

Human Relations Commission  
Informal Meeting Minutes  
May 18, 2022 5:00 p.m.

**Attendance:** Ava Hart, Sanji Lawrence, Debbie Ruimerman, and Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management

**Excused Absence:** Tasha Edens and Anthony Gennaro

**Absence:** Henry Fernandez, Ed Ford, and Howard Thody

**QUORUM:**            *Yes:* \_\_\_\_\_    *No:*   X  

**Call to Order:** Chairperson Hart called the meeting to order at 5:09 p.m. She noted for the record that there was not a quorum present. Director Jackson noted for the record that Alicia Moody was not an active member yet because she had not been sworn in.

**Public Session:** Jay Tulin and Myra Clark-Siegel were present. Jay Tulin asked if the commission would be able to conduct business on the issue he and Myra Clark-Siegel were there to discuss. Chairperson Hart indicated that the commission would not be able to vote without a quorum. However, it could have a discussion and hear any updates. Jay Tulin said that the South Windsor commission and town council had adopted and approved the working definition of anti-Semitism set forth by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Also, the Human Relations Commissions in Farmington, Wethersfield, Mansfield, and West Hartford have endorsed it and will be moving it forward to their councils. Mayra Clark-Siegel said that in regards to the recent shootings in Buffalo and in Laguna Woods, they stand in solidarity with their community partners. AJC immediately reached out when they heard. There is no place for this type of hatred. She said they are all committed to working against hate of all kinds. She said she wanted to go on record with their condemnation of the horrific ideology of the white supremacists who committed these acts. AJC is horrified. Chairperson Hart thanked Myra Clark-Siegel for her words. Director Jackson said it's unfortunate that they are living in such difficult times. She added that when people, for reasons of ethnicity, culture, race, or religion, have been excluded for a long period of time, it's difficult to bring about inclusion. There's going to be major resistance. The commission discussed that hatred is learned. However, what also learned is understanding, respect, and acceptance of the other. Director Jackson explained that not only is it important to teach those characteristics, but also to teach children and adults the truth about our history.

The commission members further discussed the tragedy in Buffalo, NY and how it has affected them. There was also discussion on how the community in Buffalo had been previously facing threats of violence. Myra Clark-Siegel said that they have a power to stand up with one another. They need to stand up together, and they need to continue to educate people. Education is key.

Chairperson Hart said she appreciated the conversation. She also appreciated what Myra Clark-Siegel said earlier regarding the violent acts of hatred. She understands AJC more and understands that it works for everyone. She said she also plans to support moving the resolution forward. Myra Clark-

Siegel thanked her and said they were there to work together. Jay Tulin said he agreed and was thankful for the support.

The commission also discussed the use of social media platforms and how they are used to spread hateful rhetoric and ideologies. Myra Clark-Siegel said that AJC has been working with multiple social media platforms in addressing what is on their pages and how people are using the platforms.

Chairperson Hart thanked Myra Clark-Siegel and Jay Tulin for their time and said they would discuss the resolution further. Director Jackson added that the three-page document is too long and will need to be truncated. However, the commission would work on an abbreviated draft that they could present to the mayor and the Common Council. She explained that once the draft is ready to go before the Common Council, Chairperson Hart can send an invite to Jay Tulin and Myra Clark-Siegel to attend the council meeting along with the commission and to present the resolution for adoption.

Myra Clark-Siegel and Jay Tulin thanked the commission for its time and partnership and left the meeting.

### **Regular Meeting:**

**Approval of Agenda:** The May 18, 2022 Meeting Agenda could not be approved due to lack of quorum.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** The February 16, 2022 Meeting Minutes could not be approved due to lack of quorum.

**Old Business:** The commission discussed revisions to the proposed resolution. Director Jackson suggested keeping the title. She also suggested eliminating some of the examples listed but adding that 700 mayors have signed the statement, Mayors United Against Antisemitism. She added that the commission should keep the full document that AJC provided with the abbreviated resolution that goes before the Common Council. Also, they should research the resolutions that the other towns have passed. Once they have a workable draft, they can review it with the Common Council Clerk to discuss its length. She said that ideally the commission would have a draft to review at its next meeting.

**New Business:** Director Jackson said she wanted to bring something to the commission's attention for a potential future initiative. She said she got an email from a parent who is very concerned about student behavior at the middle school and high school. She also indicated that she has been hearing that there is a tremendous amount of fighting going on in the Middletown high school and middle school. Chairperson Hart said she agreed that this is a problem and confirmed that she has heard the same thing, as well. She asked what the Human Relations Commission could do in its capacity. Director Jackson said that the first step could be that Chairperson Hart touch base with Dawn Brooks, who is the Assistant Principal at Middletown High School. Another step the commission could take would be to have one of its meetings open to parents to hear what is going on at the middle school and high school. Chairperson Hart said that in her profession, she works with children. This issue is not exclusive to Middletown. Children are struggling everywhere because parents and teachers are struggling. Parents and teachers are anxious and depressed due to the lasting effects of the pandemic, the economy, and the political climate.

Commissioner Lawrence said that a compounding issue is the way parents communicate with other parents, how they talk about other students, and the videos they post on different media platforms. Because there is no filter, they feel they can freely say whatever they want, and in some cases, they don't even have students currently in the school system. Chairperson Hart said she agreed that the parental interference on social media is making the situation worse.

Director Jackson said the commission may first want to reach out to Dawn Brooks, then possibly the acting superintendent. After that, the commission could hold some open forums to get feedback from students and then feedback from parents. COVID has stretched everyone too far, and the effects are long lasting.

**Review:** The commission reviewed the attendance. Chairperson Hart asked the office to follow up with Commissioner Ford and Commissioner Thody because they haven't been in attendance for the past few meetings.

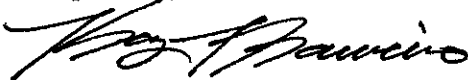
**Announcements:**

The next meeting of the commission will be June 15, 2022.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,



Kasey Maurice,  
Administrative Sec. III