

Boston Human Rights Commission Public Meeting Minutes

November 18, 2020 at 5PM via Zoom due to COVID-19

Present: **Commissioners:** Chairwoman Margaret McKenna, Reyes Coll-Tellechea, Ben Goldberger, Leslie Harris, Leonard Lee, Anne Rousseau and Robert MacEachern
Staff: Executive Director Evandro Carvalho and Executive Assistant Susan Helmy
Guest Speakers: Barbara Garner, VP of Academic Services of Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), Theodora Higginson Hanna, Co-CEO Qingjian (Q.J.) Shi, Chief Program Officer of Tech Goes Home and Commissioner Emily Shea of Age Strong
Others: Approximately 10 individuals from the public attended this meeting including Chief Karilyn Crockett and Age Strong Commissioner Emily Shea

A. Introductions

1. Chairwoman Margaret McKenna called the Meeting to order at 5PM with all Commissioners in attendance.

B. Chairwoman McKenna and Executive Director's Reports

1. Executive Director Evandro Carvalho informed the Commissioners that he and Chairwoman McKenna met with Wayne Budd who was the chair of the Boston Police Reform Task Force. Wayne Budd stated that the Task Force will not continue their work. He also recommended that BHRC reach out to the other Task Force members to help devise a role that BHRC can play in the implementation of the recommendations made to the Mayor.
 - a. Chairwoman McKenna believes that BHRC should, on a quarterly basis, make sure the recommendations made by the Task Force are implemented.
2. Director Carvalho also informed the Commissioners that he and Chairwoman McKenna met with Chief Marty Martinez. He is the Chief in the Mayor's Office Health and Human Services and also leader of the COVID-19 Health Inequities Task Force. He stated that the Health Inequities Now Plan will be released in January. He also thought that BHRC through reports and hearings, can lift up the stories of individuals and their experiences with COVID-19 while also uncovering the roles that racism and discrimination play in our healthcare systems.
 - a. When Chairwoman McKenna spoke to Chief Martinez, they also spoke about hunger. Massachusetts has the largest increase of hunger over the past 6 months.
3. Lastly, Director Carvalho named the job titles of the next 4 staff hirings that will include: Policy and Research Analyst, Program Manager, Education Coordinator and Community Outreach Coordinator.

C. Discussion on Broadband Access

1. **Commissioner Emily Shea of Age Strong Commission, City of Boston**
 - a. Commissioner Shea spoke to the current services offered by Age Strong including counseling, broad planning and direct services such as providing 3,000 boxes of food to the aging population during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - b. As COVID-19 progressed, three items became apparent in regards to tech access: affordability of digital devices, access to the internet and access to training. Access to training is a critical component because many individuals over the age of 75 have less tech access or knowledge. This is even more prevalent in communities of low income.
 - c. Age Strong Commission has partnered with DoIT. In this partnership, 550 tablets with 30 months of free wifi access went to organizations such as the Mass Senior Access Counsel.
 - d. Age Strong is also trying to find the most beneficial way to spend their \$100,000 that they have under the CURES Act.

2. **Barbara Garner, VP of Academic Services of Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)**
 - a. JVS is a workforce development agency with a staff of 160. JVS is an organization that helps individuals find employment and build sustainable careers. Over 51% of their clientele are minorities and over 72% are non-native speakers. Their work has shifted to all remote work, making it a necessity for an individual to not only have a computer but access to the internet.
 - b. When JVS turned to remote work in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 40% of students needed a digital device, internet or both. JVS partnered with Tech Goes Home, however they realized they needed to find solutions to tech problems on their own. This led to JVS' Tech Access Project.
 - c. In this project, JVS loaned out 225 laptops and 70 hotspots. They estimate that they need double this amount to help all of their students and they are currently fundraising for it. The laptops are given out based on seniority in the program.
 - d. Hotspots however are not a long term solution so JVS has reached out to Comcast.

3. **Theodora Higginson Hanna, Co-CEO and Qingjian (Q.J.) Shi, Chief Program Officer of Tech Goes Home**
 - a. Tech Goes Home is an organization with 8 staff members, 300 certified instructors and has a partnership with over 150 schools, healthcare and community organizations.
 - b. Tech Goes Home does not only supply digital devices but they also provide trainings to instructors so they are able to teach individuals not only how to use the device but how to connect.

- c. Tech Goes Home has estimated that in the city of Boston: 48,000 households do not have desktop or laptop and 38,000 households do not have any internet connectivity.
- d. Commissioner Coll-Tellechea inquired about the assistance given to individuals that are visually or hearing impaired. Q.J informed her that the Carol Center for the Blind among others have trained instructors of Tech Goes Home to help assist these individuals. Tech Goes Home is also working to revamp their website to be screen friendly for all.

D. Discussion of International Human Rights Day

1. Executive Director Evandro Carvalho informed the Commission that after having met with Commissioners Lee and Harris, an agreement was made on the structure of the event. This event will have one keynote speaker, a panel of 3 individuals and a moderator.
2. There are individuals who have expressed interest in taking one of these roles but once confirmed, their names along with a flyer will be released.
3. This event will be held on International Human Rights Day, December 10th from 6pm to 8pm. Commissioner Lee stated that the goal of this event is to bring awareness to this topic in order to help and heal black males. The objective is to rebrand and redefine the way that society portrays black men.
4. This goal will focus on the trauma that black males endure from the moment they are born to the moment they pass away. Trauma will range from busing to homicide and social settings.

E. Announcements

1. Chairwoman McKenna announced that we will have our Human Rights Day event in December and our next Commission meeting mid January.

F. Public Comments

1. There were no public comments made during this meeting.

G. Votes

1. Two votes were taken during this meeting.
 - a. Unanimous vote of approval of the October 28th 2020 Meeting Minutes.
 - b. Majority vote to adjourn at 6:24pm.