

STATE OF CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Regular Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 14, 2025
2:00 p.m.
Via Microsoft TEAMS

Commissioners Present

Edward Mambruno, Secretary
Lisa Giliberto
Alex Harris
Andrew Norton
Edith Pestana
Joseph Suggs
Tamara Titre

Commissioners Absent

Nicholas Kapoor, Chairperson

Staff Present

Tanya Hughes, Executive Director
Kimberly Jacobsen, Legal Managing Director
Michelle Dumas Keuler, Legal Managing Director
Johnette Tolliver, State Program Manager
Jody Walker-Smith, HRO Attorney
Gary Madison, HRO Representative
Laura Thurston, Assistant Attorney General

Cheryl Sharp, Deputy Director
Spencer Hill, HRO Attorney
Darcy Strand, Legislative Liaison
Shawn Burns, Regional Manager
Libby Reinish, HRO Attorney
Darian Pitts, Executive Secretary
Kellye Hudson, Executive Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Andrew Norton, sitting in for Chair Nicholas Kapoor, convened the May 14, 2025, meeting at 2:11 PM.

II. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT & ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM

Commissioner Norton noted there was no Chairperson's report and establishment of quorum was met with six out of eight Commissioners present.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Secretary Mambruno requested a motion to approve the 2025-04-09 Commission Meeting Minutes as written.

To Approve the 2025-04-09 Commission Meeting Minutes:

Motion: E. Pestana

Seconded: J. Suggs

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: 1 (Giliberto)

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

The motion carried.

IV. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS – VOTE REQUIRED

Presented by Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp.

Department of Veterans Affairs

Staff representing the Department of Veterans Affairs were Brigadier General, US Army Ret. Commissioner Ron Welch, Deputy Commissioner Joseph Danao II, Human Resource Associate-EEO Shaun Simoneau, Human Resource Business Partner 1 Bethanne Watts, Human Resource Generalist 3 Donna Zwilling.

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 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: 15 out of 42 or 36%
- Promotional Goal Achievement: No Promotional Goals were set
- Program Goal Achievement: 1 out of 1 or 100%

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2023 Approved; 2022 Approved; 2021 Disapproved (Failure to File); 2020 Disapproved; 2018 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for The Department of Veterans Affairs and to retain its Biennial Filing Status:

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: A. Harris

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

The motion carried.

Department of Social Services

Staff representing the Department of Social Services were Deputy Commissioner Easha Canada, Chief of Staff Astread Ferron-Poole, Acting EEO and Diversity Manager Anthony Spence, and Toni Aniugo, Fellow.

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: 14 out of 30 or 47%
- Promotional Goal Achievement: 6 out of 15 or 40%
- Program Goal Achievement: 2 out of 2 or 100%

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 Social Services and to retain its Annual Filing Status:

Motion: E. Pestana
Second: E. Mambruno

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

The motion carried.

Office of Health Strategy

Staff representing the Office of Health Strategy were Chief of Staff Kim Martone, and AA Officer Mario Garcia.

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: 3 out of 8 or 38%
- Promotional Goal Achievement: There were no Promotional Goals set
- Program Goal Achievement: 4 out of 4 or 100%

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

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for the Office of Health Strategy and to return to Biennial Filing Status:

Motion: J. Suggs
Second: A. Harris

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

The motion carried.

State Elections Enforcement Commission

Staff representing the State Elections Enforcement Commission were Interim Executive Director and General Counsel Clare Kindall and AAO Charla Vincent.

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: 3 out of 8 or 37.5%
- Promotional Goal Achievement: No Promotional Goals were set
- Program Goal Achievement: 4 out of 4 or 100%

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2024 Approved; 2023 Disapproved for failure to file; 2022 Approved; 2021 Approved; 2020 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for the State Elections Enforcement Commission and to return to its Biennial Filing Status:

Motion: J. Suggs

Second: A. Harris

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

The motion carried.

V. REQUEST 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. Humberto Castro-Cruz v. Community College and Board of Regents
CHRO Case Nos. 2230396 and 2230397
Presented by HRO Attorney Jody Walker-Smith

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

To Deny the Request to Reopen CHRO Case Nos. 2230396 and 2230397 Humberto Castro-Cruz v. Community College and Board of Regents:

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: L. Giliberto

Discussion: None

Vote:

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

No: 0

Recused: 1 (Titre)

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

The motion carried.

VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION

This requires a two-thirds vote of Commissioners present and voting; staff and guests invited to attend must be noted.

1. Christine Corda v. Corporation for Independent Living, et al – Housing Election
CHRO Case No. 2450093
Presented by HRO Attorney Libby Reinish

To enter Executive Session and to invite into the Executive Session the following individuals: Executive Director Tanya Hughes, Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp, Managing Attorney Michelle Dumas Keuler, Managing Attorney Kimberly Jacobsen, Attorney Libby Reinish, and Assistant Attorney General Laura Thurston.

