

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes
St Cloud City Hall

Wed Feb 15, 2017
5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Pre-Forum Commission Meeting: 5:30-6:15 pm

Present: Sarah Drake, Matt Glaesman, Heidi Hovis, Emmanuel Oppong, Rachel Wexelbaum, Jonathan Wong, with brief appearance from Mayor David Kleis

League of Human Rights Commissions Bill: Heidi and Jonathan received a strange bill for \$100 from David Singleton from the League of Human Rights Commissions. Rachel will contact David for more information, as this is the first bill we have ever received from them.

SCAHRC Budget: Sarah will contact Emmanuel re: St Cloud City Budget and whether or not the Human Rights Commission has a line. Mayor Kleis said that we need to have a Joint Powers Board meeting in order to make a budget request, have it approved, and open up the budget. We have not had a Joint Powers Board meeting since the office's latest state appropriation. Matt Glaesman appointed Emmanuel to schedule the meeting, which will happen some time in March. Kevin Lindsey will be invited to this future meeting, as he has not presented to the Joint Powers Board meeting since the state appropriation. The Mayor is in support of the human rights commission having a budget so that they can be more proactive with outreach and education; he will bring this up to the Lieutenant Governor. The Mayor said that he would also like to see people on the commission from St. Joe, St. Augusta, Waite Park, and more representation from the other cities. Rachel requested the most up to date Joint Powers Board agreement for the commission—Matt Glaesman said that he would send it to us.

April Housing Panel Planning: Jonathan asked about interpreters for housing panel—the city has a few but maybe not enough for everyone.

Open Forum: 6:30 - 7:30 pm

3 attendees: Ray Meier, Judith Siminoe (President's Special Counsel, SCSU), Elynn Bartges (Chief Diversity Officer, SCSU)

The Department of Human Rights is fighting discrimination through championing legislation, handling court cases, providing investigators and offices throughout Minnesota, outreach, and education about our rights.

Officer Lindsey gave us three handouts (I will include digital copies with the minutes):

- "Adding Equity Goals to Bonding Projects: SF640/HF892 (Pappas/Urhahl)": This is an explanation of Governor Dayton's bonding proposal that would include compliance certificates to ensure that state contractors with 40 or more employees make a good faith effort to hire more women, people of color, and people with disabilities, as well as to follow state and federal equal pay laws
- Minnesota Department of Human Rights 2017 Legislative Budget Proposals: MDHR's 3 budget proposals in SF803/HF896: Incremental Increase to Maintain Operations at Current Levels, Regional Offices in Greater Minnesota—to maintain funding for existing ones and to build new ones in Duluth, Rochester, and Worthington (Senators Knoblach and Relph are supportive of continuing to keep the St Cloud Office funded and staffed); Ban the Box for Housing, which would ensure that individuals know that landlords are using criminal background checks prior to paying an application fee

- 2017 Legislative Session Human Rights & Equity Bills of Interest: 40 of em with summaries!

Kevin Lindsey briefly explained these equity goals, budget proposals, and some of the human rights & equity bills, then opened the floor for open discussion. Topics discussed were as follows:

What is the role of MDHR in this current political climate?

— Role for MDHR is to make sure that people understand their rights under state law, as well as how the Human Rights Act is enforced. They also investigate claims of discrimination, harassment, and abuse.

— There is a strong call from people of all backgrounds for MDHR to be more aggressive in investigation, especially if federal enforcers step over the line.

— MDHR is collecting data on how many people in MN were negatively impacted by the immigration/refugee ban, this information will be provided to our MN legislators, MN reps in House of Representatives, and MN senators in the hope that they will use this information to turn things around.

— For the next two weeks, MDHR will be in Cold Spring and elsewhere will be surveying communities asking if they have been victim of discrimination...there have been reports of wage theft from people in the immigrant/refugee communities.

Heidi Hovis, our local St Cloud Human Rights Investigator, said that there has been an increase in walkins, calls, and local investigations. There have been more requests for help with discrimination issues in the community, and the office has been hosting multiple “Know Your Rights” events around the region. Jonathan Wong is now the Communications Officer for the St Cloud Human Rights Office.

