

Onondaga County/Syracuse Commission on Human Rights

John H. Mulroy Civic Center
11th Floor East
421 Montgomery Street
Syracuse, NY 13202
(315) 435-3565

2017 Human Rights Commission Meeting Dates

Meeting #	Date	Location	Notes
2017 - 1	January 25, 2017	200 Wyoming St. (PEACE)	
2017 - 2	February 22, 2017	716 Hawley Ave. (NE Community Center)	
2017 - 3	March 30, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	Original March 15, 2017 meeting cancelled due to weather
2017 - 4	April 26, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 5	May 24, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 6	June 21, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 7	July 26, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 8	August 30, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 9	September 27, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 10	October 25, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 11	November 15, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	
2017 - 12	December 11, 2017	518 James St. (Gifford Rm)	



Onondaga County / Syracuse
Human Rights Commission

Joanne M. Mahoney
County Executive

Onondaga County Justice Center Oversight Committee

John H. Mulroy Civic Center, Basement Suite 19
421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, New York 13202

Phone: 315.435.3565 • Free call from Jail & Jamesville Prison: 315.435.3567

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Barrie Gewanter
Executive Director

**Human Rights Commission Meeting Notes-
1/25/17 – Approved 5/24/17**

Present:

David Pasinski
Starr Guckert
Shiu-Kai Chin
Rosalie Young

Crystal Doody (on phone)
Doug Mackey
Suzette Melendez
Gabe Ramos

Leonardo Sanchez
Mary Alice Smothers
Montanette Murphy

Excused: Bruce Carter, Rabbi Dan Fellman, Rev. Bernard Alex, Francis M. Parks

Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter (Director)

Community Present: Suzie Carman

Media Present: None

Meeting Held at the Westside PEACE Inc. location as arranged by M.A. Smothers

Meeting was convened

1. Welcome & Introductions

Leo Sanchez opened the meeting welcoming everyone and started a round of introductions of commissioners and members of the public present

2. Consideration of Previous Meeting Minutes

Minutes for the 10/26/16 and 11/16/16 meetings were reviewed and approved unanimously

3. Report from Commission Chair

Leo Sanchez spoke about the Restore Opportunity Now (RON) Press Conference organized by the Human Services Leadership Council. Commissioners requested more information about the RON campaign. It was suggested that a Commission committee could request more information to consider any involvement or statement re: this campaign.

4. Updates from the Executive Director

Barrie Gewanter provided an update on the staffing situation in the HR office given Bridget Owens medical leave. Barrie requested that Commissioners choose a location for the 2/22 meeting. NE Community Center was chosen. Barrie requested Commissions choose dates for the April and May meeting. April 26 and May 24 were chosen.



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Barrie conveyed a request from County Legislator Chad Ryan for names of potential candidates for HRC from the Immigrant Refugee Community. Commissioners decided to add Khadija Abdulkadir and Harith Abdulbasit to the proposed list of potential HRC candidates discussed at the 12/2016 HRC meeting. Joyce Suslovic confirmed that Khadija was willing to serve. Montanette agreed to try to reach out to Harith. Barrie was asked to see if Monica Bacote was interested in servicing. Leo agreed to reach out to Sheiknoor Adan.

Barrie stated that she is attempting to resolve an issue with SU in relation to a contract to start receiving interns from Falk College. Barrie still has to reach out to Stacey Levon at OCC and Pam Heintz at SU

Barrie confirmed that Doug and Dave P were planning to attend the 2/7 Diversity Training, and that Crystal, Montanette and Mary Alice were planning to attend the 3/9 training. Rosalie and Starr confirmed that they were willing to serve as Bridge Builders for the March training at Jamesville Prison.

Barrie led Commissioners through signing up for work shifts at the HRC/JCOC outreach table at the MLK Community Event the next Saturday at Nottingham High School. Suzette, Joyce, Leo, David, Bruce, Mary Alice, Gabe and Suzie signed up for work shifts. Barrie distributed a list of Citizenship Naturalization ceremonies and CRB outreach tabling scheduled for 2017.

Barrie described several intake cases and suggested that Commissioners could team with Barrie on related intervention. Montanette agreed to work with her on a racial bias allegation at a Liverpool gas station and an industrial demolition company where an employee displayed a noose at a job site. Starr agreed to join Barrie in 2 situations involving allegations of disability discrimination. Starr also asked Barrie to note a report she received that Aspen Dental refuses to provide an in-person interpreter for a patient who was both deaf and blind.

Barrie mentioned the availability of a secure cloud based file sharing system that she would provide Commissioners with access too later in 2017. She stated that this system was being used by JCOC members to review case files and other confidential documents.

5. Old Business

Barrie provided an update on Commission Appointments and Term Extensions. Barrie indicated that the Mayor has sent out appointment letters for the 6 Mayoral appointees but that the county has not received any official notice of this yet. She is finding out who has been nominated as they reach out to her on their own after receiving a letter from the Mayor directly. It appears that the Mayor has selected people from the list forwarded to her by Shiu-Kai on behalf of the Commission.



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Barrie has asked the County Executive's office to request official notification from the Mayor of these new appointments.

