

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2022
7:00 p.m.
VIRTUAL (Zoom)

Members Present

Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair
Michelle Cho
Janeka Cogdell
Kevin Edwards, Vice Chair
Lynette Foster
Matt Harris, Chair
Susan Kellom
Elizabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson
David Rigsby

Staff Present

Jean Keller, Director
David Miller, Investigator
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support
Patricia Ruble, Investigator

Members Excused

Danielle Beach
Chris Harris
Scott Schwartz

Guests

Hon. Mark Levine

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Harris

Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 7:10p.m. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of December Minutes

Upon a motion by Commissioner Rigsby, seconded by Vice Chair Edwards, the Commission approved the minutes of the December meeting. All Commissioners present voted aye.

3. Guest: Hon. Mark Levine

Chair Harris welcomed and introduced Hon. Mark Levine and said that he was here to discuss voting rights in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Mr. Levine began by talking about what is happening in the United State Senate right now with regards to voting rights. He mentioned a very important bill that will do a lot of great things from ending Gerrymandering nationwide to protecting voting rights. He said that this voting rights bill is going through Congress, and it has passed the House, but said that he expects the bill to die today, not for lack of votes, but because two democratic members will join all fifty republicans in not voting to change filibuster rules.

Mr. Levine expressed that he is extremely worried about our democracy at the federal level. He also talked about two bills that might squeak through the Senate; one is the Voting Rights Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act; the other one is an electoral college bill, which protects the counting of the electoral votes.

Mr. Levine stated that a lot of good was done in Virginia in 2020 and 2021 and talked about all of his voting rights bills that became law. He said that a lot of the things that were done were transforming in term of Virginia Voting Rights, which took Virginia from being one of the worst in the nation to being the top third State. He also stated that voting early has been a tremendous change in Virginia. He mentioned another bill that passed, which was that a picture ID is not required for voting, people can use a utility bill. He also mentioned that voting on Sunday was also passed and said that "souls to the polls"

is alive as it should be. He said the many States are doing their best from keeping people from voting on Sunday. He also mentioned another of his voting law, which ends the tie; so, this bill says that they can have another election and he also stated that they did voting laws with regards to redistricting.

He also talked about automatic restoration of voting rights for felons and said this bill passed the House and the Senate, but that it has to pass the House and the Senate again this year in order to go to the voters in 2022 and become part of our constitution. He said that he is confident that it will pass the House, but not so sure that it will pass the Senate. He explained what is going to happen and said that this bill will go to the constitution amendment subcommittee, and he thinks that it will die there, but that doesn't mean it is dead, it can be brought up through the change of the rules and what this will do is it will force the Republicans who claim to support voting rights to cast a vote for it or against it. Mr. Levine also mentioned the voter verify paper ballot bill.

Mr. Levine addressed questions by Commissioners regarding if precincts are equally funded in all of the jurisdictions and said that, that it is up to the localities. He also addressed a question about the action in which some states are taking to make the state officials who certify elections results bipartisan officials and other ways that the systems can be tweaked to perhaps even reverse a result that comes out the way the Governor of the state does not support and whether this is something that we have to be concern of in Virginia. He stated that he is less worried about is what is happening in a number of other states where people vote for someone for the President of the United States and legislator does not like that, he said that this will require a bill and there is not such law in Virginia. He stated that he is a little concerned about overall counting and explained the way the electoral boards are appointed in Virginia. He said that for last eight years every single electoral board in Virginia has had two Democrats and a Republican; this has switched, there will be two Republicans and a Democrat. He said that the vast majority of the time he has found local electoral board to be very fair and who just want to get the votes counted and because there is paper record, it is hard to cheat, so he does not predict a lot of votes counting issues. He also addressed a question about Sunday voting, since it was left up to each area as to whether or not they would have Sunday voting when Virginia passed the bill for Sunday voting.

Chair Harris thanked Hon. Mark Levine for his presentation. Hon. Mark Levine thanked the Commission for the invitation.

4. Recognizing Patricia Ruble, Attorney/Investigator, on her Retirement!

Chair Harris recognized Investigator Patricia Ruble and said that she has been in the Human Rights Office since 2002 and announced that she has decided to retire. Investigator Ruble highlighted some of the work that she has done and also shared some of her memories with the Commission and thanked them for the work that they do.

5. Executive Committee /Upcoming Meetings

Chair Harris stated that the Executive Committee met last Monday and said that Acting Police Chief Don Hayes will be the guest at the February Commission meeting. Director Kelleher asked Commissioners to submit their questions in advanced for Acting Police Chief Don Hayes.

Vice Chair Brunner stated that she will follow up in late January with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice to see if they can come speak about the pre-trial risk assessment instrument issue at the March Commission meeting.

Chair Harris stated that the Executive Committee has requested an update from the Alexandria Health Department related to the outreach that they did last year to reach underserved communities that might be resistant on getting the Covid vaccine and also how the equity is in terms of getting folks tested. Director Kelleher will reach out to the Health Department and ask if they come to speak at the April Commission meeting.

Chair Harris stated that there are currently two vacancies on the Commission: one is a liaison from Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities and the other one is a liaison from the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board. Director Kelleher stated that the ACPD is planning to fill their liaison position and both of those position have been listed by the Clerk Office.

Vice Chair Edwards announced that March will be his last month with the Commission because he is moving to Charlotte, North Carolina.

6. Old and New Business

Alexandria's Community Remembrance Project

Director Kelleher stated that things are still moving a long and that the EJI representatives have endorse everything that Alexandria is doing. She added that they are going to launch an essay contest for youth, and this will part of the activities for 2022.

Rainbow Crosswalk letter

Director Kelleher stated that because we have brand new City Manager, she expects that something will move on in the Spring regarding the rainbow crosswalk.

Director Kelleher also stated that she had shared the research that Namood Khan had conducted on 5G and said that this issue is definitely something important to keep an eye on, because of its effect on low income and the elderly population. Vice Chair Brunner stated that she is recusing herself from all the discussions on 5G matters.

7. Liaison Reports

Commissioner Palmer Johnson reported that the Commission for Women their guest speakers were Josh Baker and Martin Barna of the DASH Board. She said that they gave interesting statistics and said that 100% DASH is free and reported that in January ridership was 47% of pre-covid. She said that she asked for gender statics of their employees, but they did not have that information with them, but said that out of the 200 males, 52 are females. Commissioner Palmer Johnson also announced that March will be Women History Month and they are going to be planning some activities. She added that February 2nd is Advocacy Day and they will be looking at the various bills that affect domestic abuse and sexual assault and the meeting will be between 8am and 2 p.m.

Commissioner Foster reported that Sarah Taylor was their guest speaker at the Commission on Aging meeting. Ms. Taylor said that she will be in Richmond and one thing that she said is that she will be seeing the same problem through a different lens, which are going to be voter access and equity and

equality. Commissioner Foster stated that the other thing that they discussed was the 3G, 5g lifeline and how it will affect the elderly community.

8. Announcements /Adjournment

MOTION: adjourn the meeting.

Palmer Johnson/Foster **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:43p.m.