



City of Salisbury
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
May 21, 2020

Committee Members Present

Reverend John Wright, *Chair*
Mark Decker
Nance Held
Billy Earl Amos
Ron Pagano

Committee Members Absent

Marcel Jagne-Shaw
Chalarra Sessoms
Amber Green
D'Shawn Doughty

In Attendance

Laura Baasland, *Department of Water Works Program Specialist*
Marco Merrick, *Education & Outreach Associate, Maryland Commission on Civil Rights*
Julie English, *Mayor's Office Administrative Assistant*
Stephen Feliciano

The Human Rights Advisory Committee (HRAC) met at 6:00p.m. virtually using Google Meet

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:08p.m. by Rev Wright and began with introductions of everyone in attendance. The Committee also welcomed the guest from the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, Education & Outreach Coordinator for the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights.

Last Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes from April were acknowledged. A motion to approve them as written was brought forth by Ms. Held and seconded by Mr. Amos. The motion carried by a unanimous vote in favor.

Open Public Forum, Current Events & Local Issues

The 2A sanctuary legislation brought forth by the Wicomico County Council was brought up. Mr. Pagano mused the possibility of issuing a writ of mandamus to order Sheriff Mike Lewis to follow the rule of law. Mr. Amos asked the committee whether or not it would be appropriate to suggest that the Mayor make a statement in favor of upholding the rule of law. Mr. Amos and Mr. Pagano volunteered to draft a recommendation in the coming week. The committee voted on whether or not to recommend that the Mayor release a statement in favor of the rule of law in Maryland and refer to specifically to the gun legislation in the State that will be upheld within the municipal limits of the City of Salisbury, the motion passed by unanimous vote in favor.

Guest Speaker: Marco Merrick, *Education & Outreach Coordinator, Maryland Commission on Civil Rights*

Mr. Merrick went over the history of the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR), which has been around. Uphold and enforce Title XX and partner with EEOC and HUD to enforce cases that fall under their statute. MCCR investigators continue to work virtually during the pandemic to keep cases moving, but it was slowed due to court closures and inability to have in-person meetings. Mr. Merrick and his colleagues emphasize training for State employees (sexual harassment), and work on outreach initiatives. Host forums and programs, etc.

Mr. Merkey provided an overview of trainings that the MCCR provides, including: fair housing and discrimination, Employment Discrimination Prevention; Religious/Spiritual Awareness accommodations, dimensions of diversity, Conflict Resolution; LGBTQIA Safe Spaces; Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; Disability Issues, Awareness & The Law; Know Your Civil Rights. These trainings are generally offered to public entities at no charge. Ms. Held asked if the trainings are brought directly to the agency who requests it, or if travel is involved. Mr. Merrick confirmed that the training is brought directly to the requester, and they have also collaborated with agencies down on the shore, including a collaboration with Salisbury University for Safe Spaces training with Diane Illick. Maryland Equity and Leadership Inclusion Program—has been joined by public agencies, private businesses, nonprofit entities, etc. Two cohorts—one in 2017 and one in 2019. Looking to ramp up next cohort by 2021.

Hate crimes are being more reported, and number one place there has been an uptick is on college campuses. Report of hate crime and other crime instances have relaxed due to COVID-19. A lot of outreach has been done surrounding medical marijuana and medical professionals weighed in, as well as professionals who discussed discrimination and the law.

Agency being housed in Baltimore does not allow fair access across the state, so the agency is establishing advisory committees across the state, including an Eastern Shore Advisory Committee.

Rev Wright asked if individuals can go to MCCR if they feel they have been discriminated against, and Mr. Merkey confirmed that yes, they are the agency. They are tax-payer funded and it is one of their primary focuses to inform people about their rights and make them aware of protected classes (race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age). Issues around protected classes, such as housing, employment, etc. MCCR is the agency to help with the issues, and even if they aren't the appropriate ones, they can inform you and/or point you in the right direction. Their goal as an agency is to ensure that Maryland becomes free of discrimination. MCCR is a phone call away, the process is as simple as that. The very first step is to contact MCCR who will put you in touch with the intake office. The intake office will collect all information from the complainant and complete the initial fact-finding. There will be an intake hearing that will then advance to an investigation. Depending on the circumstances, there will sometimes be a suit. Cases have been won in court, and often, through a mediation process, settlements have been reached.

