

**WASHINGTON STATE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 27, 2020 AT 9:30AM
CONFERENCE CALL**

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners: Deborah Cook, Skylee Sahlstrom, Guadalupe Gamboa and David Hackney.

Staff: Sharon Ortiz, Executive Director; Cheryl Strobert, Deputy Director; Sharon James, Assistant Attorney General; Laura Lindstrand, Policy Analyst; Jerry Lee, Operations Manager; Ana Sepulveda, Customer Service Specialist 2; Cindy Gresham, Public; and Deborah Gonzales, Commission Clerk.

OPENING AND WELCOME

Chair Cook chaired the meeting and called the meeting to order at 9:36A.M.

MEETING MINUTES

The July 23, 2020 Minutes were reviewed and approved.

Commissioner Sahlstrom motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Hackney seconded the motion.

CASE CLOSURES

Cases that required corrections prior to the meeting:

Merkley, Maria v. Fibre Federal Credit Union

Cases pulled prior to the meeting for additional review:

Sym, Grayla v. Renter's Warehouse

Herrera, Silvestre v. Jones Produce, Inc.

Rodriguez, Yolanda v. Jones Produce, Inc.

Commissioner Sahlstrom motioned to approve the cases for closure. Commissioner Gamboa seconded the motion and the motion was carried.

COMMISSIONER REPORTING

Commissioner Hackney prepared the Black Lives Matter Proclamation and will be distributing it to everyone for review.

Commissioner Gamboa discussed the need for spreading awareness of the impacts of COVID-19 on the farm worker community in Washington. He had previously worked with Senator Rebecca Saldaña and Rosalina Guillen on a letter illustrating what the State should do to help protect the health of farmworkers. The letter was submitted to the Seattle Times, but was rejected. Then it was picked up by the Everett Herald for publication.

He and Director Ortiz called a meeting with the Director of Labor & Industries regarding the enforcement of the emergency regulations that were enacted in June 2020. The main focus was regarding Gebbers Farms which is a large farm in Okanogan County. The population is around 44,000 in the county, and the COVID-19 reported cases were increasing drastically due to agriculture. The farm was not adhering to the regulations issued by the State, and as a result three farm workers had been diagnosed with COVID-19 and died. Two of which died in the labor camps without medical attention, and were not distanced from others.

There have been several of the farmworker Latino advocacy groups that placed pressure on the State to take action. The State had since then put more effort into enforcement, and the Governor has mandated that everyone in that county to wear masks.

Commissioner Sahlstrom wanted to commend Civil Rights Investigator Rebecca Moore and Civil Rights Specialist Christina Higgins for the detail provided in their work.

Director Ortiz wanted to also commend Deputy Director Cheryl Strobert and the administrative staff for their efforts during these unprecedented times.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Director Ortiz provided her report to the Commissioners prior to the meeting. In regards to the issues surrounding Gebbers Farms, she is communicating closely with the Civil Rights Unit at the Attorney General's Office. She is working with the unit to decide how best to approach the situation.

She also notified Commissioners that the agency is experiencing a high volume of calls that are related to COVID-19 and mask wearing. The agency is currently working on developing a new phone tree that will help ease the amount of calls, and direct callers to the appropriate party.

AAG UPDATE

Assistant Attorney General Sharon James provided an update from the Civil Rights Unit. In the Harmon case, that is on appeal, there is a case scheduling order in Thurston County at Superior Court. They have a briefing scheduled and hearing is set for April 2, 2021.

2020 COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE

September 24, 2020 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
October 22, 2020 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
November 2020:	TBD
December 2020:	TBD

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:01A.M.

Respectfully submitted by,
Deborah Gonzales