Barrie reported that she attended the Jan 11 meeting of the Leg Public Safety where the committee unanimously approved County Executive reappointments for Shiu-Kai, Doug Mackey, Francis Parks and Joyce Suslovic. A vote of the full legislature to confirm these reappointments is expected in February. At the Committee meeting, Barrie also mentioned to the Committee that the HRC is waiting for the Legislature to bring forward their reappointment for Montanette Murphy. Legislator Ryan asked Barrie about the remaining 2 legislature appointments that have not been filled and suggested that a Commissioner from the Refugee Community be sought.

6. New Business

Doug asked Commissioners if he could attend an upcoming 2/16 meeting of New Feminists for Social Justice in his role as a commissioner. All present agreed to his request. Shiu-Kai expressed concern about President Trump initiating a 120 day ban on immigration for refugees. Joyce shared his concern and suggested that this would have a significant effect on students and their families. There was also a discussion about providing information about the path to citizenship and identifying services and classes that assist those seeking naturalization. Dave Pasinski also mentioned that a new Sanctuary Movement was starting locally.

7. Committee Breakout Sessions

Commissioners then broke into 4 groups to meet for the first time in Committee. Shiu-Kai joined the Education Committee and Suzie Carman joined the Law Enforcement-Community Relations Committee. Each Committee was asked to designate a Chair and identify issues of concern and potential projects. After approximately 25 minutes of Committee meetings, each Committee reported back to the whole Commission as follows:

Outreach Committee, who designated Doug Mackey as Committee Chair

The committee sees its role as getting the word out about who the HRC is and what it does. It wants to get this information out to the public, not just to our clients. They felt that tabling at events would be a key way to do that, for example at the State Fair, Westcott, Plowshares, Ecofest, Arts and Crafts Festival, Juneteenth. The committee urged other Commissioners to tell them of events where the Outreach Committee can organize a presence, including places outside the city. The Committee will compile a list of annual events. The Committee also wants to develop materials to catch people's that are not forms. Issues that the Committee is concerned about include the increasing vulnerability of the refugee committee

Education Committee, who designated Joyce Suslovic as Committee Chair



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Joyce is in immediate direct and constant contact with students and parents. The work of this committee is likely to overlap with advocacy. The Committee is interested in identifying how well diverse groups understand and exercise their rights and self-advocacy. The Committee wants to develop and/or deliver know your rights trainings. They also are interested in asking refugees and immigrant youth to write initial drafts of informational brochures, especially SCSD students. Barrie commented that she can provide information for know your rights trainings that she is prepared to deliver or teach others to deliver. A member of the outreach committee asked if any bi-lingual commissioners would be willing to translate materials into their own languages. Suzie Carman stated that she would be willing to translate forms and fliers. Suzie has been notified that she has been appointed to the HRC by the Mayor.

Advocacy Committee, who designated Starr Guckert as Committee Chair

The Committee has agreed to meet next Monday at 1:00 at Aurora of CNY and to invite Francis to the meeting. The Committee feels that immigration is one area of advocacy we need to focus on, especially in regards to interpretation for individuals who are limited English proficient (LEP) in medical settings.

Law Enforcement-Community Relations Committee, who designated Gabe Ramos as Committee Chair

The Committee felt that it was important to have police and youth communicate. This needs to be from the standpoint of youth. Committee members wanted to reach out to the Syracuse Chief about doing presentations at schools, then reach out to the Sheriff's Dept. to do similar presentations at schools in the county. Barrie mentioned that she does a presentation about what you need to know when interacting with police, and can share the content with the Committee. There was strong interest in connecting with the City school district to do this in City schools. Mary Alice agreed to look at what grades are included in schools. The Committee felt that it should aim to reach youth ages 10 to 15 or to start with 4th 5th graders. Gabe talked about human relations workshops he was involved in the schools in Syracuse many years ago. The work involved helping kids to working together across race and other boundaries/divisions.

8. Items for Feb. Meeting Agenda

Commissioners wanted to discuss the possibility of an HRC Facebook page. Dave Pasinski stated that he would be in Nicaragua in February.

9. Upcoming Events & Announcements



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On 2/9 at 6pm in the Atrium Building in Downtown Syracuse there will be a town hall meeting to discuss ending the occurrence of AIDS locally. Starr mentioned a film and discussion on 1/26 at 7pm at the Palace Theatre addressing the topic of Human Trafficking and its impact in CNY.

Shiu-Kai made a Motion to Adjourn the Meeting. Gabe seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.



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DRAFT - Commission June 21, 2017 Meeting Minutes
Approved 7/26/17

Present:

Steve Butler
Shiu-Kai Chin
Sanjay Chlabani
Starr Guckert
Crystal Doody
Rabbi Dan Fellman

Doug Mackey
Montanette Murphy
Suzette Melendez (phone)
Francis Parks
David Pasinski
Shelley Skellington

John Rushing
Leonardo Sanchez
Mary Alice Smothers
Gabe Ramos
Joyce Suslovic

Absent Excused: Bruce Carter Rosalie Young Jeff Tamburo
R

Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter (Director) Kelsey Leeper & Juliette Rawda (Interns)

Community Present: Mike Hungerford **Media Present:** N/A

Meeting Convened at 5:35 pm

Agenda Item 1 - Introductions:

All present introduced themselves.

Agenda Item 2 - Minutes distributed and approved.

