

City of Worcester Human Rights Commission Minutes

Monday March 9, 2020, 6:00pm

Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber (3rd flr)

Members Present: Philippe Berry, LaToya Lewis, Lauren De Oliveira, Deidre Padgett, Edward G. Robinson, Aaron Richman

Members Absent: Lilian Chukwurah, Elizabeth O'Callahan, Jacqueline Yang

Staff: Biodun Akande, Dr. Mattie Castiel, Jayna Turcek

Guests: Steve Kerrigan, CEO and Leo Negron Cruz, Worcester Community Health Worker Supervisor from Edward M. Kennedy Center

Call to order at 6:10pm and introductions: Commissioners introduced themselves.

Approval of February 3, 2020 meeting minutes:

Motion was made by Lauren De Oliveira and seconded by Edward Robinson approving the February 3, 2020 meeting minutes with spelling of names edited. All approved.

Discussion on bringing increased awareness and local participation in future Human Rights Campaign Healthcare Equality Indexes with guests from Edward M. Kennedy Center (Steve Kerrigan, CEO and Leo Negron Cruz, Worcester Community Health Worker Supervisor)

(See 2019 HEI: https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/HEI-2019-FinalReport.pdf?_ga=2.249590080.715493804.1580315620-1617106697.1570043964)

The City of Worcester has received a 100% score on the Municipal Equality Index (MEI) from the HRC for many years. Until recently the Human Rights Commission was unaware of the HEI and is pleased to learn about the Edward M. Kennedy Health Center's process.

In 2010 the Edward M. Kennedy Health Center (EMK) was renamed after the late Massachusetts Senator, prior to that it was known as Great Brook Valley Health Center. The HEI designation (only one in the city) is something EMK takes great pride in. EMK has clinics in Worcester, Framingham and Milford as well as six schools. EMK serves almost 28,000 patients annually and about 133,000 visits. EMK was started by 7 women who lived in the valley's public housing who had to take their children to the emergency room. They met with a nurse in 1972 and used 10 housing units for the clinic on site until the new building was erected on Summer Street. In 2004-05 opened a clinic in Framingham and in 2014/15 opened in Milford.

On a personal note Mr. Kerrigan had worked fourteen years for the Senator so he is very grateful to be able to continue the Senator's work on health care here at EMK.

There are 11 organizations that have the HEI Equity Leader designation in Massachusetts and three outside Boston two of which are federally designated as Community Health Centers. The

Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) is the national LGBTQ benchmarking tool that evaluates healthcare facilities' policies and practices related to the equity and inclusion of their LGBTQ patients, visitors and employees.

This designation and score shows to the community the EMK's commitment to serving all people. This process is like going through an accreditation process. It is arduous, but they encourage going through it. There is no penalty if a Center does not achieve the designation, because it can be done again the next year. It is an important self-assessment.

The criterion includes:

- Non-discrimination staff training
- Patient services and support
- Employee's benefits and policies
- Patient and community engagement
- Responsible Citizenship

Each criterion is scored in different ways. Some you need all factors and others do not. Each year they try to expand their ability to serve their clients and be responsive to their employees. EMK has 330 employees. There are training modules which employees participated in. They did it as a team and got more hours in and everyone learned.

Again they would encourage health care facilities to participate in the process and through the Human Rights Commission would offer any way of assistance possible to others.

Going through the process one learns to do things better and as the years go along documents are already in place so in this way the process gets easier.

Responses to questions from Commission:

- The Human Rights Commission is the first who asked about the Health Equity Index designation
- EMK started with a survey about GLBT services and then learned about HEI and learned more to improve service
- Reasons for looking at this Index: Looks through a long lens so health care can be provided, clearer pathways for quality of care, assists and supports employees, good for seeking funding
- Worcester Housing Authority has been a great partner.
- Welcome mural - Use the Rainbow flag to say welcome to the GLBT community and sticker on clinic doors are very important.
- Hard to put a cost to this process- as years go on cost is less – it is a values issue.
- Encourage people to reach out who feel marginalized. Go to the EMK website for additional information.

The Commission thanked both guests for their work and participation in tonight's meeting. Philippe Berry motioned to have a follow up in June to facilitate further conversations with other CEO's in healthcare with assistance from Steve Kerrigan.

Discussion: Director Turchek offered to assist with reaching out to establish one on one meetings with CEOs. Lauren De Oliveira also suggested to continue with other industries as well.

Philippe Berry amended motion to have Jayna Turchek on behalf of the Commission reach out to CEO's of local healthcare facilities to have one on one or small group meetings to have conversations to move the conversation tonight about increasing awareness from HEI and place back on Commission agenda at a later date to review progress. Robinson seconded, unanimously passed.

Worcester Consumer Rights Presentation (Biodun Akande, Program Manager)

The Program was brought back to Worcester three years ago. Prior to that Worcester residents had to go through a program in Springfield for this service for about fifteen years. The program is funded by the Massachusetts Office of Attorney General and operated out of the City's Human Rights Office in Worcester City Hall.

The Worcester Consumer Rights Program (WCRP) is a local consumer program (LCP) that offers mediation service in cooperation with the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office (AGO). The service is available to consumers in Worcester and surrounding towns. The purpose of the Worcester Consumer Rights Program is to provide amicable mediation to consumers who are involved in a dispute or have a complaint against a business that is licensed to operate in Massachusetts. The program is voluntary and does not carry any cost to either the consumer or business.

The types of common complaints that are handled include: car sales and financing, consumer fraud, debt collection, defective products, home improvement contracts, identity theft, telemarketing, utility bills.

Questions about outreach and additional funding were asked and answered.
All thanked Mr. Akande and his colleague for their good work and his time tonight.

Reminder: HRC marching in St. Patrick's Day parade next Sunday. It is currently scheduled. It may or may not be held given new climate and closings around the world that have been announced. Please stay tuned.

Next meeting: Monday April 6, 2020, Esther Howland City Hall. April is Fair Housing Month and an annual training on fair housing will be provided by Community Legal Aid.

Public Comment and Announcements:

The fair housing poster contest is happening. Students are creating the posters and the Hope Coalition will judge the posters. The event will be held on Thursday April 16th at The Worcester Pop Up at 5:30pm.

Edgar Luna, City of Worcester Economic Development-
Invites all Commissioners to meeting tomorrow at 9:30am in this chamber. This is the last training from the MA Secretary of State on the Census and process. Another forum sponsored by

Congressman McGovern will take place on Monday March 16th 11am-12noon at First Baptist Church, 111 Park Avenue, to inform all on census and to encourage response. We want everyone to be counted and understand the meaning and significance of the census.

Edward Robinson also shared that the Lawyers for Civil Rights will hold a forum on how to file a complaint with MCAD tomorrow at 5:30pm at the First Baptist Church. It is free and open to the public.

Lauren added that there is fear in community about immigration status and disclosure of residence and sharing information with ICE. The courts have routinely upheld confidentiality and nondisclosure and residents should be assured of their confidentiality when completing census.

Adjourned at 8pm