



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Commission Meeting: January 10, 2008**

**Commissioners**

**Present**

**Mario Acosta-Velez, Vice-Chair  
Andrea Barbarin, Commissioner  
Deborah Wood Dorsey, Commissioner  
Christopher Dyer, Commissioner  
Thomas Fulton, Commissioner  
Sonjiah Hooks, Commissioner  
Nimesh Patel, Commissioner  
Nkechi Taifa, Commissioner  
Michael E. Ward, Commissioner  
Michael D. Woodard, Commissioner**

**For the Commission Staff**

**Dianne Harris, Hearing Examiner  
Eli Bruch, Hearing Examiner**

**For the Office of Human Rights**

**Gustavo Velasquez, Director  
Alexis Taylor, General Counsel**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

**Vice-Chair Mario Acosta –Velez called the meeting to order at 6:35 P.M.**

**II ROLL CALL/ANNOUNCEMENT OF QUORUM**

**Dianne Harris, Hearing Examiner called the roll; a quorum was present.  
Thomas Fulton, our new Commissioner was introduced to the  
Commission.**

**III. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

The Commission approved the minutes from the meetings held on September 13, 2007 and November 8, 2007. The minutes from the September 13<sup>th</sup> meeting had not been approved because there had not been a quorum at the November 8<sup>th</sup> meeting.

#### **IV. DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Director Gustavo Velasquez gave the Director's report for the months of November and December 2007. Both November and December 2007 were good months for the Office of Human Rights, hereinafter referred to as OHR. Thirty-one (31) complaints were filed in November and twenty-four complaints were filed in December. In November, OHR had over \$287,000.00 in settlements and in early December 2007 they had two major settlements that raised the accrued amount of settlements to over \$500,000.00. In November, OHR closed twenty seven (27) cases and in December they closed twenty (20) cases. OHR closed eighty (80) cases for the fiscal year 2007.

Due to OHR's high level of productivity in processing cases the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, hereinafter referred to as EEOC, entered into a Work Share Agreement with OHR where the agency received a federal grant to investigate three hundred (300) cases by September 30, 2008.

OHR is also conducting training on gender identity and expression and genetic information for District of Columbia Government employees. There are plans for OHR to bring in experts that would assist in establishing a mandatory diversity training program for the District of Columbia Government. A motion was made and seconded where the Commission will draft an advisory letter to Mayor Adrian Fenty recommending he issue an Executive Order requiring diversity training be mandatory for all District of Columbia Government agencies. The motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Michael Woodard was delegated the task of drafting the correspondence to the mayor with the understanding that a copy would be e-mailed to each of the Commissioners for their review, prior to the next scheduled Commissioners' meeting on March 13, 2008.

OHR is in the process of receiving applications from the District of Columbia Department of Human Resources for the position of Chief Hearing Examiner. Eli Bruch, Hearing Examiner with the Commission on Human Rights, hereinafter referred to as the Commission, gave a report on the steps being taken to advertise for the position. Mr. Bruch stated an announcement of the job opening had been sent to all of the local bar associations, the top 100 law schools in the country and several legal job

databases. There were suggestions from Commissioners that an announcement of the position be sent to the Legal Times, the Washington Lawyer Magazine and local lawyer associations such as the Hispanic Bar, Gay Law and Asian Pacific American Bar Association of the Greater Washington, DC area. It was estimated that it will take approximately two months to fill the position.

#### V. COMMISSION'S REPORT

The number of cases pending before the Commission has been reduced from 30 to 29. The *Nathaniel Washington* case has been dismissed. The *Alejandro Rivas* case has settled and the Complainant is scheduled to sign a settlement agreement by the end of the week thereby reducing the caseload to 28 cases. Since the last meeting of the Commission there has been one full-fledged evidentiary hearing held December 3, 4 and 5, 2007 in the *Sheila Oliver Patterson* case. Briefs are due in February 2008. The tribunal in the *Harry Rager* case has reached a consensus on the Final Decision and Order and the decision should be signed it in the next few days. Scheduling orders have been issued in the *Cassandra Wooten*, *William Poynter* and *Lilian Trejo* cases. An Order denying a Motion to Dismiss was issued in the *William Poynter* case and a partial Order to Compel Discovery was issued in the *Lisa Winton* case.

Copies of the Commission's report were passed out to the Commissioners. A number of the Commissioners commented on new format of the report and how it gave a much clearer picture of the status of the cases. OHR General Counsel Alexis Taylor was recognized for her development of the report's new format.

Commissioner Nimesh Patel requested that a chart summarizing the Commission's decisions involving damage awards be prepared as both a guideline to future tribunals in their determination of how much to assess in damages and to insure consistency in their decision making in this area.

#### VI. COMMUNITY OUTREACH REPORT

The International Human Rights Day Forum initially set for December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007 was postponed due to the passing of Chief Hearing Examiner Neil Alexander. It was decided that the forum would be held in late February 2008. The location of the event had not yet been determined and two of the speakers had been confirmed.

#### VII. REFLECTIONS ON CHIEF HEARING EXAMINER NEIL ALEXANDER

Commissioner Deborah Wood Dorsey delivered a moving tribute of Neil's years of outstanding service to the Commission. She thanked Alexis Taylor and Joan Davenport for their hard work in organizing the well-attended and

uplifting memorial service held on December 15, 2007 honoring Neil's memory. She spoke of Neil's commitment and dedication to human rights and aptly characterized him as being the Commission's "institutional memory" given his 20 years of service to the agency. The Commission's tradition of holding a town hall meeting on International Human Rights Day was the brainchild of Neil and Commissioner Wood Dorsey. It was moved and seconded that the town hall forum be named the Neil Alexander, Jr. Human Rights Forum in honor of Neil's 20 years of service to the Commission. The motion was unanimously passed.

#### **VIII. NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF SECRETARY**

Commissioner Nimesh Patel was nominated for the office of Secretary and the nomination was seconded. He was elected to the position of Secretary of the Commission by a unanimous vote. Commissioner Mario Acosta-Velez was nominated for the office of Vice-Chair of the Commission and the nomination was seconded. He was elected to the position of Vice-Chair of the Commission by a unanimous vote.

#### **IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Director Gustavo Velasquez announced that there would be an open house to showcase the Commission's newly renovated office suite on March 13, 2008, prior the Board's next scheduled meeting. Refreshments will be served.

The Asian Pacific American Bar Association of the Greater Washington, D.C. area will be having a symposium on the lack of Asian Americans on the judiciary in the District. Notice will be sent to the Commissioners listing the date and location of the event. All are welcomed to attend.

#### **X ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made to adjourn and seconded and upon voice vote the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Nimesh Patel  
Secretary