No Minutes were available for distribution

Agenda Item 3 - Report from the 4 Committees

Advocacy Committee – Starr Guckert

Starr presented final cover letter to Commissioner of Health Dr. Indu Gupta, and the accompanying background report. This material describes the discrimination faced in medical settings by people who are LEP and people who are Deaf. Doctors offices across medical professions are refusing to provide interpreters in violation of federal law. Committee members are looking forward to meeting with Dr. Gupta to discuss how to address this problem. Barrie mentions that Dr. Gupta is willing to meet with the advocacy committee in August.

Suzette asked if this addresses this problem within the mental health field, and suggested that this is also a problem that needs to be addressed? Barrie suggested that this would be a good point to raise in the meeting with Dr. Gupta, and that it didn't have to be only advocacy committee members in the meeting. She also suggested that the HRC shouldn't have too many people to avoid overwhelming Dr. Gupta. Suzette stated she would love to come to that meeting.



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Starr mentioned a cultural breakfast that will be happening tomorrow from 9-10:30 at CirCare with a speaker about healthcare for refugees. Also, the CNY Immigration Coalition meeting is scheduled for the 29th. Barrie added that there at the last quarterly meeting there were 50-60 people from multiple counties from a variety of backgrounds. Barrie, Starr, Shelly, Crystal and Suzette plan to be there. Crystal noted that anyone is welcome to join.

Outreach Committee – Doug Mackey

The new HRC brochures were done. We did outreach at three events this month: Juneteenth, Pride, and the Duck Race- 20 workshift slots were filled.

Doug met with a group called Methodists Around the World. He was able to talk about the HRC. Doug thinks it would be good to keep track of anyone who does outreach or talks to another group about the HRC. He suggested an Excel sheet that people can fill out to keep track of this.

Barrie mentioned that interns Kelsey and Juliette will be continuing a refugee community profile project where they meet with leaders to learn about their communities challenges and needs.

Starr mentioned that we should encourage refugees to ask for interpreters when they interact within the community. Doug recalled that at the meeting he attended, there were three interpreters so it was loud. Starr reminded all that at such a meeting people that are deaf may need two interpreters.

Joyce Suslovic: Educations

Joyce has been working with students to prepare for the Regents Exams, and a lot of students are raising the issue that it's only printed in Russian, Spanish and English. Why not any other languages? Joyce mentioned that SCSD is actually trying to make the Participation in Government class that seniors must take more useful. She sees a lot of potential for the HRC to go into classrooms this fall and have an impact. She suggested that we should contact Nick Stamoulatacos (sp???) about this.

Barrie added that OnTech is holding another board meeting tomorrow night. Last month they held it on the same night as the HRC Board meeting. The next one is going to be held at the Vision Center on Salina St. Barrie pointed out that there is a copy of the announcement in everyone's packets, and that she provided some info from the internet about the laws pertaining to charter school for Education Committee members. Others can get a copy by emailing Barrie.

Mary Alice and John described the Vision Center. Both had positive things to say about it. John said that his sister interned there in the past. Doug asked if it was a religious place? Mary Alice said that they were not. She added that the building is available to rent out to anyone. Doug said he asked because some Muslims won't go into a Christian church. Mary Alice stated that it's free to everyone, and Muslims have gone in there with no problems. Barrie then read from a page in the packet about the Vision Center.



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Joyce referred to the OnTech meeting announcement in the packet and pointed to below where it says that the public is welcome it says that "if you would like to attend this meeting, please contact us". Joyce suggested that a public meeting should be a public meeting, and wondered if people would be subject to arrest if they show up without contacting OnTech first. Barrie suggested that if people show up that are not registered and are denied, then it would not really a public meeting. John suggested that he thinks it was intentional, that there is now a growing awareness of questions about this Charter school and that they may be anticipating people getting rowdy.

Mary Alice stated that what happened on the Westside this weekend was ridiculous. She described the large presence of police officers in the neighborhood during the father's day weekend. .

Joyce told the story of how a police officer pulled up as the meeting was ending. She said that he is a school resource officer and said that he had been called. He never left while we were there Barrie asked that if anyone went to the OnTech meeting, to please take notes and give her a copy.

Law Enforcement-Community Relations Committee – Gabe Ramos Chair

Mary Alice said that prior to the Westside Block party on August 17th, she is planning to do a program to talk with kids about interacting with police officers. After the presentation, youth will be marching from to the block party in Skiddy park.

Barrie mentioned that if this committee wants to meet, she can share with them information from the presentation she does about this topic. Barrie also said that the HRC will need one group to participate in the march and one group to staff the outreach table.

Crystal stated that at the last meeting, we discussed having a smaller group to discuss the relationship between the county and the HRC. We will have more info about this at the next meeting.

Agenda Item 4 - Report from the Board Chair – Leo Sanchez

Leo stated that we had our first exec committee meeting. He thought it went really well and he is looking forward to the next one. He felt that the meeting was really positive.

Doug agree that it was great, and thought it was good to have the smaller group. It helped them get more work done.

Leo state that they discussed creating a set of resources for teachers on the HRC website so that if they see they have a LGBT or a refugee student, they can get info to help them be more successful in teaching that student. Leo said that it would be good to have info from the LGBT and religious communities for this web resource. He asked Commissioners to send anything they would like to see on this site to Barrie. Barrie stated that interns will also be working on this.