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: A. Harris

Discussion: None

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Norton,)

The Executive Session began at 3:27 PM.

Commissioners Norton, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Pestana, Suggs and Titre returned after Executive Session at 3:46 PM.

Commissioner Norton reconvened the Commission Meeting to public session and noted that no actions or votes were taken during the Executive Session.

VII. VOTE ON EXECUTIVE SESSION ITEMS

1. Christine Corda v. Corporation for Independent Living, et al – Housing Election
CHRO case No. 2450093
Presented by HRO Attorney Libby Reinish

To file the case Christine Corda v. Independent Living, et al – Housing Election in the Judicial District of New Haven Housing Session and seek injunctive relief and punitive damages:

Motion: A. Harris
Second: L. Giliberto
Discussion: None

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: (0)

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business to discuss.

IX. DIVISION REPORTS

Executive Director's Report

Director Hughes reported that the agency has been very busy trying to meet its enforcement commitments with federal partners and continue meeting with all the partners throughout the state to include the Department of Labor, OPM, the Office of the Governor, EEO, HR, OLR, OAG, and BITS.

She further reported on the retirement of HR Director, Neil Griffin and the aid Lauren Stabile is providing the agency in the wake of his retirement pending a replacement.

She noted that the agency continues its work on auditor inquiries, the Disparity Study, and Civil Rights Unites Tour continues with visits throughout the state where the regional offices are located. The continued focus is on the message that the agency still enforces anti-discrimination laws and is open for business. She continues to meet with Federal Partners, EEOC and HUD monthly to discuss their response to some of the national executive orders. Many are reporting their staffing levels are down by 60%, leading to an influx of cases for the CHRO.

She further reported CHRO's attendance at a deficiency hearing regarding the agency's budget that resulted in some of the unfunded positions being funded. Training presentations are ongoing with the legal staff providing enhanced training sessions on a regular basis.

In conclusion she informed the Agency Wide Training Day is scheduled for June 30 and will be held at Killam's Point in Branford, CT. She invited the commissioners to join.
(*Note: the location has since changed to the Artist Collective)

Outreach Report

Deputy Director Sharp highlighted the Agency Wide Training Day and noted that there will be outside panelists coming in to talk about education, outreach and the CHRO's commitment to it. There will also be discussion about economic and community development. She informed that meetings have been held with many of the CHRO's stakeholders, particularly the Department of Housing and the Housing Finance Association.

Legislative meetings continue with discussion centered on the Disparity Study Bill. Multiple meetings are being held regarding the Civil Rights Museum. The agency will be partnering with the Artist Collective and its Board of Directors. The Civil Rights Museum has also been put on the agenda for State Bonding.

She further informed the Civil Rights Unites Tour continues and has completed four sessions, and additional presentations of the Disparity study through HBCU and Optimus Health are planned. Plans are in place to hold a Youth Summit at UConn Law School in October. Students will be hailing from across the state for this all day event.

She announced that interest and membership in KCA is growing and invited the group to spread the word about the program. The next Food and a Film is coming up in June and will showcase three months of DE & I topics. We are working in conjunction with the Department of Motor Vehicles to adjust the "Real ID" form due to adverse impact on individuals based on their national origin, making it more difficult for them to travel. She noted the lengthy written report and directed the group to review it for more outreach activities.

Legislative Update

Legislative and Administrative Advisor, Darcy Strand reported that there are approximately three weeks left of the Legislative Session and things are shaping up nicely for the agency and its proposed Bills. The major item is the Disparity Study Bill. She has been working closely with the BPRC and the Chairs of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. She noted other bills that are being worked on, specifically, one being promoted by Senator Flexer regarding non-disclosure agreements, and the bill to protect people who need gender affirming care.

She also reported that the agency is working with the BPRC to help build negotiations regarding the full implementation of the Disparity Study.

Legal Update

Managing Legal Director Kimberly Jacobsen reported on two housing cases. One of them was an Office of Public Hearing case where the complainant claimed the landlord failed to make repairs in their unit and allegedly made some discriminatory remarks to the complainant based on their sexual orientation, gender, ancestry, and national origin. As a result, the referee ordered that the respondent pay \$60,000 in emotional distress, \$8,000 for failing to make the repairs, and a cease-and-desist order.

The second housing case highlights the appellate work that is done by the CHRO. This case was an administrative appeal filed by the complainant against the agency. His complaint of age discrimination had been investigated and resulted in a no reasonable cause decision. The Complainant asked for a reconsideration but was denied. As a result, the complainant took the option of filing an administrative appeal and the Judge agreed with the CHRO's decision that there was no evidence that there was age discrimination.

X. ANNOUNCEMENT OF TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Commission Meeting will occur on Wednesday, June 11, 2025, at 2:00 PM. This meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

XI. **ADJOURNMENT**

To Adjourn:

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: L. Giliberto

Discussion: None

Vote:

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

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Norton)

The motion carried

The meeting adjourned 4:25 PM.