

STATE OF CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



**Regular Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 13, 2024
2:00 p.m.
Via Microsoft TEAMS**

Commissioners Present

Nicholas Kapoor, Chairperson
Edward Mambruno, Secretary
Sujata Gadkar-Wilcox
Lisa Giliberto
Alex Harris
Andrew Norton
Edith Pestana
Joseph Suggs
Tamara Titre

Staff Present

Tanya Hughes, Executive Director	Cheryl Sharp, Deputy Director
Kimberly Jacobsen, Legal Managing Director	Shawn Burns, Regional Manager
Travis Fuller, Regional Manager	Spencer Hill, HRO Attorney
Courtney Shields, HRO Attorney	Robin Fox, HRO Attorney
Robin Trepanier, HRO Attorney	Darcy Strand, Legislative Liaison
Mathew Diaz, HRO Trainee	Maria Seminara, HRO Trainee
John Conway, HRO Trainee	Melissa Josephs, HRO Trainee
Darian Pitts, Executive Secretary	Kellye Hudson, Executive Secretary
Anthony Pragano, Executive Trainee	Maria Mayer, Legal Secretary
Laura Thurston, Assistant Attorney General	

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Nicholas Kapoor called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM.

II. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Commissioner Kapoor informed that a quorum had been achieved with 7 out of 9 Commissioners present. He also noted that Commissioners Harris and Titre were expected. He entreated everyone to be brief with their comments due to the extensive agenda.

He informed the annual evaluation of Executive Director Hughes has concluded. He also congratulated Commissioner Gadkar-Wilcox on her election as State Senator-elect for the 22nd district of Trumbull, Monroe, and Bridgeport. The Chair noted that she will be with the Commission for one more meeting and will be more formally celebrated at the December meeting.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Secretary Mambruno asked for a motion to approve the 2024-09-11 and the 2024-10-09 Commission Meeting Minutes as corrected/presented respectively. Prior to the vote,

Commissioner Giliberto noted that she had not been present for the 2024-10-09 Commission meeting and therefore would abstain from voting on that item. A brief discussion ensued concluding with the decision to vote on the items separately.

To Approve the 2024-09-11 Commission Meeting Minutes:

Motion: E. Pestana

Seconded: L. Giliberto

Vote:

Yes: 7 (Gadkar-Wilcox, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

To Approve the 2024-10-09 Commission Meeting Minutes:

Motion: E. Pestana

Seconded: A. Norton

Vote:

Yes: 6 (Gadkar-Wilcox, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs)

No: 0

Abstain: 1(Giliberto)

Did not Vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

IV. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS – VOTE REQUIRED

Presented by Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp.

Department of Administrative Services

Staff representing the Department of Administrative Services were Commissioner Michelle Gilman, Deputy Commissioner & Chief Human Resources Officer, Nicholas Hermes, Administrator of Equal Employment Opportunity, Alicia Nunez, Human Resources Business Partner, Theresa Judge.

This plan was recommended for approval based on compliance with the following: 46a-68-102(a) the plan does contain all elements required by Sections 46a-68-78 through 46a-94. The agency has demonstrated every good faith effort to achieve goals and despite these efforts has been unable to do so. The agency had no deficiencies in prior plan review and therefore is in compliance with the (b)(4) standard.

The Goal Achievement is as follows:

- Hiring Goal Achievement: 45 out of 88 or 51%
- Promotional Goal Achievement 19 out of 40 or 48%
- Program Goal Achievement: 1 out of 1 or 100%

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2023 Approved; 2022 Approved; 2021 Approved; 2020 Approved; 2019 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for the Department of Administrative Services and to retain its Annual Filing Status

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: L. Giliberto

Vote:

Yes: 7 (Gadkar-Wilcox, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

**Commissioner Titre joined the meeting at 2:12 PM. **

Department of Children & Families

Staff representing the Department of Children & Families were Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly, Chief of Staff, Karrol-Ann Brown, Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Office of Diversity & Equity Monica Rams, Equal Employment Opportunity Manager, Ngina McMillian, Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist 1, Desiray Bell, Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist 2, Jennifer Burke, Temporary Worker retiree, Marcia Bonitto.

This plan was recommended for approval based on compliance with the following: 46a-68-102(a) the plan does contain all elements required by Sections 46a-68-78 through 46a-94. The agency has demonstrated every good faith effort to achieve goals and despite these efforts has been unable to do so. The agency had no deficiencies in prior plan review and therefore is in compliance with the (b)(4) standard.