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Crystal suggested that case workers, etc. might be already be doing stuff like this. Leo said it would be good to compile all of this information. Doug added that it will help if everyone is involved.

There was also a discussion of how to let teachers know once this resource is ready. Barrie stated that she has a lot of info about contacts at area schools, but it all needs to be updated. It was suggested that the HRC could send an announcement to every social studies department head. Montanette questioned whether it would just be the social studies department heads getting this info. Barrie suggested that it could be department heads and principals, but hopefully they would pass that along to the teachers in their department.

Leo said that he was speaking to Marissa Rice at the Q Center at ACR about how to help create resources to give to teachers with info about transgender youth, and how to be more compassionate and understanding in the classroom, especially at transition times. Rabbi Dan suggested that we would want to add info about disabilities as well and that this was something else interns could work on. Barrie described the civil and human rights education section that is already part of the website and this would be added to this section. Rabbi Dan suggested that it would be cool to create an app? Starr reminded all that it needs to be accessible.

Crystal mentioned that the Southern Poverty Law center has a program called Teaching Tolerance that is incredible, and they have a book that addresses many of these issues. She encouraged whoever is working on this project to look at this so we aren't reinventing something that has already been done. Rabbi Dan suggested that it would need to be a local resource that someone that has an issue could easily access.

Joyce suggested that the Education and Outreach Committees could team up on this, because things don't trickle down from dept. heads in the school system. She suggested that HRC members come in to talk to education staff at schools, we could help eliminate some of these miscommunications and let them know what the HRC is doing.

Rabbi Dan said our hope is to have a viable something up and running by mid August so the teachers can have a resource before school starts. Leo suggested that it will take a lot of work, but it will be extremely helpful. Barrie suggested that to be effective it will involve a lot of relationship building. Rabbi Dan asked the members that if they had any school contacts, please send them to Barrie and she'll build her network for who we can communicate.

Doug stated that he wanted to make sure that everyone is aware of what is happening in the Lafayette School district with the Onondaga Nation School. He said that the person who got the school principal position was not Native American, and even though they stepped down, the school board still refused to appoint a native candidate to the position. So parents pulled their students out of school early and they haven't been back. Laura Lavine, a mayoral candidate, is the Superintendent of that school board.



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Mary Alice informed the board that there is a meeting tomorrow night with the mayor, city council, and joint school construction board about potentially shutting down Blodgett school on the West Side.

Rabbi Dan pointed out that the discussion was off the agenda. Leo asked everyone to look at the new brochure. Everyone was in agreement that it looks good. Then Leo asked everyone to look at the draft HRC policy regarding public comment at meetings

David suggested that it might be problematic where it talked about who will be responding to various issues. Leo stated that he hoped that whoever is the chair of the committee that deals with that particular issue would respond. Doug asked if we're already ready to respond, why is there a need to wait until the next meeting? Barrie suggested an edit to move the "Committee is not obligated..." sentence to in front of "the commission shall decide if" Sentence. There was consensus in support of this.

Barrie discussed the research she did prior to the creation of this draft and then presented this to the exec committee. She stated that this was how they came up with this draft.

Montannete asked if we were bound by any laws regarding public comment periods. Barrie said "Yes and no." She explained that there is no law that says the board has to respond to public comment, but if you have already made a meeting open to public comment, you can't then just shut it down. You can regulate it, but it has to stay open. Similar to a protest.

Starr suggested that if someone from the community brought an issue we aren't currently working on, then it should be given to whoever is closest to dealing with this issue. Barrie clarified that Starr was referring to Item five in the draft policy.

Dan asked Sanjay for an informal legal opinion on the adequacy of the policy draft. Sanjay responded positively. Barrie pointed out that the sign-in sheet now asked people to indicate if they wish to make a public comment about a particular topic, and that this would allow the HRC to make sure that it can limit anything that isn't related to the work of the board (such as a personal issue).

Crystal made a motion to vote on the policy as amended. Starr seconded the motion. .
All voted in favor.

Montanette expressed a concern about privacy if someone wanted to make a public comment about a personal issue. Barrie suggested that we get few members of the public at meetings, and that the sign in sheet would give her an opportunity to talk to them and see what they want to address as she gives them a copy of the agenda.

Agenda Item 5. Report from the Executive Director—Barrie Gewanter



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Barrie stated that she has not finished the re-write of the letter to the legislature about the HRC's proposals to amend the county Fair Practices Law. She plans to complete this in July.

Barrie will be on vacation in late June and early July.

Barrie mentioned that Crystal attended the last diversity training, stated the dates for the upcoming meetings and asked if anyone want to attend. None at this time.

Barrie related that she volunteered at the Duck Race to End Racism on the morning that there was to be a so-called Anti-Sharia march downtown. There was an alternative march that started at the Grace Episocal church. From what she gathered, about 8 Act for America protesters were there plus some people from a local "militia." On the other side of the street was an anti-fascist group in all black with masks, and other counter protestors, but they didn't have permits, so the police let them protest on the opposite sidewalk. The groups yelled at each other for two hours.

