

**City of Worcester Human Rights Commission Minutes**  
**VIRTUAL MEETING – Monday, February 7, 2022, 6:00pm**

**Members Present:** Jacqueline Yang, Elizabeth O’Callahan, Edward G. Robinson, Charles Hopkins, Guillermo Creamer Jr, LaToya Lewis, Ellen Shemitz

**Members Absent:** Deidre Padgett, LaToya Lewis, Lilian Chukwurah, Jorge Lopez-Alvarez

**Staff:** Jayna Turchek

**Guests:**

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, Center for Nonviolent Solutions  
Nick Cantrell, Center for Nonviolent Solutions

**1. Call to order and Introductions**

A quorum was established, and Chairperson Yang called to order. The Chairperson welcomes members of the commission and those present and introductions of those in attendance as well as roll call were taken.

Chairperson Yang began with an acknowledgement of the traditional, ancestral, territory of the Nipmuc Nation, the first people of Massachusetts and those who’s land we are convening on tonight. While the Nipmuc history predates written history, records from the 1600s inform us that the original inhabitants of Worcester dwelled principally in three locations: Pakachoag, Tatasset (Tatnuck), and Wigwam Hill (N. Lake Ave). It is important to make this acknowledgment and to honor the ancestors that have come before us. It is all too easy to live in a land without ever hearing the traditional names and the history of the people who first resided and prospered in these lands and continue to reside and prosper.

The Human Rights Commission was established to promote the city’s human rights policies. It is the policy of the City to assure equal access, for every individual, to and benefit from all public services, to protect every individual in the enjoyment and exercise of civil rights and to encourage and bring about mutual understanding and respect among all individuals in the city. Our work requires us to address institutional racism so that as a community we can achieve racial equity. Our work also requires us to make visible the unheard, unearned, and unquestioned privilege enjoyed by some members of our community to the detriment of others. We take time to make this acknowledgement, to educate, so a path can be cleared for healing.

The term “**institutional racism**” refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies create difference outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional polices may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and the oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

The term “**racial equity**” is the active state in which race does not determine one’s livelihood or success. It is achieved through proactive work to address root causes of inequalities to improve outcomes for all individuals. That is, through the elimination or shifting of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

The term “**privilege**” describes the unearned social power and informal institutions of society to all members of a dominant group. For example: “white privilege” and “male privilege.” Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we are trained to not see it but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage against those who do not have it.

## **2. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Approval of the meeting minutes for the December 6, 2021, Human Rights Commission meeting.

## **3. New Business**

### **A. Request for support of city resolution concerning nuclear weapons from the Center of Nonviolent Solutions**

Commissioners have received the draft resolution and request for endorsement. The Center is looking for the Commission’s support prior to submitting the resolution to City Council. Claire Schaeffer-Duffy and Nick Cantrell from the Center of Nonviolent Solutions are here to address the Commission.

#### **Clair Shaeffer-Duffy: (Program Director at the Center for Nonviolent Solutions)**

Nick and I are here to ask for your support regarding our resolution which calls for safer nuclear policies to the U.S. Government. For most of us, nuclear weapons are not at the forefront of our minds. There are many more immediate concerns. However, there are currently 13,000 of these weapons in the world and should they detonate, by accident or in the circumstance of war, the harm that they would cause is catastrophic. There is not really a Plan B.

This resolution is asking the government to take 5 courses of action.

- a. **To support an international treaty calling for the abolishment of nuclear weapons.** This treaty was created by ordinary people from around the world in 2017 and it come into legal effect, as international law, last year.
- b. **The U.S. Government to renounce its option to first use for nuclear weapons.** This is a military position that we currently have.
- c. **End giving sole authority for the launching of any nuclear attack to one individual.** Currently, whomever is the U.S. president at the time has sole authority.
- d. **Take our U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert.**
- e. **Cancel the current plan to revamp our nuclear arsenal.** Most of us are not aware but there has been a huge investment in an upgrade which is the opposite

direction that we need to be going in, as a species. We need to be disarming our arsenals as investing in doing that.

The resolution that we are asking you to endorse is part of the “Back from the Brink” resolution and it is the work of a grassroots movement that started 2 or 3 years ago. In Massachusetts, seventeen cities and towns, including Boston and Springfield, have endorsed it.

