

**WASHINGTON STATE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
OCTOBER 22, 2020 AT 9:30AM  
CONFERENCE CALL**

**ATTENDANCE**

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

**Staff:** Sharon Ortiz, Executive Director; Cheryl Strobert, Deputy Director; Matt Kernutt, Assistant Attorney General; 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 9:31A.M.

Chair Cook welcomed the agency's new Commissioner, James Mohr. Commissioner Mohr works at the Washington State University based in Spokane. He has done work around social justice issues. He started a LGBTQ center in Alaska and was active in other political issues as well. Commissioner Mohr is excited to be a part of this Commission.

Chair Cook and the rest of the commissioners introduced themselves and gave a brief description of their years in service. Commission staff also introduced themselves.

**MEETING MINUTES**

The September 24, 2020 Minutes were reviewed and approved.

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

**CASE CLOSURES**

Cases pulled prior to the meeting:

Ortega Espinosa, Adriana v. Total Employment & Management

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

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

The Governor's budget is due to be released in mid-December. During a Deputy Director's call, they announced the shortfall of the budget being around \$5 billion less than originally anticipated.

Completion of the requirements for both the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) contracts have been completed. Director Ortiz thanked Deputy Director Cheryl Strobert of all her efforts.

New civil rights investigators have been hired, and will begin on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. One investigator will be assigned to the Housing Team. The remaining will be entry-level EEO investigators. Director Ortiz, Deputy Director Strobert, and OPS Manager Jerry Lee have been working on a virtual training plan. Due to COVID-19, the agency is continuing to practice safety measures, and with that has created a Safe Return to Work Plan. With the threat still imminent, it is not likely that staff will be able to return to the office regularly for the remainder of the year.

Director Ortiz has also been reviewing a reasonable cause case and is planning on sending the case to the Attorney General's office for review. The case involves a visually impaired complainant going to an employment recruiting agency to apply for work at the agency itself. Allegedly the employees at the agency sent the complainant to a place that only finds jobs for people with disabilities, and they failed to interact any further with the complainant. They allegedly claimed that their failure to engage in the interactive process with the complainant was due to the complainant not being able to use the type of software they utilized. In the respondent's response, it referenced that the complainant was "a blind, wheel-chair bound individual with multiple disabilities." The complainant does not use a wheel-chair and does not have multiple disabilities.

### **COMMISSIONER REPORTING**

The Washington Council of the Blind had an advocacy seminar on medical advocacy issues, and invited a nationally recognized attorney as well as a local health advocate to participate. They asked Chair Cook to be the Zoom Moderator. There were a number of discriminatory actions that people were describing, and Chair Cook took the opportunity to describe the mission of the Human Rights Commission and how the complaint process works.

Commissioner Gamboa participated in a call for the Coalition to end Sexual Harassment Against Farmworker Women. They were discussing reaching out to legislators about improving protections for farm worker women. It has been difficult due to COVID-19, but it remains a primary focus for the coalition.

Director Ortiz stated that the agency is not in the financial position to take any budgetary cuts and still function. She has reached out to legislators and scheduled virtual meetings with them. She encouraged all the Commissioners to reach out as well. She will be distributing information they can use to be better prepared.

### **AAG UPDATE**

The Civil Rights Division continues to handle the Human Rights Commission cases. They are also focused on Attorney General Ferguson's Election Protection Initiative. It's an internal legal team within their office coordinating their office's election protection efforts.

### **2020 COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE**

November 19, 2020:	Conference Call
December 17, 2020:	Conference Call
January 28, 2021:	TBD
February 25, 2021:	TBD

March 25, 2021:

TBD

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:09A.M.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Deborah Gonzales