Barrie thanked everyone who showed up to staff our outreach table at the Duck Race event, and said that we will probably do that again next year. She and intern Kelsey Leeper also attended/worked the World Refugee Day event and got a thank you from Interfaith Works. That organization is having a Spirit of America campaign starting in July to promote the idea that America is multi- racial/ethnic/lingual/etc. and selling related lawn signs. As part of the campaign the HRC could have a refugee speak with the board at its July meeting.

Barrie described 2 significant new intakes. In one a young man (under 30) was denied a job at a call center because of testing positive for marijuana, but he has a NYS issued medical marijuana card. He is going to petition their corporate HR Department and may get legal assistance.

The second intake was a man who is homeless who was holding a sign on the off-ramp stating "attitudes are contagious, make your's count". He was not soliciting money, but was arrested and doesn't understand why this occurred. There has been a recent news article that police are monitoring panhandlers, but recognizes that this is protected first amendment speech. The police asked public not to give the panhandlers money. Barrie included a one-pager in the packets with stats about the local homeless population between 2015-2016.

Barrie pointed to the new wallet cards and What to Do if Stopped by Police brochures provided by the Syracuse CRB. She urged members to take more if they would like to distribute them.

Barrie also pointed out a document in the packets provided by David Pasinski about the Sikh community and the discrimination they have faced since 9-11. Barrie pointed out that there is a Sikh community here in Syracuse and they are often mistaken as Muslim. Dave stated that he has a contact in this community and will send the info to Barrie. She pointed out that Sikh's are not refugees, but they are immigrants and we should learn more about them



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Sanjay pointed out that there was a shooting a couple years ago in another state at a Sikh temple, and that there was recently a vigil held at the local temple.

Barrie also mentioned who did work shifts at Pride and Juneteenth. The next event is the ADA march on July 26th that starts and ends at city hall at around 11am. Crystal and Leo, Gabe, Shelly, and Rabbi Dan said they will go to ADA event.

Barrie said that we need people to work the Westside Block Party in August. Mary Alice promised to send the application to Barrie for tabling. Barrie also mentioned the proposed event at the Everson, and that some of the board have agreed to play roles in getting that event to happen. Barrie said that she didn't know the date for the event at this time, but would be provide more info when she got details.

Barrie stated that there was an OnTech meeting in May and briefly described the problems that were reported to her by Joyce and an intern. The next OnTech meeting is tomorrow at 5pm.

Agenda Item 6 - Old Business

Barrie stated that Montanette was reappointed and that Khadijo was approved by the Public Safety Committee and will be voted on at the 7/5 legislature meeting. Barrie will arrange for her to be oriented to the board. There is still one open position. The Public Safety committee members stated that they were happy that our most recent appointment is under 30 and from the refugee community.

Barrie said that the Chair's response to Ms. Eagan was finalized by the Exec. Committee and is waiting for review in the CE's office. A copy of this response was in the packets

Shiu Kai reminded everyone to be clear when speaking as a Commissioner about who they are speaking "for"

Suzette mentioned that she had attended an event at the Islamic center

Montanette suggested that Commissioners should try to attend the mayoral forums, and said that it is a good opportunity to get a pulse of the community .

**Leo suggested that the meeting be adjourned and move into Committee meetings.
Shiu Kai made this motion. Doug seconded.**

The meeting concluded and Committees held separate meetings in the same room.



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Present:

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David Pasinski	Crystal Doody	Rosalie Young
Starr Guckert	Jeffrey Tamburo	Mary Alice Smothers
Montanette Murphy	Suzette Melendez	Steve Butler
Shelley Skellington	Crystal Doody	Khadijo Abdulkadir
Rosalie Young	Bruce Carter	Montanette Murphy (on phone)

Excused: Shelley Skellington, Doug Mackey, Shiu Kai Chin

Absent: Gabe Ramos Rev. Bernard Alex Suzie Carman

Staff Present: Barrie Gewanter (Director), Kesley Leeper & Juliette Rawda (Interns)

Community Present: Lauren Rosenstein (Social Worker) Gwendolyn Muok (NAACP)

Media Present: None

Meeting was convened at 5:45

1. Introductions of Commissioners & Visitors

Khadijo was welcomed as a new Human Rights Commissioner. She introduced herself as the founder of the New American Women's Empowerment group. She mentioned that the NAWA has a new center where they offer tutoring and classes in English and to help prepare for Citizenship. She identified herself as a Black Muslim Female, and would like to focus her work with the Commission on the needs of refugees and how they are discriminated against. However she agrees with the other top priorities identified by new Commissioners in 2016, and is open to working with the other committees. She looks forward to learning more.

Other members of the Commission introduced themselves. Two Members of the public identified themselves. Lauren Rosenstein is a social worker at Circare and is interested in serving on the Commission. She mentioned that she had sent her resume to Barrie by email. Barrie said she would send it to the Commissioners. Gwendolyn Muok stated that she was present on behalf of the NAACP.

2. Minutes from June 2017 Meeting distributed and approved.

Crystal made a motion to approve the draft minutes of the June 21, 2017 meeting, Joyce seconded the motion. Crystal amended the motion to update the draft minutes to mark as excused 2 people who were not present. Starr seconded this motion which was approved unanimously. Minutes were approved unanimously as amended

3. Reports from Committees:



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Advocacy Committee – Starr Guckert Chair

Starr notified the body that the letter and report to Dr. Gupta was revised by the Committee and delivered. She said that she hopes to arrange a meeting with Dr. Gupta next month. Starr mentioned that today was the 27th Anniversary of the ADA and thanked the Commissioners who marched in the annual ADA Day Demonstration in Syracuse. She also mentioned a DOJ briefing document she just read that put on hold a number of regulatory changes that would have “made the world more accessible.” She said that this included accessibility features of the current administration’s websites.