To be clear, we are all just everyday folks. We are not just sitting here doing foreign policy and we are certainly not doing policy of the pentagon. This campaign that includes the resolution that we are asking local communities to pass, is really educational. It’s an attempt to make Americans aware of the gravity of a nuclear threat which has intensified, especially now with the Ukraine/Russia crisis, and to show popular voice through the medium of resolution that the majority of American people want a safer U.S. nuclear policy and ultimately want the abolition of nuclear weapons. It is modeled after the nuclear freeze initiative, created in the 1980s. During the Cold War the world had upwards of 50,000 nuclear weapons. It was the push of many people but the Nuclear Freeze, which asked cities and towns to back the resolution, that really slowed down the escalation and led to a draw down in our arsenal.

**Nick Cantrell:** (board member of Nuclearban.us and Treaty Awareness Campaign)

My focus and area of expertise is in Nuclear Warfare Divestment and Disarmament. This is a draft resolution. This is what Boston passed in December. Part of the Back from The Break Campaign is that it does allow for municipalities to draft their own language. There is a little bit of flexibility there. There are core components from Back from the Brink. Boston added that they wanted to, specifically, forward their resolution to their elected members of Congress. I think that is a great idea.

Representative McGovern introduced the Back from the Brink Resolution at the Federal level last session. He has been a huge champion of this initiative as well the treaty in general.

This does not require any money and does not require any on-going commitments from members of this group or members of city council. There are many things we can do, after this is done, to continue to work in this area. Some of us do those on a daily, or on-going, basis.

This really is just a specific moment we can take and say that we encourage the United Federal Government, which from a practical standpoint is really the only organization on the plan that can make this come to pass and have it be enduring. Of the 17 municipalities who have already passed this, in the state of Massachusetts, have passed it unanimously. This is designed to be something that can be embraced by members across the ideological spectrum, and I really do think that the time to do this work is right now. The Biden administration has announced that they are currently undergoing a review of the nuclear posture. Actions like this are impactful in a way that they might not be in a year or two because part of what they are reviewing is how the country feels about the current nuclear posturing. The more municipalities, organizations, counties, etc. that take the step of actually asking the U.S. government to embrace the treaty; sign it, ratify it, work toward its implementation.

**Commissioner O’Callahan:** Is there additional information about missing nuclear weapons? Is there a parallel effort to address that?

**Clair Shaeffer-Duffy:** For those not familiar, “broken arrow” is a term used to describe near misses in missile launches that have happened in the past 70 years, since the U.S. possessed nuclear weapons. That is one of the factors in rating the level of risk which we are at any given time. Their very existence is risky and is one reason for this call for de-escalation. The resolution is motivated by the risk of accidents.

**Nick Cantrell:** It is one of the issues to be dealt with. There have now been 59 countries that have signed and ratified this so the treaty has entered into force as international law and the countries that have signed and ratified it. One of the requirements is that there has to be on-going meetings for implementation. The first meeting was supposed to happen in January but it got pushed to March and now it looks like it is pushed to July. It’s still tentative but it is supposed to be in Vienna, and this is one of the issues. How do we recover the broken arrows at the bottom of the ocean, what do we do? Whose responsibility is it? How do we do it safely? There are quite a few details to be worked out and that work is on-going.

**Clair Shaeffer-Duffy:** You should know that the Nuclear Ban Treaty, that Nick was referring to, drafted with the participation of 102 people from different states, shifted the lens on how we think about nuclear weapons. Previous treaties assumed that the nation’s security framework was sufficient to prevent use. This treaty says that the nature of these weapons has global impact and their production, transportation, excavation materials, are damaging to humanity. They used the framework of Humanitarian law which is very different from National Security interests, speaking specifically about how the production of these weapons violates that.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** What do you think are the biggest counterarguments? Why would people oppose us endorsing this resolution and how would you respond to those key arguments?

**Clair Shaeffer-Duffy:** I can’t! Who is for loading up the world with nuclear weapons? They jeopardize everybody. We have an abundance of them. There is no argument that our arsenal is deficient. We are not dealing with shortages here. From my prospective, this resolution is a conservative one in saying to take it off hair-trigger alert to prevent accidents. I don’t think one single human being should have the authority to push a button. That is enormously concerning. Though to be fair, there is this assumption that nuclear weapons are a fact of life and we need ours because, as one Vietnam veteran I spoke to said, they have bad stuff so we are going to have it and the rationale is that we are not going to put ours down because it is out there.

