

The regular meeting of the Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission was held on January 9, 2025 at 4:00 p.m., Fire Administration Building – 4817 Columbus Street.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Virginia “Ginger” Jenkot (Chair), Jamal Gunn (Vice Chair), Caitlin Cagni, Miluska Carlevarino Zegarra, Arnel Custodio, Carla Hesseltine, Simone Nied, Mark Stevens, Ramona D. Taylor, Ron Taylor, Frances Knight Thompson, Rabbi Israel Zoberman

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jackson Doane (unexcused), Sylvia Nery-Strickland (excused), Emiliano “Jojo” Orenca (unexcused)

CITY STAFF PRESENT:

Deputy Chief Sean Adams (VBPD Liaison), Michael Berlucchi (City Council Liaison), Ty Harris (VBCPS Liaison), Donna Hernandez (Assistant City Attorney), Captain Karen Johnson (VBSO Liaison), Dominique McKinnon (Human Resources), Lindsey Moran (Human Resources), Terry Turbyfill (Human Resources)

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Jenkot called the meeting to order at 4:09 p.m.

CHAIR’S REPORT

Chair Jenkot thanked the commissioners, staff and liaisons who participated in the annual awards ceremony. Councilmember Berlucchi shared his appreciation for the opportunity to serve as Master of Ceremonies for the ceremony.

Chair Jenkot gave a recap on the HRC and local activities in December and to date this month:

- The Homeless Memorial Vigil was held on December 18 and on behalf of the Human Rights Commission, she provided the closing remarks for the ceremony.
- On Tuesday night, City Council approved the NAMI project for affordable and supportive housing.
- There was an update in the news on the Rolin Hill case – three former deputies were indicted in the case.
- The General Assembly session started on January 8 and Staff Liaison McKinnon shared with the Commission the legislative bill tracker. Staff Liaison McKinnon gave an overview of the spreadsheet. Commissioner Nied gave an update on the legislative bill – HB1699 - that she has helped develop. Chair Jenkot will share with the commissioners a website that lists all the names and contact information for local representatives. Crossover will be on February 4th. Vice

Chair Gunn asked about the legislation for a crisis receiving center (CRC) and Staff Liaison McKinnon will check the LIS system for any CRC legislation.

- There is an open survey for residents to give feedback on the development of Rudee Loop, Envisioning Rudee Park, at www.rudeepark.com and the Chair encouraged commissioners to participate.

ROLL CALL

Roll call of the commissioners was taken once there was a quorum in the room. Commissioner Hesseltine participated in the meeting remotely from a relative's home for a medical reason. Commissioner Ramona Taylor participated in the meeting remotely from a relative's home for a medical reason. Commissioner Ron Taylor participated in the meeting remotely from his home for a medical reason. Commissioner Thompson participated in the meeting remotely from her home for the personal reason of a schedule conflict.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 14, 2024 MEETING

A motion was made by Vice Chair Gunn, seconded by Commissioner Zoberman, to approve the minutes from the November 14, 2024 meeting.

The motion passed by a vote of 12-0.

Members Voting Aye: Dr. Virginia "Ginger" Jenkot (Chair), Jamal Gunn (Vice Chair), Caitlin Cagni, Miluska Carlevarino Zegarra, Arnel Custodio, Carla Hesseltine, Simone Nied, Mark Stevens, Ramona D. Taylor, Ron Taylor, Frances Knight Thompson, Rabbi Israel Zoberman

Members Absent: Jackson Doane, Sylvia Nery-Strickland, Emiliano "Jojo" Orenca

COMMISSIONERS REPORTS

Chair Jenkot opened the floor for any reports from the commissioners and asked for any suggestions for future meeting presentations.

Commissioner Stevens reported that the homeless count will be starting at the end of January. Volunteers canvass known areas as part of the process for the federal grant program. He added that winter shelter has not yet reached capacity with 45 beds currently occupied. Winter shelter will continue through March and he recommended referring anyone who needs housing to the Housing Resource Center. Vice Chair Gunn asked if tours of PiN Ministry can be arranged, and Commissioner Stevens suggested getting a tour of the Housing Resource Center for one of the HRC meetings. Commissioner Stevens also shared that he is supporting legislation to increase the age limitation for foster care from 21 to 23 as 50% of individuals who age out of foster care either end up homeless or in

jail. The bill is being sponsored by Anne Ferrell Tata and once the draft of the bill is finalized, he will share the bill number with the Commission.

Commissioner Custodio reported that the Philippine Cultural Center just held this annual New Year's celebration, and they will be celebrating their 25th anniversary in June. The center is working with the Alzheimer's Association to develop a support group for Alzheimer's caregivers. The Southeastern Virginia Chapter of the association is holding a Zoom meeting on January 15, and you can find the link on their Facebook page.

Commissioner Nied reported that she has been speaking with delegates to get support for HB1699.