Outreach Committee– Doug Mackey Chair

Doug had no current updates from the committee.

Barrie notified the Commissioners that she and Doug have signed up for a booth at the Westcott Street Fair that will take place on September 17th. Barrie said that she will not be available to set up the tent or materials, so she asked that a few members of the board volunteer to do so for her because she will not make it back to Syracuse from a trip in time. The event goes from 11am to about 6:30pm. Barrie mentioned that anyone in Syracuse that has any interest in human rights tends to show up for the event, and emphasized the importance of the presence of the HRC. Doug signed up. John, Suzette, and Crystal mention that they might be able to attend but have to check their schedules. Barrie will provide a work shift sign up sheet for the event at the next meeting.

Mary Alice notified Commissioners of another upcoming event, the West Side Block Party on Aug. 17th: She said that the HRC tent can be set up around noon, and that the event ends around 5pm. Barrie created a quick signup sheet for volunteer work shifts and passed it around for sign ups.

Steve Butler said that the Everson Curator had not gotten back to them for their August event. No date had been set up yet due to this lack of response.

Education Committee– Joyce Suslovic Chair

Joyce passed out a brief report recalling the Committee’s support of the New American Women’s Empowerment Group in a successful community speak out event on April 23rd at the N. Side learning Center in regards to the OnTech Charter school.

Barrie noted that there is a write up in the Commissioners packets based on Joyce’s notes from the 7/19 OnTech Board meeting. Joyce indicated that Bob Gardino is referred to in these notes, and it was Ed McLaughlin who was there instead. After attending that meeting Joyce had a few major concerns:

- Khadijo attended the meeting at the Vision center in June. It seemed to Joyce as though OnTech is making it seem as if the meetings are elusive and hard to locate. One of the people who attended the meeting asked if the meeting could be brought to the North Side to a neutral location. The July meeting was held at the N. Side Learning Center.



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- Parents came to the meeting to find out may be happening with their children, but there were no interpreters available for them. In June Khadijo asked that interpreters be present at the next meeting. Ellen Eagan says that people are welcome to ask for translators as long as it is within 24 hours in advance. Khadijo had a woman from the NAWC Center request a Somali interpreter. In response, Eagan brought a Liberian as the Somali "translator". He spoke only English. When asked about this, Joyce said Eagan stated that she had called the CYO and they could not help. Joyce said she was disturbed by the ignorance of the Board members as to how to arrange for an interpreter, and said refugee community members are unable to attend because they cannot understand what is occurring within the meeting due to language barriers. Khadijo said that people walked out of the July meeting because there was no interpreter.
- Joyce said that the announcement of the July meeting was posted only 3 days prior to the meeting date. This is not enough advance warning. The announcement said to call if you need an interpreter.

Barrie stated that CYO is not a place to locate interpreters, and wondered why Eagan seemed unaware of how to accommodate to those who don't speak English. John expressed his concern that if this Charter School is aimed at refugees then why does the administrator seem to have no idea how to communicate with them effectively.

Joyce said that an ESL teacher in the audience brought up the new state regulations for ESL. Eagan's answer was they would look into it and mentioned IEP's and used the term "SPED" to refer to special education although this term has not been used since the 1960's. Joyce was disturbed that the question was about ESL and the answer involved special education. These are two very different areas of educational focus.

Suzette asked for clarification regarding the mention of Matt Johnson in the notes about Joyce's experience at the meeting. Joyce explained that Matt is a junior high school student at ESM and involved in Tillie's Touch, a soccer organization for refugee youth. It provides supportive programs and free materials related to education. Joyce said Matt is the President of his High School class and was concerned about how refugees would be recruited for this school. He asked that refugee kids would be taking home forms that are in English, which the parents won't be able to read. Joyce said OnTech Board members came back at Matt and claimed that parents are very capable of figuring it out and can understand English. Joyce said that 8th graders are not in a position to choose their own high school, yet many times refugee kids end up signing their own paperwork. Matt asked what process would be in place so that kids would not sign papers to determine their future without the ability to fully understand. Joyce suspects that case workers could funnel newly arrived immigrants to OnTech. Khadijo stated that Eagan apologized for not having an interpreter at the meeting. Khadijo said she suspects that CYO and Interfaith Works may recruit students for OnTech.

Starr asked if there was anything indicating whether or not children with disabilities would be provided with accommodations. Crystal noted that IEP's were mentioned so there is a possibility. Joyce recalled that when Steve Kimatian came to a HRC board meeting he said that



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they were not recruiting refugees, but “at-risk students,” but she wanted to know the meaning behind this term

Bruce suggested that there was a potential for the Committee to meet with Michael Melara from Catholic Charities and Beth Broadway from Interfaith Works to share the Committee’s observations and ask them why they were supporting this Charter School. Bruce described the actions of the OnTech Board as a type of “colonialism” and questioned whether they were even aware of the implications of their own actions. He further suggested that inaction is complicity and suggested that the HR Commissioners use their contacts to ask if community leaders are aware of what is going on. He pointed out that the HRC is not doing an investigation as suggested by Steve Kimatian, but that may be called for in future.

