

**WASHINGTON STATE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
JULY 23, 2020 AT 9:30AM
CONFERENCE CALL**

ATTENDANCE

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

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

OPENING AND WELCOME

Chair Cook chaired the meeting and called the meeting to order at 9:35A.M.

MEETING MINUTES

The June 25, 2020 Minutes were reviewed and approved.

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

CASE CLOSURES

No cases submitted this month were pulled by the Director.

Commissioner Sahlstrom had concerns regarding two cases, but was unable to initially identify either of the two cases by name, but her concerns were not enough to prevent the cases from being closed, however, she did want to address some concerns. She later identified the two cases as follows:

Astudillo, Ivan v. Congdon Packing Co
Poorman, Cheri v. Tri City Orthopedics – request for a technical assistance letter to be sent to the Respondent.

She requested that the Commission consider sending a technical assistance letter to the Respondent for the Poorman case, and the Astudillo case be reviewed for some of the language contained in the memorandum.

Executive Director Ortiz recommended that after the cases in question are reviewed, the cases could be subject to being administratively reopened if needed. Chair Cook agreed.

Commissioner Sahlstrom made a motion to approve the cases for closure subject to the considerations noted above. Commissioner Hackney seconded the motion and the motion was carried.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Executive Director Ortiz, Deputy Director Cheryl Strobert, and Diann Lewallen (DES) met with the Governor's Office to discuss the need for hiring additional investigators. It was recommended that the Agency apply for a Hiring Freeze Exemption, to which it did. The exemption was approved and the Agency is now able to hire more investigators. All employees have also taken four furlough days to date, and monthly furlough days are to follow.

Through the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant, the agency was able to outsource a contract with the Northwest Fair Housing Alliance to produce professional-looking Fair Housing Brochures. Executive Director Ortiz is also working on additional funding from HUD from the CARES Act to hire two additional investigators.

Policy Analyst Laura Lindstrand spoke about being inundated with questions from employers and businesses regarding COVID-19 and masks related issues. For example, some are asking for guidance on what to do when an employee cannot wear a mask at work due to a reasonable accommodation request. Policy Analyst Lindstrand is to attend a training held by the National Employment Lawyers Institute to obtain some additional information about how to address these questions. Employees are struggling on how to meet with the ADA requirements, while at the same time maintaining a safe work environment for everyone.

COMMISSIONER REPORTING

Chair Cook participated in the ADA's 30th Anniversary Celebration which was hosted by the State. The event will be aired on TVW on Monday, July 27th. It was facilitated by Mark Adrian from the Department of Services of the Blind. Chair Cook was a panelist that discussed her perspectives on the ADA, and also shared information about the services and challenges faced by the Human Rights Commission.

Commissioner Hackney will be working on the Black Lives Proclamation.

Chair Cook recommended that more virtual outreach opportunities be conducted since it cannot yet be determined how much longer large public gatherings will be prohibited. She emphasized that virtual meetings may result in more attendance than in-person meetings, and also yield positive outcomes. It is clear that public education is important, and relaying information to the public is a good demonstration of support.

AAG UPDATE

Assistant Attorney General Matt Kernutt shared that the State is currently working with the Attorney General's Office to hopefully provide clear guidelines regarding the issues surrounding mask wearing. As state agencies start preparing to have some employees back in the office, this implementation needs to have clear guidance for everyone to follow. The applicability of the Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD) for disabilities that may prevent mask wearing, is an important topic for the Department of Health, Attorney General's Office, and the Governor's Office.

The Civil Rights Unit has also been responding to complaints from tenants regarding potential violations of the Governor's Eviction Moratorium. The Governor is currently looking to extend the deadline while we are all still in this state of emergency.

2020 COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE

August 27, 2020 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
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 10:07A.M.

Respectfully submitted by,
Deborah Gonzales