

**WASHINGTON STATE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
MARCH 24, 2022 9:30AM  
CONFERENCE CALL**

**ATTENDANCE**

**Commissioners:** Deborah Cook, Guadalupe Gamboa, James Mohr, and Jeff Sbaih.

Commissioner Sbaih and Assistant Attorney General Kristen Lamson were not present during roll call, but joined the meeting shortly afterwards.

**Staff:** Sharon Ortiz, Executive Director; Cheryl Strobert, Deputy Director; Kristin Lamson, Assistant Attorney General; Colleen Melody, Assistant Attorney General; Selene Garcia, Customer Service Specialist 2; and Deborah Gonzales, Commission Clerk.

**Public:** Rebecca Faust

**OPENING AND WELCOME**

Chair Cook chaired the meeting and called the meeting to order at 9:30A.M.

**MEETING MINUTES**

The February 24, 2022 Meeting Minutes were reviewed and approved.

Commissioner Gamboa motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Mohr seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

**CASE CLOSURES**

The following case was pulled during the meeting:

Mateos Itdez, Adao Gabriel v. Capitol Hill Station Apartments

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

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

Chair Cook expressed her gratitude for Director Ortiz's 21 years of service to the Human Rights Commission and commemorated her exemplary service. She also thanked Deputy Director Strobert for her continuing to hold the role as Interim Executive Director.

Commissioner Mohr thanked Director Ortiz for her passion in civil rights, and her dedication to the agency.

Commissioner Gamboa shared touching times from when he first worked with Director Ortiz regarding farmworkers' rights. He appreciates her work and dedication with the farmworker unit and values her impact on the community.

All members of the board expressed that Director Ortiz will truly be missed.

Director Ortiz thanked everyone for their kind words. She will miss the work but is ready for retirement. In her final report to the Commissioners, Director Ortiz was happy to announce that the agency was approved to receive additional funding for six new staff members. She is hopeful that this will help in reducing the wait time for investigations to be conducted, and further reduce the backlog.

Deputy Director Strobert thanked everyone for their confidence in her to carry on the duties of the Director until one is officially appointed. She will miss working with Director Ortiz and looks forward to working with everyone else.

### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

No candidate was selected prior to Director Ortiz's retirement. Chair Cook recommended that Deputy Director Cheryl Strobert continue in her role as Interim Executive Director until the position is filled.

Commissioner Gamboa motioned for Deputy Director Cheryl Strobert to remain Interim Executive Director until the position is filled. Commissioner Sbaih seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

### **AAG UPDATE**

AAG Lamson updated the Commission with details of a housing case filed with the Human Rights Commission: Mohamed v. Elkins Distribution. In this case, the Plaintiff alleged that the Defendant failed to grant a reasonable accommodation in the form of providing prompt and adequate unit repairs. This lack of unit repairs exasperated the disabilities of the Plaintiff's minor daughter. The Civil Rights Division with the Attorney General's Office is currently litigating the case in King County Superior Court.

The Defendants moved for Summary Judgement arguing the case was filed outside the statute of limitations, since the last discriminatory act allegedly occurred in 2017, and the complaint had not been filed until December 2022 in court. The Civil Rights Division argued that this only applies to private lawsuits brought directly to court, and not to claims that originate in the Commission.

The Court agreed with the Civil Rights Division's argument, stating that a full investigation and conciliation efforts do not have to be concluded within the 3-year statute of limitation, and the Civil Rights Division had filed timely within the 30 days.

Commissioner Sbaih brought to the Commission's attention of a pending lawsuit from Olympus Spa against the Human Rights Commission. AAG Lamson and AAG Melody advised that they would be researching the matter and later update the Commission.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chair Cook moved the Public Comment action item prior to Executive Session. She explained that since it would be challenging to determine when they would officially return from Executive Session, she wanted to give present members of the public an opportunity to speak should they not be able to return at the later time.

No public comment was made.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Commission moved into Executive Session to evaluate the qualifications of two applicants for public employment for the Executive Director position pursuant to RCW 42.30.1101(g). It was anticipated that the session would last until 12:45PM and would reconvene the meeting.

Executive Session started at 10:00AM and ended at 1:00PM.

Upon returning from Executive Session, Deputy Director Strobert provided additional recruitment options for the Executive Director position through the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) by possibly hiring a professional recruiter.

Chair Cook recommended that the recruitment be extended until April 22, 2022 and allow Deputy Director Strobert to gather additional information regarding the consulting firm, or other proposals from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Sbaih entered a motion to move forward with Chair Cook's recommendation of extending the recruitment and obtaining information regarding the consulting firm. Commissioner Gamboa seconded the motion, and it was carried.

Chair Cook recommended that the candidate pool be reviewed again during the April 28, 2022 Commission Meeting. It will be during this review that it will be determined if the Commission will be moving forward with selected candidates or performing a more formal recruitment.

Commissioner Sbaih and Commissioner Gamboa were in favor of this recommendation.

### **2022 COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE**

April 28, 2022 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
May 26, 2022 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
June 23, 2022 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
July 28, 2022 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
August 25, 2022 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call

September 22, 2022 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
October 27, 2022 at 9:30AM:	Via Conference Call
November 2022:	TBD
December 2022:	TBD

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:15PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Deborah Gonzales