Law Enforcement-Community Relations – Gabe Ramos Chair

Gabe was not present so Leo asked if anyone from the committee would like to share anything on his behalf. Montanette noted that at the last Committee meeting they talked about reaching out to police departments. She reached out to the Camillus Police Chief and is interested in setting up a dialogue with that department.

Mary Alice reported that she had been involved with Deputy Chief Cecile and the parks department. They redid the clubhouse in Skiddy Park, put in furniture, air conditioning, etc. however they are not willing to give community leaders a key. Mary Alice says people wanted to let children use the restroom and be within the air conditioning. The Syracuse police department says that they want the office to be “safe”. Now must request building use 2 weeks in advance but not more than that and only 10 kids can have access at a time. She asked why the neighborhood was not involved in related decisions that affect them. She also said that the Westside Initiative Board approved of placing the “Shot Spotter” system on top of the Pro-Literacy building, but there was no community outreach first. She suggested that in Boston the presence of this system gave police the ability to run up to a house. Barrie suggested that when SPD wanted to put cameras in that neighborhood, the NYCLU demanded a community meeting before the cameras were put in place. Barrie asked if the committee still wants to do presentations on how to interact with police. Mary Alice said yes. .

4. Report from Commission Chair & Co-Chair: Leo Sanchez

Leo stated that the Executive Committee met for the first time, and it was productive and helpful in focusing this meeting. He also mentioned his contact with Marissa Rice of ACR Health. He said that she offered information and hopes to collaborate with her in LGBTQ advocacy.

5. Report from the Executive Director & 6. Old Business

Barrie distributed a draft of potential links for teachers to turn to for assistance with LGBTQ students. Joyce noted that the SPLC’s Teaching Tolerance online magazine is one of the best resources and that the information might be helpful for parents as well. Rabbi Dan Fellman suggested that guidance counselors could use the information as well and suggested adding a



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page with refugee links too. Francis suggested that the resources not be limited to any grade level or only to educators, but should be useful for all spheres of community life.

Starr stated that she has spent time recently trying to estimate the % of refugees who are Deaf. Her final answer was that about 7% of the refugee population national is Deaf, and that results in about 84 individuals in Onondaga County.

Rabbi Dan Fellman stated mentioned the federal administration's announcement about barring transgender individuals from serving in the military, and wondered how we could frame this as a local concern. Barrie handed out a copy of an article about this published today

Suzette suggested that the HRC speak to local agencies that work with military vets, such as Clearpath for Veterans and the Veterans Law Clinic, and the Institute for Veterans and Military Vets at SU, ROTC at Oswego. She also said that there were a lot of Vets at University College. These agencies are more in touch with the families that may be affected by this and that the HRC can go to them to get the perspective of the individuals who may be impacted by this. The HRC can then say that the effect of this new policy is said to be XYZ, and that the HRC feels that this is compelling.

Francis said that there are Army and Air Force military science courses at SU with professors of military science. There are also men and women who have been discharged from the military that are training to start their own businesses. She also mentioned the American Legion Posts locally. Rosalie added that there are students at Oswego who are in the military that come to SU to get credits.

Rabbi Fellman asked how the HRC could frame a statement? He said that he wants the HRC to speak about this.

Bruce said that he led the charge in the SU Senate to eliminate ROTC on campus in the past because at the time the military discrimination against soldiers who were LGBT but the chancellor refused and admitted that they were not following their affirmative action guidelines in this situation. Bruce suggested that the HRC can't be passive, and that we have been. He referred to this new policy as Don't Ask Don't Tell for individuals who are transgender. He suggested it was probably a violation of Title VI, but will also prevent individuals from entering the military. He called it pro-actively discriminatory.

Starr asked about the status of Don't Ask Don't Tell. Barrie responded that the policy was over, but it was regarding sexual orientation, where this is about issue of gender identity.

Bruce added that his reading of the HRC legislation is that it is not restricted to acting locally, but is encouraged to act in a fashion that is local and advise local officials. It doesn't say that we can't act beyond local issues. He pointed out that he and Crystal and Montanette and John are on a committee that is looking at this. He suggested that the HRC can't be passive, that it needs to be active participants.



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Suzette stated that she was not saying that this was all the HRC should do, just that this is a place to start, a way to speak to how people are affected locally. Sanjay stated that he has been

struggling with the same issues, on how active the HRC can be. He suggested that the constraints are not just within the legislation, but with the politics and the makeup of local government - what to do in this political reality. He spoke to the values that are being communicated and asked how we move to address the assaults on individual dignity. He asked how we can celebrate human rights, and do programming that celebrates transgender individuals.

There was agreement all around at Sanjay's statement. Barrie followed up by asking if the HRC wanted to do a speak out of LGB and Transgender vets

Francis stated that there is a new Dean at Hendricks Chapel. There have been protests there for years. She mentioned that there is a commissioning ceremony held there for new second lieutenants. She said that she would like to challenge us to see who the progressive figures are within theological groups in Syracuse are. She suggested that we might ask this new Dean to open the doors to Hendricks and provide space for people to gather to begin conversations. Rabbi Fellman suggested that we need to go beyond the university.

