that Commissioner Cortez, Steve Swanson and Judge Vasquez were in Denver, Colorado observing the youth court system. They are exploring if that model will work in Austin. More information will follow during the next meeting in August 2010.

Commissioner Meyer made two announcements; one of them was about a group called Journey of Hope which will be in Austin on October 27 to the 31. She described that the Journey of Hope is an organization led by family members of those inmates that are on death row executed, exonerated, and others with stories to tell that address alternatives to the death penalty. She added that on October 30 the Journey of Hope will have the annual march to abolish the death penalty. More information will follow.

The second announcement was about the organization called Witness to Innocence, an organization of 150 people who have been exonerated from death row across the country. They will be hiring a field service person in Austin to do 100 speaking engagements in Texas to educate the public about how these errors are occurring in the death penalty cases. More information will follow.

At 6:03 pm Commissioner Scheps invited the public and the commissioners to meet in room #1027 for a non voting work session.

Lisa Scheps informed the public and the commissioners that;

- Enrique Serrano is the Acting Administrator for the Equal Employment / Fair Housing Office (EE/FHO).
- The International Association of Official Human Rights Agency's (IAOHRA) organization is expecting the commissioners from Austin, Texas to hold a reception during the 2010 conference. Commissioner Scheps commented that this expense could cost about \$1,500 to \$2,000 and the commission's budget is low in funds. She added that the registration to attend the 2010 conference was for \$850.00 leaving a balance of \$1,080.00; she will try to talk to a City Council Member to support that event with the city's budget.

ITEM VII

Discuss issues around the Human Rights Commission bylaws and protected classes.

Commissioner Scheps said there were some issues Charles Gorham mentioned some time ago about enforcing the Equal Employment / Fair Housing Office protected classes. The City of Austin bylaws do not mention gender identity and sexual orientation and Commissioner Scheps will look into that for the next meeting.

ITEM VIII

Further discussion on the homeless issue in Austin as per our annual work plan.

This issue will be discussed at the next meeting

ITEM IX

Discussion of the Youth Court

Commissioner Cortez, Steve Swanson, and Judge Vasquez are working on this project and they will do a presentation about their trip to Denver during the next meeting in August.

ITEM X

Discussion Human Rights Commission Officer Election in August

There will be elections during the next meeting in August 2010. Commissioner Scheps informed the commissioners and the public that she will be stepping down as a chair and there is a high possibility that she will be resigning as a commissioner before the IAOHRA Conference.

ADJOURN

Chair Lisa Scheps adjourned the meeting at 6:36 pm without objection.