The Goal Achievement is as follows:

- Hiring Goal Achievement: 128 out of 262 or 48.86%
- Promotional Goal Achievement 23 out of 49 or 46.94%
- Program Goal Achievement: 1 out of 4 or 25%

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2023 Approved; 2022 Approved; 2021 Approved; 2020 Approved; 2019 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for the Department of Children & Families and to retain its Annual Filing Status

Motion: J. Suggs

Second: S. Gadkar-Wilcox

Vote:

Yes: 8 (Gadkar-Wilcox, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

Metropolitan District Commission

Staff representing the Metropolitan District Commission were Chief Executive Officer, Scott Jellison, Equal Employment Opportunity Representative, Rita Kelley, Human Resources Director, Jamie Harlow.

This plan was recommended for approval based on compliance with the following: 46a-68-102(a) the plan does contain all elements required by Sections 46a-68-78 through 46a-94. The agency has demonstrated every good faith effort to achieve goals and despite these

efforts has been unable to do so. The agency had no deficiencies in prior plan review and therefore is in compliance with the (b)(4) standard.

The Goal Achievement is as follows:

- Hiring Goal Achievement: 12 out of 35 or 34%
- Promotional Goal Achievement 2 out of 2 or 100%
- Program Goal Achievement: 2 out of 2 or 100%

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2023 Approved; 2022 Approved; 2021 Approved; 2020 Approved; 2019 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for the Metropolitan Commission District and to retain its Annual Filing Status

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: E. Pestana

Vote:

Yes: 8 (Gadkar-Wilcox, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried

Southern Connecticut State University

Staff representing the Southern Connecticut State University were Interim President, Dr. Dwayne Smith, Interim Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Dr. Kelvin Rutledge, Director of Diversity and Equity Programs, Paula Smith.

This plan was recommended for approval based on compliance with the following: 46a-68-102(a) the plan does contain all elements required by Sections 46a-68-78 through 46a-94. The agency has demonstrated every good faith effort to achieve goals and despite these efforts has been unable to do so. The agency had no deficiencies in prior plan review and therefore is in compliance with the (b)(4) standard.

The Goal Achievement is as follows:

- Hiring Goal Achievement: 18 out of 51 or 35%
- Promotional Goal Achievement 12 out of 29 or 41%
- Program Goal Achievement: 2 out of 2 or 100%

The five-year approval history is as follows: 2023 Approved; 2022 Approved; 2021 Approved; 2020 Approved; 2019 Approved.

To Approve the Affirmative Action Plan for the Southern Connecticut State University and to retain its Annual Filing Status

Motion: L. Giliberto

Second: A. Norton

Vote:

Yes: 8 (Gadkar-Wilcox, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

V. EXEMPTION REQUEST

UConn Health: Grant Based, Collaborative and Consulting Agreements Non-Discrimination Certification Waiver Request. Presented by HRO Attorney Spencer Hill

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

Attorney Hill explained UConn Health is requesting an extension of its blanket waiver exemption for grant based, collaborative and consulting agreements. The one -year waiver is set to expire on November 30, 2024. The request is to extend the waiver for an additional year, through November 2025 subject to 4 conditions outlined in Attorney Hill's letter to UConn dated October 18, 2024. Attorney Hill further explained that the approval is needed to prevent UConn Health from being at a competitive disadvantage with similar academic medical research facilities throughout the United States.

Commissioner Kapoor entertained a motion to grant the exemption request for 1 year and to require the 4 conditions set forth in last year's motion to continue with this approval.

To Approve the Request for Exemption for UConn Health for 1 Year and to Require the Conditions Set Forth in Last Year's Motion to Continue:

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: E. Pestana

Vote:

Yes: 8 (Gadkar-Wilcox, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

VI. REQUEST TO REOPEN

In the case(s) below, Commission Counsel, Respondent or their representative, and Complainant or their representative were provided five minutes to provide opening remarks. Questions and answers from commissioners followed these remarks.