Ms. Green inquired if Mr. Merkey has any suggestions about how to make citizens aware of the MCCR and its purpose as a resource for individuals. Mr. Merkey confirmed that our website can be linked to their webpage, and information can be provided to physical venues such as community centers, etc. They also do outreach at public events and fairs.

Committee to link MCCR's resources on their webpage. The committee would also like to suggest that the City display MCCR resources, information, and materials in all public City spaces, such as the Visitor's Center and Community Centers, etc. Can we also get materials to our partner communities? Materials are published in English and Spanish. The committee informed Mr. Merkey about our significant Haitian population and the need we have here for outreach in Haitian Creole.

Mr. Feliciano asked if MCCR is dealing with whistleblower complaints due to COVID-19 and reopening. Violation of a person's employment's rights. Enabling a hostile work environment? Mr. Pagano discussed that a whistleblower isn't necessarily a protected class.

This is an issue that tends to disproportionately affect those who are least able to speak up. Agencies predict that there will be a lot of changes in legislation due to COVID-19.

Rev Wright asked Mr. Merkey how many investigators MCCR has and what the case load is like. MCCR is comprised about 30 staff, and approximately two-thirds to one-half of the agency is investigators. Mr. Merkey said that 10-15 people are handling the entire case load of Maryland. You can view the 2019 agency annual report directly from their website. The case load is quite heavy and the workload is considerable.

Rev Wright explained the structure of the committee and its operations to Mr. Merkey, including the membership and the capacity to make recommendations. The committee also functions as somewhat as a liaison between citizens in the community and resources they may need to be connected with, as well as education and outreach efforts. Mr. Merkey commented that the committee has been such an engaging dialogue with wonderful, probing questions.

Maryland Lynching Memorial Project: Task Force Update

Ms. Green reported on the most recent Lynching Memorial Task Force meeting. She explained to Mr. Merkey that the task force is working to establish a lynching memorial in the City of Salisbury, and the task force works in collaboration with the State of Maryland Lynching Commission to participate in hearings and engage community buy in. Subcommittees that focus on language, and subcommittee that emphasizes and community engagement. State has not extended deadlines for community hearings, they have not been postponed due to COVID-19. Each county and region has their own deadlines, but each area has to report by early 2021.

The task force heard back from EJI and got some dates. The draft of the marker takes 3-15 weeks, ordering and shipping take 10-12 weeks, installation should take place 1 week prior to the ceremony. EJI outlined a great timeline that the task force can work with, and it can surely take place before 2021. Ms. English asked Ms. Green when the June meeting is scheduled, and Ms. Green will find out and report directly to Ms. English. Mr. Pagano asked about funding and Ms. Green clarified that there is no funding needed for the marker itself, but there may be funding needed for marketing and promotional materials, as well as the unveiling ceremony. Rev Wright asked if the task force has identified where the additional funding will be coming from, and Ms. Green clarified that that will be discussed at the next meeting. Now that the task force has the necessary timeline steps and can solidify a concrete timeline, they can focus on digging in. The task force has discussed the possibility of holding another soil collection ceremony but that has not been decided on.

Renaming Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day

Mr. Feliciano thought the draft was well-written and the language was great and doesn't need to be edited, but admitted that it did prompt some thinking and a number of questions. The committee mused what could be added to the recommendation to address the concern that this may be a largely symbolic gesture, and what can be added as an educational component.

Mrs. Baasland will remind the committee to collaborate with Mark on a draft revision.

Committee Membership

Ms. Held and Rev Wright asked that members of the committee who won't be in attendance please inform the liaison or Chair so that the committee can be aware of who will be there. Mrs. Baasland will include in the reminder emails that members of the committee confirm their attendance. The next meeting will be designated as the mid-year housekeeping meeting.

Employer Complaint Resources

Information can be added to the webpage to connect individuals with needed resources.

Next Meeting & Adjournment

Ms. Held would like the committee to add homelessness and human trafficking to the agenda and discuss that issue sometime before the end of the year. The next HRAC meeting was set for Thursday, June 11, at 6p.m. and will again be held virtually. On a motion by Mr. Pagano, seconded by Mrs. Held and carried by unanimous vote in favor, the HRAC meeting was adjourned at 7:45p.m.

Minutes Taken By: Laura Baasland, *Department of Water Works Program Specialist*