

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2025  
7:00 P.M., City Hall  
301 King Street, Room 2000  
Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Jon Thompson, Chair  
Marc Bendick, Vice Chair  
Lisl Brunner  
Iulia Fratilla  
Matt Harris  
Manisha Maniyar  
Megan Prince  
Tom Reeder, Jr.  
Sam Schwartz

Staff Present

Anna McClure, Investigator/Acting Director  
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez Adm. Support

Members Excused

April Breslaw  
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson, Vice Chair  
Conrad Sylvanus

**1. Call to Order/Introductions**

Chair Thompson called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

**2. Approval of February Minutes**

Upon motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Vice Chair Prince, the Commission approved the minutes of the February meeting. Of the Commissioners present, 7 voted aye and 1 abstained.

**3. Immigration Throughout Alexandria**

**Guest: Sindy Carballo Garcia, Tenants and Workers United**

Chair Thompson said the Commission wanted to focus on the concerns that they have heard from the community about threats and intimidation of immigrant friends and neighbors. He added that they have heard reports of ICE trucks and ICE officials being spotted around the City. Local news has reported on isolated ICE raids at apartment complexes. He stated this is very concerning and they want to see how the Commission can assist the immigrant community.

Sindy Carballo is the Youth Organizer for Tenants and Workers United (TWU) and oversees programming for and works with middle and high school students. TWU also focuses on issues like affordable housing, and healthcare and childcare accessibility. As an organization, they believe there is power in collective action. TWU does door-knocking in the community to inform residents about resources and how they can navigate their needs. She said TWU's main goal on immigration is to provide resources to protect families and to create a safe space for all. She said they see a lot of fear in the community when they are door-knocking. People do not want to answer and think twice about giving out their contact information for TWU's distribution list. In addition, there has been lower turnout at TWU meetings and English classes. Ms. Carballo said that TWU has been conducting "Know Your Rights" training for families and working with local businesses to make sure they know their employees' rights, so if ICE comes, they know what to do. TWU is also doing monthly rapid response training and there has been a lot of interest in it.

Sindy said TWU is working with the Legal Aid Justice Center to provide families with standby guardianship support and guidance, so that families have a plan for their children or other dependents and are prepared in case they are detained or deported. She added that they are doing advocacy work to make sure that City institutions, such as Alexandria City Public Schools, are reacting appropriately to what is going on. She said that they are meeting with the Superintendent later this month to get to know more about protocol and what type of resources they are providing to students and families, because TWU has heard of misrepresentations in that area. She said a group met with the Police Chief the previous week to learn about how APD is working internally and to ensure there is an end to any collaborations between APD and ICE.

She added that there is also an emergency fund that accepts donations from anyone in the community who can provide funds directly to families that are being impacted. Another idea is to have volunteers that can support families, for example going grocery shopping for families that are scared to go out. There is no process for this yet, but they are thinking about it.

Ms. Carballo explained that the rapid response training is for volunteers who are at a lower risk of being detained by ICE. There is Signal group where TWU is informed by a community member if they think there is an ICE presence. A rapid response volunteers will go out to the reported location and determine if it is ICE or APD, or something else. If ICE presence is confirmed, TWU can take additional steps to make sure the family has resources and to help them find an attorney and locate where their loved ones have been taken.

Commissioners asked how many times, or how often, there has been an ICE presence in Alexandria, where ICE is showing up, and whether ICE is showing up in any of the areas that used to be considered protected areas, like churches and schools. Ms. Carballo said they have not really seen an ICE presence in protected areas. The Commission asked if she had any sense of how many ICE raids have happened in Alexandria. She said she does not know. Acting Director McClure stated that she had talked to the person in charge of the immigration work at the Legal Aid Justice Center, Rohmah Javed. Ms. Javed said that they have not really seen enforcement at sensitive locations, but they have seen ICE shows up at apartment complexes with a warrant for one person and then detaining many more people, especially if people are out in common areas or outside. Ms. Javed also reported that ICE is being more strategic about waiting outside probation and parole offices and courthouses than they have been previously.

Chair Thompson said the Executive Committee wants to host a community “Know Your Rights” training at the May meeting. The Executive Committee will be work on flyers and the Office of Human Rights will provide “Know Your Rights” cards. Acting Director McClure said cannot share the cards yet, because right now they are only being distributed to City Departments. Chair Thompson said he will send a link for red cards and will print and have them available at the next meeting. Chair Thompson said it will be open to the public and he wants to demonstrate the differences between local police officers and ICE agents. In addition, there would be information on the parameters there are on what ICE agents can and cannot do. He suggested holding the meeting in the West End, to make it accessible, and having a way to join on Zoom.

