

STATE OF CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Regular Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 9, 2025
2:00 p.m.
Via Microsoft TEAMS

Commissioners Present

Nicholas Kapoor, Chairperson
Edward Mambruno, Secretary
Alex Harris
Andrew Norton
Edith Pestana
Joseph Suggs
Tamara Titre

Commissioners Absent

Lisa Giliberto

Staff Present

Tanya Hughes, Executive Director
Kimberly Jacobsen, Legal Managing Director
Michelle Dumas Keuler, Legal Managing Director
Johnette Tolliver, State Program Manager
Catherine Spain, HRO Attorney
Spencer Hill, HRO Attorney
Jase Olavarria, HRO Representative
Kellye Hudson, Executive Secretary

Cheryl Sharp, Deputy Director
Spencer Hill, HRO Attorney
Darcy Strand, Legislative Liaison
Shawn Burns, Regional Manager
Jonathan Sykes, HRO Attorney
Gary Madison, HRO Representative
Darian Pitts, Executive Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Nicholas Kapoor convened the April 9, 2025, meeting at 2:03 PM.

II. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT & ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM

Commissioner Kapoor noted the meeting was being held via Microsoft TEAMS, and establishment of quorum had been reached with six out of eight Commissioners present.

He further noted and welcomed several students from his Introduction to American Politics class and added this was an opportunity to see democracy at work. He went on to acknowledge CHRO's staff and thanked everyone for continuing to run "full steam ahead" despite what's happening in the country and the state.

*** Commissioner Harris joined the meeting at 2:05 PM.***

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Secretary Mambruno requested a motion to approve the 2025-03-12 Commission Meeting Minutes as written.

To Approve the 2025-03-12 Commission Meeting Minutes:

Motion: E. Pestana

Seconded: T. Titre

Vote:

Yes: 6 (Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

III. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS – VOTE REQUIRED

Presented by Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp.

Office of the State Treasurer

Staff representing the Office of the State Treasurer were State Treasurer Erick Russell Deputy General Counsel/Interim EEO Officer Ginny Kim, Senior Legal Counsel Jessa Mirtle, Assistant Treasurer/ Chief of Staff Andréa Comer.

This plan was recommended for approval based on compliance with the following: 46a-68-102(a) the plan does contain all elements required by Sections 46a-68-78 through 46a-94, 46a-68-102(b)(3) the agency has demonstrated every good faith effort to achieve goals and despite these efforts has been unable to do so, and 46a-68-102(b)(4) the agency has substantially addressed deficiencies noted by the Commission in prior plan reviews.

The Goal Achievement is as follows:

- Hiring Goal Achievement: 7 out of 9 or 77.8%
- Promotional Goal Achievement 0 out of 1 or 0%
- Program Goal Achievement: -- out of -- or --

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2024 Disapproved; 2022 Approved; 2020 Approved; 2018 Approved; 2017 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for The Office of the State Treasurer and to retain its Annual Filing Status:

Motion: J. Suggs

Second: E. Mambruno

Vote:

Yes: 6 (Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

Department of Revenue Services

Staff representing the Department of Revenue Services were Commissioner Mark Boughton, AAO, Equal Employment Opportunity Penny Potter.

This plan was recommended for approval based on compliance with the following: 46a-68-102(a) the plan does contain all elements required by Sections 46a-68-78 through

46a-94, 46a-68-102(b)(3), the agency has demonstrated every good faith effort to achieve goals and despite these efforts has been unable to do, 46a-68-102(b)(4), the agency had no deficiencies in the prior plan review and therefore, is in compliance with the (b)(4) standard.

The Goal Achievement is as follows:

- Hiring Goal Achievement: 24 out of 49 or 49%
- Promotional Goal Achievement: 21 out of 39 or 54%
- Program Goal Achievement: -- out of -- or --%

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2024 Approved; 2023 Approved; 2022 Approved; 2021 Approved; 2020 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for the Department of Revenue Services and to retain its Annual Filing Status:

Motion: E. Pestana

Second: A. Norton

Vote:

Yes: 6 (Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

IV. CONTRACT COMPLIANCE REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION

1. Sonitrol Security Systems of Bridgeport – Presented by HRO Attorney Jonathan Sykes

Chair Kapoor informed the Commissioners were in receipt of the two letters from the office of the Executive Director dated March 25, 2025, regarding the exemption requests.

Attorney Jonathan Sykes continued and informed the contract is between the Bridge Academy and Soundsafe d/b/a Sonitrol Security Systems of Bridgeport for approximately \$800,000. Under this agreement, the contractor installed certain security enhancements to property using funds secured through a grant from the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection. An exemption from CHRO requirements is requested on the basis that the contractor meets the criteria of Regs. Conn. State Agencies § 46a-68j-29(a)(4). The recommendation is to approve the exemption request.

To Grant the Exemption Request for Sonitrol Security Systems of Bridgeport as Outlined in the March 25, 2025, Letter from the Executive Director:

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: A. Norton

Vote:

Yes: 6 (Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

2. New England Arborist Tree Care, LLC – Presented by HRO Attorney Spencer Hill

Attorney Hill informed the contract is between the Town of Tolland and New England Arborist Tree Care, LLC. Under this agreement, the contractor will perform tree trimming and/or removal pursuant to a grant under the Town Aid Road (TAR) program. An exemption is being requested from the set aside requirements laid out in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 4a-60g(b)(3) on the basis that the contractor meets the criteria of Regs. Conn. State Agencies § 46a-68j-29(a)(4) The recommendation was to approve the exemption.

