

**Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 1, 2023, 6:00pm**

Esther Howland Chamber (3rd flr.) City Hall
455 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01608

Virtual meeting link:

<https://cow.webex.com/j.php?MTID=m9d233db4f78bb0528628acf433e3ce8a>

Meeting number: 2311 007 3698 Password: C6GputMFp79 Phone: 415-655-0001

Attendance:

Present: Chairperson Ellen Shemitz, Guillermo Creamer Jr., Elizabeth O'Callahan, Edward G. Robinson, Jacqueline Yang

Absent: Charles Hopkins, Jamaine Ortiz, LaToya Lewis

Staff: Jayna Turchek

Call to order and introductions

Chairperson Shemitz opened the meeting at 6:04pm and welcomed members and the public. Director. Turchek provided the technology instructions for public access to the meeting.

Approval of meeting minutes from April 3, 2023

Commissioner Creamer moved approval of meeting minutes from April 3, 2023. Commissioner Robinson seconded the motion. All approved by roll call 5-0-0.

Legislative advocacy/ requests for endorsement:

- A. **MA H. 1597 / S. 983 An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors (Temperance Staples, Living in Freedom Together)**
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/HD3295>

Temperance Staples joined the Commission via WebEx representing Living in Freedom Together., Equality Model Massachusetts Coalition (EMMC).

She shared the following: This group stands for the partial decriminalization of the sex trade protecting the victim and prosecuting the abuser. There is no question that Worcester is struggling with Homelessness, drug addiction and gender-age violence which is the sex trade.

This bill, An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors would establish a Commission of social services agencies, law enforcement etc. to protect women's rights, work on reviewing wrongful records which prevents access to housing

reunification with children, and other social determinants. Mary Keefe and Tricia Farley-Bouvier are the presenters in the Mass. House of Representatives. So Far 34 other House Representatives have signed on to the bill.

The Commission was asked to endorse the legislation described.

Question to the Commission from the Chairperson: Is there any opposition?

Response:

The issue would be more about understanding of prostitution and what the bill would do rather than opposition. There is this myth that prostitution is something one chooses to do.

Question to guest: Have you worked with LIFT in Worcester?

Response: Yes, Ms. Staples is from LIFT.

Question to guest: Does law enforcement support this bill?

Response: Worcester's DA and Sheriff Department support the bill. Meetings with other law enforcement entities are being set up around the State. LIFT has worked with law enforcement for some time now and has prevented significant incarceration of woman.

Chairperson Shemitz moved to endorse and support MA H. 1597 / S. 983 An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors. Commissioner Creamer seconded the motion. Motion approved by roll call. (5/0/0)

B. MA H. 922 / S. 2177 An Act advancing water access equity through utility reporting requirements (Professor Martha Davis and Jacob Hayward, Research Associate, Northeastern University School of Law)
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H922>

Professor Martha Davis introduced Jacob Hayward, Research Associate, Northeastern University School of Law) working with Human Rights and Global Economy program at Northeastern. One of the key issues the program has been working on is equitable water quality throughout the State.

He is asking for support of MA H. 922 / S. 2177 An Act Advancing Water Access Equity through utility reporting requirements. Passage of this bill would provide the best access to water nationwide and prevent discrimination of water usage. This bill requires water utilities to report non-payment, deferred payment, service disconnections and customer assistance requests. This information is already being collected by water utilities. The bill makes this information public so appropriate groups can determine where problems are, usually high cost of water and lack of access, and work to solve

the situations. This data is tracked by zip code and can identify economic and racial disparities. This way customers can be treated equally.

A coalition has been developed over the past few months including The National Resource Defense Council, The National Consumer Law Center, as well as local groups Conservation Law Foundation, Greenroots for Civil Rights, Mass. Law Reform Institute and the Massachusetts State Rights Council to the Civil Rights Commission.

A similar bill was enacted in New Jersey last year. Illinois and California have also adopted similar bills and Maryland is considering a bill to achieve access to water.

Question: What data is there related to shut offs etc.?

Response: We don't have data because it is not public. For Worcester and local area, the no cut off rule has continued so, there are not many shut offs. However, this is not true in other parts of the state. Other data is not available and the purpose of this bill to have the data.

Question: Do you know how many local rural people depend on private companies.?

Response: A little different from the question we can say statewide private verses public water utilities. 5% of the population relies on private water. This bill will not effect people who have private wells.

Question: Is there any opposition to this bill?

Response: None has surfaced. There is an effort to put some dollars to this bill to assist with the collection of data. In the long run this bill will help the utilities to assure customers have water at an affordable rate. It was noted that in California, number are showing race was an issue for access to water.

Question: In Massachusetts, are there customer assistance programs?

Response: Individual companies do have this program, but we do not have any data. There may be people that are eligible and not enrolled. This is the information that this bill would make public. Sometimes these programs are crafted that do not reach the people who need the assistance. For example, Boston program gives discount for Seniors, not all seniors need the discount.

Question: How many renters are responsible for their own water bill?

Response: There is a report done, but information was not at hand. Usually, landlords pay the water bill. New construction requires units to have their own water meter.