The Commission asked how TWU is limited by the funding they have available and what they

could do with more. Ms. Carballo said that they received funding of \$20,000, which is not enough to hire a full-time person. She added that, outside of immigration, they are doing budget advocacy in housing, and it would help to be able to hire an additional person. Regarding standby guardianship, the Legal Aid Justice Center has been a great support to TWU.

Commissioners also asked if TWU has a plan or are working on a partnership for the possibility of children being left alone, who do not have guardians assigned, and if they are able to refer people to get legal help. Ms. Carballo stated she is not sure about having a plan for minors with no guardian. She said they are focusing on making sure that community members have the standby guardianship designated, but there is only so much that they can do.

Commissioners asked about the meeting with the Police Chief. Ms. Carballo said they wanted to be sure APD is not cooperating with ICE; they are also planning to meet with the Sheriff. The Commission asked if there is a number to call if they think someone needs help. Ms. Carballo said there are yellow cards with a rapid response hotline number. Acting Director McClure stated that Legal Aid Justice Center is directing people to call this hotline, which is for the entire state, so that hotline volunteers can determine which organization to refer the caller to for help.

#### **4. Executive Committee**

##### Letter to City Council Regarding the DEI Discussion

Chair Thompson stated that he spoke with several members of City Council, and one of the topics raised was that they would like more updates on what the Commission is doing. Chair Thompson said that every time they have a guest speaker at the Commission meeting, he wants to send City Council an update about what was discussed and what possible recommendations the Commission would like to make. He asked if anyone had any edits to the draft letter about the DEI discussion at the February meeting that was circulated by Acting Director McClure. He noted that he included Dr. Christopher's point that "DEI" is a politically charged term right now, and encouraging the use different phrases or even just saying the words diversity and inclusion. He also mentioned a review of current City programs that might be vulnerable to a court challenge. He wants to make sure that the City has a backup plan to help them retain some of the programs and initiatives of City Council. Vice Chair Bendick stated that it would be a good idea to refer to what the ACLU talked to them about, which is universal due process.

##### CPRB Ordinance Update

Chair Thompson reported that City Council is in favor of the Commission having a liaison on the CPRB. He said what is uncertain is their stance on investigative powers. He said it sounds like there is an even split with one member still undecided. He does not know who. He thinks the Commission has done enough advocacy and Council knows the Commission's position.

##### May Meeting

Chair Thompson said he wants the Commission to get creative about how to find a way to do a "Know Your Rights" program while also keeping folks safe. He is hoping to have red cards and flyers printed by the next meeting, and to work with third parties who are already doing this kind of training. Acting Director McClure said that the Legal Aid Justice Center is willing to come

and do a training and speak with the Commission.

Chair Thompson said the Mayor will be coming to the April meeting and he would like to send her questions about two weeks before. He asked commissioners to submit questions to him.

## **5. Old Business & New Business**

### **Commission Goals**

Chair Thompson stated that the Executive Committee discussed goals that the Commission wants to focus on, including immigration, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and police/civilian issues. Chair Thompson asked if anyone had more ideas.

Commissioner Brunner says that the Commission should be looking into ICE and its activities but has the most strength when their actions are grounded in the Human Rights Ordinance. She is skeptical of diversity and inclusion because the City has an equity officer and that equity is a whole field with experts, which Commissioners are not. Chair Thompson said h wants to narrow the goals down to what ordinance gives them the authority to do. Chair Thompson said that he and Acting Director McClure will organize the list of the Commission's main goals and will send out a list of possible questions to ask the Mayor.

## **6. Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Prince reported that the ACPD had someone from the Fire Department discuss helping people with disabilities and mobility impairments during an emergency. AFD has a new device called the "STRYKER Chair" to help people with mobility aids to get down flights of stairs. Additionally, they talked about restructuring strategic initiatives because of turnover in leadership. They are soliciting applications for the Bertier Scholarship and nominations for the Collins award, both due by April 30, 2025. Acting Director McClure will share the link for the application and nomination forms.

Commissioner Reeder reported that the Commission on Aging is focusing on SNAP and Medicaid benefits and working with the City on getting the word out, especially for seniors. They are also working on the age-friendly plan, focusing on affordable assisted living and meeting with developers to encourage them provide discounted assisted living units. Finally, they are soliciting nominations four awards, which are due April 2, 2025.

## **7. Public Comment**

Members of the public gave comments regarding Gaza and suggested having the public comment section at the beginning of the agenda. They also thanked Commissioner Prince for introducing the letter of divestment and thanked the members of the Commission who voted in favor of it. They encouraged Commissioners to attend public hearings and encourage City Council to take up the issue.

## **8. Announcements/Adjournment**

**MOTION:** Adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Schwartz/Vice Chair Bendick **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 p.m.