Executive Orders Stripping Federal Civil Rights Away:

According to Officer Lindsey, if the federal government decided to strip away civil rights legislation, the state of MN still has the right to enforce its own civil rights laws. In fact, MN already provides more civil rights protections than federal law. Currently this is the case for age, pregnancy, and LGBTIQ protections.

Immigration/Refugee Ban:

According to Officer Lindsey, immigration law and enforcement is set by the federal government. The state of Minnesota also has no regulatory role in immigration/refugee status. HOWEVER, the state of Minnesota has the power to determine how much help they should give federal law enforcement to locate and deport illegal immigrants. If police officers are overstepping their rights in the form of targeting, profiling, discriminating, harassing or abusing people, or providing disparate treatment to people from certain groups, however, victims can file claims with MDHR. If the victim is undocumented, however, depending on the situation and the request, MDHR might not be able to provide assistance.

Heidi and Eunice met with Catholic Charities and other entities and parishioners expressed concerns about ICE. ICE is prohibited from targeting or profiling individuals, and cannot call out anyone as illegal without just cause. ICE officers must treat the people they apprehend in accordance with Minnesota state laws.

LGBTIQ Issues:

Kevin Lindsey and Laurie Swanson were sued by Telescope Media Group (St Cloud) for requiring them to take LGBTIQ business even though it conflicts with their religious beliefs. This will not go to trial; instead there will be a summary judgement. Stay tuned.

MDHR is waiting to hear what the Supreme Court rules on bathrooms—this will provide Minnesota with a roadmap on how to address gender neutral bathroom provisions in public buildings and educational institutions. Currently MDHR is investigating one case that involves bathrooms—they will most likely issue an opinion on this case that will be more progressive than the federal courts.

Healthcare:

Kevin Lindsey confirmed that federal funding for healthcare is distributed to the states, and that all states that accept federal funding to provide support for particular medical issues (AIDS, TBI, etc) have to provide reports to the federal agency dedicated to that medical issue. At this point a lot of questions about state-funded healthcare are up in the air. For example, if the federal government determines not to let in as many immigrants/refugees, will they give less funding for healthcare and services? Stay tuned.

Ban the Box in Employment and Housing:

— Ban the box in employment and housing (240 actions so far!). This will allow people to get more information prior to paying a fee for a criminal background check. If they know that they are not going to pass, they can save their money. Will this prevent outright discrimination? Landlords supportive of active dialogue with people who have criminal background. Some efforts are also being made by schools about asking people about criminal backgrounds—does it preclude enrollment?

Anti-bullying in MN:

Surge in hostile education environment cases in MN—goes beyond bullying. MDHR is investigating a handful of cases—the governor wants to be kept apprised of this. If there are students who feel that something above and beyond bullying is going on, they should file claims—the MDHR will investigate.

Protest Bills:

Protest bills in House and Senate that would criminalize actions of groups that block roadways, airports, or interfere with government proceedings: would move penalty from misdemeanor to gross misdemeanor. According to these proposed laws, the Women's Rights March would have been subject to gross misdemeanor. Also part of this bill: those who participated in the protest would have to pay for the police fees. Some supporters of this bill believe that it is no different than someone getting stranded in the Alaskan wilderness and the government billing you for your rescue. There are many gray areas in these laws, as it would be difficult to determine whether or not bystanders or people stuck in traffic during a protest on the interstate would be protest participants. Police action on these protests may actually cause more disruption than the protests. Hate speech and hate symbols are not addressed in the protest bills. Under these proposed bills, the state government would give protesters permits to protest in certain locations...it is possible that the government could turn down the request if they did not agree with the subject of the protest, though.

Student Religious Liberties Act

This proposed bill would allow students the rights to opt out of educational activities without penalty that conflict with their religious beliefs. This bill has no Senate companion. With over 2,000 bills introduced to the legislature, it will not move forward without a Senate companion. It

is possible that the outcome of this bill will be the same as any bills brought to the legislature about businesses having the right to discriminate against LGBTIQ people due to religious beliefs.