Barrie stated that she didn't know what committee this would fall under. She said that she heard one suggestion is to gather the voice in the community and do something such as a press release and another suggestion is to gather people, such as military personal or those interested in the military, to celebrate their lives and contributions. She asked which idea may be preferred.

Bruce stated that if everything we do has to be cleared by the county executive's office, then this committee will never be allowed to be controversial and will never accomplish anything. If we can't take on any issues because we have to protect the Commission's future then that will equal inaction and follow only what elected officials want now. He said he thinks that the HRC should be about morality and dignity. He stated that the way the president spoke about transgender individual was abhorrent, and that it is immoral to not speak even though it may threaten the Commission's existence. We will never move forward and make change in regards to LGBT, or women or people with disabilities or people of color. If the HRC has to worry about how the County will respond when actions are morally reprehensible, then why does the HRC exist?

Barrie again asked if the Commission wants to take up either of the two ideas on the table. John and Jeff asked if the HRC did a press release, when and how would we go about gathering info for the release. Who would we interview? How would we get the content?

Leo pointed out that this is not a question that can be resolved quickly. Francis acknowledged that some of us are not assuming that this would not be resolved in a minute, after facing a lifetime of racism and oppression. She suggested that there are progressive meeting places in Syracuse, and recalled their place in a time when abolition was a divisive issue within this community. She pointed to Plymouth Church and May Memorial Unitarian Universalist Society on E. Genesee. She assured the group that there are enough people who are disturbed by the new policy.



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Bruce suggested that it would be easy to do a press release to announce the new webpage, and point to the creation of these as a way of showing the HRC's concern about local impact. Then the HRC could do a celebration event as a speak out.

Sanjay suggested that International Human Rights Day is in December and that we could aim to do something on that date, and start planning it now. He said he liked the idea of bringing vets to speak at that event. Starr asked why we had to do only one thing. Barrie responded that we don't and that this could be a start. She suggested that she could get the webpages up by the 11th. Leo asked anyone with resource links to please send them to Barrie.

Suzette said that she liked the idea of setting a press release about these resources and having an affirmative statement about how timely they are, now more than ever. She also said she liked Sanjay's idea of a celebratory event, but suggested we combine this with a space to discuss the issue.

Leo turned to describe his idea for a Youth Engagement initiative. He said that he has looked at other youth engagement programs in other places, and thought that it was something that Syracuse needs. He said that it was important to show how people are more alike than different. It would involve getting urban and suburban youth together. Barrie explained that we could gather kids from suburban and urban school districts together for Friday evening and Saturday. Each committee would have a session with the youth to focus on their area of interest. There could also be guest speakers. There would be a space for the youth to share their life realities and their dreams. Leo added that he did not want kids to think that their life stopped on their street or in their neighborhood. Jeff suggested that it would be equally valuable for suburban kids to learn about the experience of urban kids. Starr stated that she never wants to hear anyone say "she is so intelligent but what can she do because she is"

Mary Alice said that this idea is near and dear to her. She talked about how she takes kids out of the City to DC. They experience a plane, a subway, a hotel, museums, and the capitol. She said that it opens up the kids minds and worldview. She talked about the impact of the Holocaust Museum on one student. She said that this was part of Youth Leadership Greater Syracuse.

Barrie stated that the response letter to Ellen Eagen was drafted and delivered to the County Executive's office for review. She stated that the final letter to the legislature recommending amendments to the County's Fair Practices Law is in the Commissioner's packet as a 2 page letter and a background report. She reminded Commissioner that this added prohibitions on discrimination based on gender identity and expression, and based on source of income in housing.

Barrie pointed out another document in the packets about an organization called Hopeprint and the Refugee Alliance. These organizations are focused on assisting refugees after the first 90 days.



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Barrie listed the next diversity trainings. She mentions that her dept. budget goes in front of the ways and means committee in a few months and will ask for a new staff person. She mentioned that the young man who uses medical marijuana (under a doctor's care with state certification) who had been denied a job based on a positive drug test, had gotten his job back after Barrie helped him write a letter to his employer.

David mentioned that All Saints church voted overwhelmingly to offer sanctuary.

Suzette suggested that we check with the two visitors to see if they wanted to offer any public comment. All agreed.

Lauren Rosenstein stated that she went to school in Syracuse and worked at Interfaith Works. She now works with youth and families and is interested in all the topics addressed in the meeting.

Gwendolyn Muok asked what kind of collaboration the HRC was interested in with the NAACP. Barrie suggested that one possibility was working together to provide presentations on What You Need to Know When Interacting with Police. Muok said that she had been at an SCSD Hearing when the OnTech Charter had been discussed. She asked why students would be sent out of the school district and into a Charter. Joyce replied that we should be aiming for integration of refugee students, not segregation. Barrie suggested that the HRC could also collaborate on non-partisan voter education and non-partisan voter registration.

7. New Business

Item was tabled

8. Announcements

Joyce again asked Commissioners to reach out to the Superintendent and Board of the Syracuse City Schools and urge them to change Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day.

At 7:26 Leo made a Motion to Adjourn Meeting & Move into Committee Meetings. Suzette seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.