**Nick Cantrell:** there is quite a bit of old dogma around nuclear deterrence theory which is the idea that if we all have nukes then we are all safe. There is a lot that is sort of wrapped up in Americana, the pervious use of nuclear weapons. There really is no other tool like this that we prescribe this magical deterrence to. We would not say that the best way to keep the world safe from being attacked by weaponized smallpox is to distribute it to nine countries with varying degrees of animosity and boarder disputes. It would be foolish. Yet we have taken this approach and it has been engrained and the American psyche.

Military leaders have moved past nuclear deterrence as a valid theory. Many military leaders, upon retirement, begin to advocate for reduction and disarmament of nuclear weapons and speak out against their ability to deter conflict. Nuclear weapons increase our risk of nuclear conflict. How could they not?

There are quite a few people whose livelihoods are wrapped up in this. One of the principal manufacturing components is Raytheon, a Massachusetts based company. We have members of our city who are employees of Raytheon or own stock or have Raytheon pensions. I think that should be acknowledged as a locust of power in our community and in support of weapons of mass destruction.

Commissioner Robinson motioned to endorse the resolution, seconded by Commissioner O'Callahan. Unanimously approved on roll call.

### **B. In memoriam: Reflections on the life of former Human Rights Commissioner Mable Millner**

Mable Millner came to the city of Worcester to work at the College of the Holy Cross. In 2020, she retired as the director of Multicultural Education and Associate Dean of Students for Diversity and Inclusion. During her 20 years in Worcester, Mable also served for more than a decade on the Human Rights Commission and was the Chairperson for the Coalition Against Bias and Hate. She lived a life of service and has left a legacy that will live on with her students, colleagues and friends that she left behind.

An excerpt from Holy Cross Publication at Mable Millner's retirement

"Millner grew up in the segregated South, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, which still enforced Jim Crow laws. "I wasn't allowed to go to white schools — or anything else that was white," she says. "We had two Woolworth's because you couldn't go into the white Woolworth's. Going to the Greyhound bus station, there was a white side and a black side. So, the white people got on the bus first, and then the bus went around to the back and then black people were able to get on the bus. And if you ordered food, they would give you food out of this window because you couldn't eat in the station. I remember all of that as a child."

But from within the African-American community and her family, Millner found incredible examples of strength that sustain her today and inspire her work as a mentor. "In my neighborhood, there were principals, there were attorneys, there were teachers, there were doctors. The president of a black college in my town lived two streets over. So, you saw these people as role models," she says. From her mother, who gave "unconditional love and support," to her aunt, who "encouraged her nieces and nephews to pursue education and become the best of themselves," Millner says "family and education" were the core fibers of her upbringing.

When Millner was 11, her community helped African American activists travel safely through the area on their journey to what would become the largest human rights demonstration in the United States — the 1963 March on Washington.

Travelling long distances in the South was challenging for African Americans. “You could not go to most restaurants. You couldn’t go to every gas station. There were very few hotels that you could go to,” Millner says.

“Our church was one of the churches that helped participate in terms of providing food and lodging for those who were headed to Washington.” These activists joined more than 250,000 others at the Lincoln Memorial as Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech. Millner is proud to have participated in the 25th anniversary of the historic march. She reflects it was “a moment to measure how far we had come yet realize how much further we needed to go.” Her work was still needed.”

### **C. Notice and planning for upcoming discussion regarding petitions for a study/resolution for decriminalization of entheogenic plants and fungi**

For background information: <https://www.baystatesnm.org>

The Commission has received nearly two dozen emails from Worcester residents asking that we take up this item for study and action. Tonight’s meeting is for Commission members to discuss how they wish to take up this request.

In advance of today’s meeting, Director Turcek asked the WPD for arrest data related to manufacturing, possession, delivery, and use of entheogenic plants and fungi along with demographics and breakdown of those arrested. WPD responded that they are not tracked.

#### Requests:

- Is there a way for WPD to look through arrest history to provide us with the data over the last two years?
- For the City Solicitor to attend the meeting with the petitioners and be prepared to assist the Commission in understanding our authority over both de-prioritization and decriminalization of these, and other, drugs.
- Petitioners have requested an end to the threat of arrest for first responders and veterans using psilocybin mushrooms to treat conditions like depression, PTSD, and addiction.
- For the Director of Public Health and the Commissioner of Health and Human Services to provide an option and/or study relative to the use of entheogenic plants and fungi.
- For information from our state and local elected officials to better understand what legislation is currently proposed that would address decriminalization of these, and other, drugs.