To Grant the Exemption Request for New England Arborist Tree Care, LLC as Outlined in the March 25, 2025, Letter from the Executive Director:

Motion: E. Pestana

Second: J. Suggs

Vote:

Yes: 6 (Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

V. REQU EST TO REOPEN

In the case(s) below, Commission Counsel, Respondent or their representative, and Complainant or their representative were provided five minutes to provide opening remarks. Questions and answers from commissioners followed these remarks.

1. Gregoria Hicks Villafane v. Waterbury Teachers' Association

CHRO Case No. 2430125

Presented by HRO Attorney Catherine Spain

**** Commissioner Titre recused herself from the proceedings. ****

To Deny the Request to Reopen CHRO Case No. 2430125 Gregoria Hicks Villafane v. Waterbury Teachers' Association:

Motion: J. Suggs

Second: E. Pestana

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 5 (Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs)

No: 0

Recused: 1 (Titre)

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

VI. DIVISION REPORTS

Executive Director's Report

Director Hughes informed that the agency audit continues with outreach to staff on a number of inquiries. She has asked staff to be fully compliant.

She reported meetings with the EEO representative are taking place frequently as work continues on the CHRO's Affirmative Action Plan. It was due to be submitted January 31. The agency has until the end of April to submit and is working diligently on draft revisions.

She informed the agency was adhering to the hiring freeze and spending cap by reducing expenditures and overtime significantly. However, due to staff leaving the agency, the freeze is somewhat problematic as replacements can't be hired. Staff from other regions have been recruited to assist with clerical work in the Capital Region due to the retirement of Dedra Morris.

She further reported that CHRO testified on the agency bill on March 10, before the BPRC on the Disparity Study on April 2, with plans for future presentations of our Civil Rights Unites Tour. The next venue for the tour will be in Bridgeport. She emphasized Connecticut's progressive state laws with the hope of allaying concerns people have due to the executive orders coming out of the National Office. She also reported that the agency would be testifying at the Appropriations Committee's budget deficit mitigation hearing the next day to discuss a \$500,000 proposed reduction.

In conclusion she informed that she was invited to join Senator Sujata Gadkar-Wilcox and other progressive legislators in a Legislator/Lawyer Press Conference on April 8 to speak out against the unconstitutional executive orders coming out of DC.

Outreach Report

Deputy Director Sharp informed that the agency held a successful legislative breakfast on March 19 and noted Civil Rights Unites events in Bridgeport on April 10, Norwich on April 16, and Waterbury on April 22. She also informed that KCA is in session and entreated the Commissioners to participate. She noted that four KCA students testified at the Legislature before the General Law Committee on curbside voting for individuals with disabilities. She also informed that Chief Justice, Rahim Mullins would present to KCA in May and the KCA writing competition deadline is in May. She acknowledged Commissioner Pestana for the content supplied to KCA for the current session on environmental justice.

She further reported on the housing discrimination trainings being done by the Legal Department throughout the state and Managing Attorney Kimberly Jacobsen's recognition by the Connecticut Bar Association.

She went on to report that work continues on the Civil Rights Museum. Meetings have been held with Senator Douglas McCrory and the Directors of the Artist Collective, and the efforts being made to apply for outside grants to help bring the museum to fruition. She noted her request of the Commissioners to serve on the Board of Directors and entreated them to respond. She further noted the possibility of making the museum a non-profit for the benefit of raising funding. She concluded by noting the increase in

complaint activity in the regions, specifically, the Waterbury office which has led to navigating ways to get out into the community more and ultimately help those in need.

Discussion ensued about how the Commissioners could help address the issues the agency is currently experiencing. It was noted that in the past the Commissioners have pulled together and drafted correspondence to the Legislature, and the Governor's Office to address issues of lack of resources for the CHRO.

As a result, a decision was made to draft a letter to the Appropriations Committee addressing the issues the CHRO is currently facing. Once the letter has been drafted Chair Kapoor agreed to forward it to the Commissioners for their input, approval, and addition of their names. The Commissioners agreed that their names could be added without them reviewing the letter. As a result, Chair Kapoor requested a motion to empower him to sign the letter on behalf of the Commission without individual signatories of the Commissioners in the interest of expediency.

To Authorize the Chair of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities to Draft and Sign a Letter on Behalf of the Full Commission and to send the letter to the membership of the General Assembly's Appropriation Committee in anticipation of the April 10th Deficit Mitigation Hearing:

Motion: A. Harris

Second: J. Suggs

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 5 (Harris, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 2 (Kapoor, Mambruno)

The motion carried

Legislative Update

Legislative and Administrative Advisor, Darcy Strand reported that the Bill to implement the Disparity Study Recommendations that pertain to the CHRO progressed out of Committee. She further reported that she has meetings set up with the Connecticut Construction Association, and the Minority

Construction Council to discuss the findings of the Disparity Study. Plans are being made with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to meet with CHRO and DAS. She also added that agency Bill 1442 progressed out of the Judiciary Committee on Monday.

Legal Update

Managing Legal Director Kimberly Jacobsen reported on a recent Supreme Court case in *Re I v. The Department of Children and Families*. Initially the Plaintiff filed a case with the CHRO because he felt he was being discriminated against in the termination of his parental rights based on his religion. The Plaintiff received a release of jurisdiction and the CHRO intervened in the case. The Supreme Court said that that along the decision to litigate may be the subject of the CHRO's jurisdiction, decisions made in the course of litigation are subject to the litigation privilege.

VII. ANNOUNCEMENT OF TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Commission Meeting will occur on Wednesday, May 14, 2025, at 2:00 PM. This meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams. Chair Kapoor added that the meeting would be led by Commissioner Andrew Norton.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

To Adjourn:

Motion: A. Norton

Second: J. Suggs

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 6 (Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried

The meeting adjourned 3:26 PM.