



# Public Meeting

## Human Rights Commission

### Meeting Minutes

Fitchburg, Ma 01420

FITCHBURG CITY CLERK

*Oct 15 2021 1:17 pm*

Date: September 20, 2021

Time: 5:30pm

Location: via Zoom

In attendance were:

Commissioners: Hafsa Asfa, Maryam Ashraf, Jamie Darcangelo, Cheryl Maguy-Stewart, David Roth and Barbara Nealon

Guests included Iris Coloma-Gaines, Esq, Laren De Oliveira, Esq and State Rep Michael Kushmerek

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#### AGENDA

- Called meeting to order at 5:35pm
- Welcoming and Introductions {attendance}noted above
- Review of previous meeting minutes June 2021-noted
- Public Comment Period-*Opportunity for the public to speak during a Commission Meeting*

*Chairperson or designee will ask if anyone in the audience wishes to speak on any matter appearing on the agenda. If you wish to address the commission, raise your hand, when recognized, you must stand state your name and address and the reason for your speaking-none*

New Business

- Presentation: An Act Relative to Language Access and Inclusion S.2040/H.3199  
Provided by Iris Coloma-Gaines, Esq, Mass Law Reform Institute, Lauren De Oliveira, Esq, Community Legal Aid in Fitchburg- both members of the Language Access for All Coalition Committee and State Representative Michael Kushmerek who is a Co-sponsoring Legislator.

This bill would initially apply to nine essential public-facing state agencies that provide services such as healthcare, housing, education, and childcare, before expanding to include other executive offices. Included is Massachusetts- Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Early Education and Care, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Transitional Assistance, Department of Unemployment Assistance, Registry of Motor Vehicles and Department of Public Health.

Statistically 1 in 10 residents of Fitchburg speak a language other than English and the gap in language access for these individuals have become more prominent during COVID.

Several towns haven't updated their language access plans according to their populations, making the need for language access heavily underrepresented

The pre-existing executive order in regard to language access has proven to be weak due to the lack of enforcement. Thus, this new act will provide proper interpreters and translators in multiple occupational fields and actually enforce these new language access protocols in court. The bill will also include interpreters for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and aims for success in 160 state representative offices.

Presenters invite Commissioners to write personal testimonies in support of the bill and Attorney Coloma-Gaines will send out a basic template for those who are willing to write one

- Representative Kushmerek remained for the meeting to provide the Commissioner's with other areas he has been working on at the State House to name a few included:  
A bill to ensure that the teaching population is accurately representative of the student population is under review. This bill aims to provide a diverse educational environment by allowing students to self-select whether or not they want to

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take the MTEL, or the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure, a well known standardized test meant for educators that proved to be an inaccurate display of student's influence in the classrooms and one of the main factors many POC did not become teachers.

Another legislation regarding improvements in mental health services is also being considered. This bill aims to make more room for patients, hire more professionals, and start psychiatric treatment in the ER while patients wait for beds to empty in the psychiatric care centers so the risk of patients' conditions worsening is lessened.

Old Business-

- Education Racial Justice Group/SURJ subgroup reports-no report
- Topics, programs for discussion for future meetings-none noted
- Other: Based on the number of +COVID cases /pandemic membership unanimously agreed to remain remote at this time.

- Adjournment 6:52pm

Meeting minutes submitted by,

Maryam Ashraf and Barbara Nealon