Apparently, there is a proposal in Vermont that would decriminalize certain amounts of drugs. The proposal would create a board of experts to determine what a reasonable personal amount of drugs would look like and possession of anything under that amount would be a civil penalty to be waived if that person seeks treatment services. Backers of the bill say it shifts drug use and possession to a public health lens instead of leaning on law enforcement and prosecutors. They are seeing a lot of harm, historically, in arresting and prosecuting users. The bill files a recent study showing that black Vermonters are 14 times more likely to be prosecuted for drug

offenses than whites. Sponsors say the initiative is based on policies in Oregon and the country of Portugal.

Additional Questions/Requests from the Commissioners:

**Commissioner Creamer:** The reality is that over the last several months we have seen individuals reach out to us as a commission to move forward with something. I would like to extend an official invitation to the petitioners to come into a meeting to have an educated conversation about this.

**Commissioner Robinson:** Decriminalization is the way to go. I think what you do in your own space is up to you but I do have a few questions after reading the report.

- At what age would it be safe to use the entheogenic plants and fungi?
- How will it be distributed?
- What can safely be done while on the medicine?
- Will the use of this product be in conjunction with other programs?
- What is the average cost of this and how do people purchase it?

**Commissioner O’Callahan:** Why are we using public resources to arrest people for, what seems to be, a victimless crime? It seems there is a growing body of literature that these substances may be harmful. I want to put forth, narrowing down the purview, as this is a really big topic, a bit and the police department is a good place to go. As we move the conversation forward we talked about bring in experts and there is one person who has actually spoken at some conferences in the area who is an expert in exactly this topic. His name is Carl Hart and he is a neuro-scientist. I am not sure he would come speak to our little commission but he is certainly somebody who has a large body of work presence online and his prior public speaking events.

**James Davis:** Carl Hart now serves on the board of a corporation called Maps that is very much undermining our work across the state and across the country. That is not to say that his books are not good and we agree with a fair amount of the works he puts out there but I assure you we have lots of great experts right here in Massachusetts and we are very excited to have them attend Harvard Medical and MGH, at police departments. The other departments who have completely eliminated their narcotics units owing to some of organizing and work.

**Commissioner Hopkins:** With the decriminalization of marijuana we have an interesting model. I suggest that there is probably some statistics about the number of people who have been arrested and had their lives changed before that decriminalization verses how many people have been impacted post-decriminalization. I think that would be an interesting thing to maybe get statistics on. The numbers have probably dropped substantially. I am aware that there are some real benefits for people using things like micro dosing. This is a very interesting topic and can benefit lots of people. I do have one concern though and that is making it something for just first responders and veterans. I would suggest that that is limiting and giving some preference to a small class of people when it could be for all people. I am also wondering whether

decriminalizing the use of these plant based medicines might actually help in the efforts to study it.

**Commissioner Shemitz:** I am curious about the data. The police department did not have the data we asked for. How much of a problem is it? Is this the only, or the best way, to open up access to these? I know there is a lot of work being done around having guided experiences when using these and simply free access to drugs that can potentially be really dangerous or have bad side-effects really concerns me. I am not an expert and I have not done the research in the area but my question is what are the different avenues to broadening access and whether decriminalization, as opposed to putting money into more research, is the best approach?

#### **D. Planning discussion in preparation for the annual meeting with the Worcester Police Department**

Our annual meeting is in June. What information would we like to receive for this year's meeting? Last year we requested, and received, the annual hate crimes states, the annual bureau of professional standards report and the report on the review of the 6-month body camera pilot and information on CCOPS and updates on the use of surveillance technology. Have questions ready for our next meeting.

**Commissioner Hopkins:** WPD does more than just core policing. What are police officers asked to do and spend most of their time doing beyond core policing? How can we look at that and figure out ways to help with that challenge? That is something I would like to explore.

**Commissioner O'Callahan:** Can we get an update on the RITE training? Also, we have previously asked about CIT training. There was a goal to get police officers trained in that area to get up to the recommendations of the ACLU.

#### **4. Communication Received: Update on the Worcester Police Department Racial Intelligence Training and Engagement (RITE)**

#### **5. Adjournment**

Our next meeting will be March 7, 2022