Commissioner Creamer moved that the Commission endorse MA H. 922 / S. 2177 An Act Advancing Water Access Equity through utility reporting requirements. Commissioner Robinson seconded the motion. All approved by roll call (5-0-0).

C. MA H. 1710 / S. 942 An Act to Promote Public Safety and Better Outcomes for Young Adults (Sana Fadel, Citizens for Juvenile Justice)

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H1710>

Sana Fadel, Deputy Director of Citizens for Juvenile Justice presented the following: CJJ is a statewide advocacy program that advocate for at risk youth or youth involve with criminal justice issues. This is done through research, education, advocacy and coalition building. The youth are in their twenties and tend to be youth of color.

CJJ began in 1994 when the national and state crime bills were introduced suggesting racial youth were creating the crime and there would be more crime if something was done so there needs to be “more time for adult crime.”

CJJ is still trying to keep youth out of the adult system. Prior to 2012 if a person was 17 or older, he/she was prosecuted as an adult. If there as an altercation at school between a 16 and 17 year old person, the 16 year old would be in the youth system and the 17 year old would be In the adult system. There was advocacy to change this. CJJ advocated that the brain of the 17 year old was similar to the s16 year old and the implications of being in the adult system has significant consequences for life. The focus needs to be on positive youth development. They need to mature in school, social civic engagement, and other factures. Research shows there are two reasons why youth either resist or persist is engaging in crime. One is authority and second meeting developmental milestones on time. The youth who had mature were able to resist being involve with crime. Those youth that did not met these milestones persisted in crimes.

The adult system is about punishment which prevents benefiting from social systems once release. In Massachusetts College is available to ex-prisoners. In the juvenile system the record does not follow the person once released.

Discussion:

Comment: Focus in the criminal justice system is rehabilitation and there is a lot that is lacking in the adult criminal justice. By definition you don't learn skills through punishment you do by skill development. Where do you draw the line? Not close when 17 years old.

Public comment (Patrick H.): How would you respond to some who would say this is being soft on crime.

Answer: Juvenile system is seen as soft. It is tough. You do have incarceration, you have a record. First time arrest doubles there chance of dropping out of high school. If

arraigned increases chance of dropping out of high school by eight times. There are diversionary programs, juveniles it is diversion from going to court knowing the harms of legal system intervention. Goal is we want you to take responsibility. Different tools. If we only look at one tool (being hard on young people) and no others there are real harms. Help young people learn and mature.

Question: What are the stats for 18-20 year olds that are incarcerated and what percentage of those are young people of color.

Answer: Don't have it in front of me. Go to Raisetheage.org Court Capacity page. Gives current numbers up to 17 and then 18, 19, and 20 year olds separately. We don't have that data by race. If only looking at incarceration (not the big front door): in MA juvenile system the racial disparities black boys 7.5 times higher than white boys. Latino boys 4.5 times white boys. There is a systemic focus on reducing those disparities. The adult stats for Massachusetts we do not have as they do not release it.

Question: Restorative justice programs exist?

Answer: Tend to be District Attorney programs, more prevalent in juvenile system. More use by individual police departments that go beyond age 18.

Question: Have you had any support getting support from the public safety community.

Answer: Yes. Sheriff Tompkins in Hampton County. District Attorney Sullivan, Franklin, Hampshire Counties has been a supporter of Raise the Age. Former DA Rollins and former DA Harrington have supported. She is doing individual outreach to DAs and Sheriffs. Some law enforcement and handful of former police chiefs.

Comment: Has there been any start to a conversation with WPD?

Answer: Reached out to DA Early, waiting for response. Not sure if outreach has been done with WPD.

Chairperson Shemitz asked if Commissioners felt they had enough information for a vote or wait until a later date.

Commissioner Creamer motioned to add a friendly amendment to share how the Commission has voted to be shared with local law enforcement.

Chairperson Shemitz motioned Commission support An Act to Promote Public Safety and Better Outcomes for Young Adults the results of said Commission vote be communicated with the Worcester Police Department. Commissioner Creamer seconded. All approved by roll call 5-0-0.

Planning for future meetings:

A. City Clerk regarding voter education (June 12, 2023)

Planning discussion:

- Commissioner Creamer will abstain from the conversation.
- Are there groups in the city performing voting education? Agreed it would be helpful to invite community groups doing this work to the meeting.
- Can we have overlay maps to review and discuss?
- Could we request the Clerk list all those who have successfully made it to the ballot?

B. Annual meeting with Worcester Police Department (July 10, 2023)

- Agreed to invite WPD for July 10, 2023
- Follow up on outstanding requests (February 2023)
- Add request for Police detail public request process including fees/requirements for community events
- Would like a moment of silence for Sgt Leto and expression of gratitude for his work over the years.

Update on Vote 16 conversation with Worcester Youth Council (Guillermo Creamer)

Chairperson Shemitz and Commissioner Creamer met with the Worcester Youth Council. Important for youth to lead. They are looking into putting together a pledge and plan to engage the public in the Fall.

Other: Commissioner Creamer acknowledged that today is May Day (May 1) and the importance of unions and the important work they do in support of workers rights.

Adjournment at 7:16pm Next meeting: Monday June 12, 2023, 6pm, Worcester City Hall– Voter education campaign conversation with City Clerk Nikolin Vangjeli