Commissioner Cagni shared that as a student of the environment study program at Tallwood High School, they have been surveying the different species of trees in the Pleasure House area to track what will need to be replanted with the approval of the Pleasure House Restoration project that will displace 5,500 trees. Chair Jenkot recommending watching the City Council meeting to see the presentation on the project. Commissioner Nied shared that Planting Shade has 1,000 saplings arriving and asked the commissioners to let her know if anyone or any areas are in need of trees to plant.

Commissioner Zoberman reported on the work that the Jewish Community Center does in the community. He also spoke on antisemitism around the world and the war in Gaza. He shared that Jewish legislation day will be held in late January where Jewish communities throughout Virginia will go to Richmond to meet with legislators. He recommended Robin Mancoll, Chief Program Officer Senior Director of the Jewish Community Center, as a presenter for a future meeting. Commissioner Zoberman reported on the Princess Anne Confederate Statue Roundtable and their work to get a Confederate statue removed from the Municipal Center in 2020. He stated that there was a recommendation during the roundtable to install a memorial park in that area where slaves were sold.

Commissioner Zoberman made a motion for the Human Rights Commission to send a letter to City Council recommending a marker at the site of the old courthouse where slaves were sold. Commissioner Nied seconded the motion.

The motion passed by a vote of 12-0.

Members Voting Aye: Dr. Virginia "Ginger" Jenkot (Chair), Jamal Gunn (Vice Chair), Caitlin Cagni, Miluska Carlevarino Zegarra, Arnel Custodio, Carla Hesseltine, Simone Nied, Mark Stevens, Ramona D. Taylor, Ron Taylor, Frances Knight Thompson, Rabbi Israel Zoberman

Members Absent: Jackson Doane, Sylvia Nery-Strickland, Emiliano "Jojo" Orenca

Commissioner Carlevarino Zegarra reported that her organization, Hands of Grace, held a Christmas event on December 21 and there were a lot of immigrant families that attended. They distributed 120 bags of toys, food and clothing for everyone who attended. Volunteers from Bon Secours, a local

Spanish radio station and Mayor Dyer were there, speaking with the families. Hands of Grace will be starting their educational programs in April.

Vice Chair Gunn spoke on the upcoming holiday – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Black History Month in February and the importance of recognizing these events. He also spoke on the 60th anniversary of the passage of the 1964 Voting Rights Act and the work that still needs to be done in Virginia for voting rights. He reported that a bill will be introduced in the General Assembly again this year for the automatic restoration of voting rights for anyone convicted of a felony. He suggested having a presentation from one of the delegates supporting the bill.

Commissioner Thompson reported that her reading enrichment program received 125 books from REACH, Inc. and each child had five books to take home. Next, they will bring the program to Brighton Rock AME Church for their afterschool program for 45 children. She added that on February 8, the Right to Read Documentary will be screened at Brighton Rock AME Church and her non-profit, Chain Breakers, Inc., received a grant for their work in literacy in Portsmouth. She shared that as president of the Hampton Roads Diversity and Inclusion Consortium, they are working to determine how they can help with DEI in Hampton Roads.

LIAISON REPORTS

VBCPS Liaison Ty Harris reported that the office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion will be sending teachers to the Equity and Engagement conference in Richmond at the end of January. The African American Male Summit is on January 25 at Green Run High School starting at 8:30 a.m. The Season for Nonviolence will kick off at the end of January and for the 3rd year, the Virginia Beach City Public Schools will be hosting the poetry and art contest. The celebration to honor the contest winners will be on March 26 at Salem Middle School at 6 p.m. Before the holiday break, his office partnered with Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities to host The Power of We workshop that brought 140 students from high schools all over Virginia Beach for building collaborative communication skills. Commissioner Stevens added that he will share the time and location of the Season for Nonviolence kick off after their next meeting.

Deputy Chief Adams reported that he will be working with Staff Liaison McKinnon to gather information on the CRC.

STAFF UPDATE

Staff Liaison McKinnon asked commissioners to notify her if there are any legislative bills that they want added to the tracker. She reported that in 2024 the Commission sent four letters to City Council regarding the Kempsville High School baseball team, the need for more cooling centers, decriminalizing homelessness and concern over students' social media activities.

CITIZEN REMARKS

Beatriz Amberman extended an invitation for Advocacy Day at the General Assembly that her organization is hosting on January 28. She will share that information with Staff Liaison McKinnon to distribute to the Commission along with the legislation that they are supporting. Chair Jenkot added that Lobby Day for Equality Virginia is next Wednesday, and it is also Faith Day in Richmond for faith organizations in Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:35 pm.

Dr. Virginia Jenkot
Meeting called to order by
Dr. Virginia Jenkot, Chair

Dominique McKinnon
Minutes prepared by
Dominique McKinnon, VBHRC Liaison

Next Meeting:
February 13