1. Robert Christopher Anderson v. Paradigm Precision Holdings, LLC
CHRO Case No. 2340190
Presented by HRO Attorney Robin S. Kinstler Fox

****Commissioner Gadkar-Wilcox left the meeting at 3:02 PM.****

To Deny the Request to Reopen CHRO Case no. 2340190 Robert Christopher Anderson v. Paradigm Precision Holding, LLC:

Motion: E. Mambruno

Second: L. Giliberto

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 7 (Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain:0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

2. Bonnie Tangredi v. Leisure Care, LLC
CHRO Case No. 2430433
Presented by HRO Attorney Courtney Shields

To Deny the Request to Reopen CHRO Case no. 2430433 Bonnie Tangredi v. Leisure Care, LLC:

Motion: L. Giliberto

Second: A. Harris

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 7(Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain:0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

3. Nadine Mezzano v. Blasius Auto Group, LLC
CHRO Case No. 2430535
Presented by HRO Attorney Megan Graefe

To Approve Reopening CHRO Case no. 2430535 Nadine Mezzano v. Blasius Auto Group, LLC:

Motion: A. Harris

Second: L. Giliberto

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 7(Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain:0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

4. Granisha Lashay Ellison v. The Curtis House
CHRO Case No. 2430531
Presented by HRO Attorney Robin Trepanier

To Deny the Request to Reopen CHRO Case no. 2430531 Granisha Lashay Ellison v. The Curtis House:

Motion: L. Giliberto

Second: A. Harris

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 7(Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain:0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Approval of 2025 Regular Meeting Schedule

Chair Kapoor informed that the meeting schedule would be amended to change the February meeting date from Wednesday, February 12, as it is an observed state holiday, to Wednesday, February 19. He further informed he included 2 hybrid (virtual and in-person) meetings to the calendar scheduled for Wednesday, March 12, and Wednesday, September 10.

To Approve Amending the Meeting Calendar to reflect the February 2025 Meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 19, 2025, and the addition of the hybrid (virtual and in-person meetings) scheduled for Wednesday, March 12 at 450 Columbus Blvd, and Wednesday, September 10 at the LOB, and to Authorize Executive Director Hughes to forward the meeting schedule to the Secretary of the State's Office for Publishing:

Motion: L. Giliberto

Second: E. Pestana

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 7(Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain:0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

VIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

This requires a two-thirds vote of Commissioners present and voting; Staff and guests invited to attend must be noted.

- CHRO ex rel. Melissa Buxton v. Shauí Zheng & NRT New England, LLC and Jose Coelho
CHRO Case Nos. 2450117 & 2450118
Presented by HRO Attorney Robin Trepanier

Chair Kapoor entertained a motion to enter Executive Session.

To enter Executive Session and to invite into Executive Session the following individuals: Executive Director Hughes, Deputy Director Sharp, Managing Attorney Jacobsen, Assistant Attorney General Thurston, and HRO Attorney Trepanier.

Motion: E. Pestana

Second: A. Norton

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 7 (Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The Motion to enter Executive Session carried with two-thirds in the affirmative and Executive Session began at 3:40 PM.

Commissioners Kapoor, Giliberto, Harris, Mambruno, Norton, Pestana, Suggs, and Titre returned after Executive Session at 3:53 PM.

Chair Kapoor reconvened the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities into public session and noted no actions or votes were taken in the Executive Session.

IX. VOTE ON EXECUTIVE SESSION ITEMS

1. CHRO ex rel. Melissa Buxton v. Shaui Zheng & NRT New England, LLC and Jose Coelho
CHRO Case Nos. 2450117 & 2450118
Presented by HRO Attorney Robin Trepanier

To file CHRO ex rel. Melissa Buxton v. Shaui Zheng & NRT New England, LLC and Jose Coelho, CHRO Case Nos. 2450117 & 2450118 in the Judicial District of Hartford and to seek injunctive relief, punitive damages and a civil penalty.

Motion: J. Suggs

Second: T. Titre

Discussion: None

Vote:

Yes: 7 (Giliberto, Harris, Norton, Mambruno, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)

No: 0

Abstain: 0

Did not vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

X. DIVISION REPORTS

Executive Director's Report

Director Hughes offered congratulations to Commissioner Gadkar-Wilcox, advised that her report would be very brief, and that Attorney Jacobsen would introduce some of the agency's new hires.

She went on to report that meetings with DOL, OPM, OTG, EEO, HR, OLR, OAG and BITS continue. Progress continues to be made with creating an electronic filing system for Affirmative Action Plans. The AA Taskforce will now meet the second Thursday of every other month. Work on the Affirmative Action Regulations has also been completed and shared with commissioners. She announced that Travis Fuller has been selected as the new manager for the Southwest Region and will be introduced as such along with the other new hires by Managing Attorney Jacobsen.

Director Hughes further reported that upgrades to telephones at 450 Columbus are underway, and completion of some reasonable accommodation requests have resulted in upgrades to make the CHRO offices more handicap accessible. She stated that her work on

the Task Force to Continue the Study of Comprehensive Needs of Children continues, as well as her work with CTRP3. The agency-wide meeting held on Tuesday, October 29 at Killam's Point in Branford, with its focus on environmental justice, was well received.

She went on to note announce the planned Writers Workshops, the updates to the Teleworking process, and completion of the EEOC contract resulting in receipt of \$1,125,955.00 for deposit into the General Fund.

In conclusion she reported that the 2024 Leaders and Legends Awards and Equity Forum will take place on November 14 and entreated all the Commissioners to attend as guests of CHRO; over 300 guests are expected.

Legal Managing Director Jacobsen reported about the volume of hiring over the past few months at the agency. She went on to introduce some of the newly hired/promoted staff: Southwest Regional Manager, Travis Fuller, Matthew Diaz HRO Trainee, Southwest Region, Martina Seminara, HRO Trainee Southwest Region, Melissa Joseph, HRO Trainee Southwest Region, Kellye Hudson, Executive Secretary to Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp, Anthony Pragano, Executive Trainee for the Executive Office, Maria Mayer, Legal Secretary, and John Conway HRO Trainee Eastern Region. She also noted new hires that were not able to make the Commission meeting, John Torres, Housing Discrimination Unit Trainee, and Cameron Deslaurier, HRO Trainee, Eastern Region. Chair Kapoor welcomed everyone and thanked them for joining the agency.

Legal Update

Legal Managing Director Kimberly Jacobsen reported on two cases that had been argued at the Supreme Court in the last month. Both cases were argued by HRO Attorney Michael Roberts. One case involved termination of parental rights due to religious reasons and the right for the complainant to file a discrimination case with the CHRO.

The second case, a disability discrimination complaint where the complainant's attorney tried to amend the complaint to add a reasonable accommodation claim. The referee allowed the amendment pursuant to the regulations. The respondent filed an interlocutory appeal. The issues were whether this was ripe for appeal and whether it was an error for the referee to allow the amendment.

She concluded that CHRO's arguments seemed to go well, and the hope is for favorable decisions on both cases.

Outreach Report

Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp encouraged the Commissioners to come to the Leaders and Legends Awards ceremony, and noted all the dignitaries scheduled to be present, as well as the honorees. She also took a moment to congratulate Sreenidi Bala for being selected as the 2024 Girls Leading Change Cohort and her trip to the White House to receive her award. She went on to report the CHRO would be sponsoring a civil rights social justice youth summit in May that will be held at UConn Law School. She concluded that the CHRO has partnered with Wesleyan University to reach out and provide educational options to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. She encouraged the group to review the written Outreach Report.

Legislative Update

Legislative Liaison, Darcy Strand reported she is working with HRO Attorney Spencer Hill and other members of the Legal Department and Contract Compliance unit on finalizing the Disparity study report. Once completed it will be shared with the commissioners.

She further reported that the Legislative Committee is working on the CHRO's Legislative agenda. In addition to legislation that will result from the Disparity Study, CHRO anticipates introducing new legislation. Work continues on crafting the language for the new legislation and complaint processing regulations.

XI. ANNOUNCEMENT OF TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Commission Meeting will occur on Wednesday, December 11, 2024, at 2:00 PM. This meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT
To Adjourn**

Motion: L. Giliberto
Second: A. Norton
Discussion: None

Vote

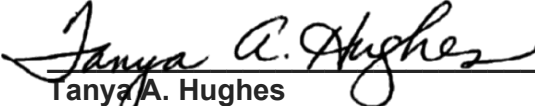
Yes: 7 (Giliberto, Harris, Norton, Mambruno, Pestana, Suggs, Titre)
No: 0
Abstain: 0
Did Not Vote: 1 (Kapoor)

The motion carried.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:19 PM.

The Minutes of the Regular Meeting dated November 13, 2024, were approved on December 11, 2024.

Prepared by:


Tanya A. Hughes
Executive Director