

**Human Rights Board  
Pinellas County  
September 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

The Human Rights Board (HRB) met in regular session at 9:58 AM on this date in the Fifth Floor Conference Room at the Office of Human Rights (OHR), 400 South Fort Harrison Avenue, Clearwater, Florida.

**Present**

Charles W. Thomas, Chair, Tax Collector  
Mike Twitty, Vice-Chair, Property Appraiser  
Lisa Arispe, Employees' Advisory Council Representative  
Ricardo Davis, representing Joan M. Vecchioli, Unified Personnel Board Representative  
Thomas Dunne, representing Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller  
Nicholas Eddy, representing Kathleen Peters, County Commissioner  
Rodney Marion, representing Barry A. Burton, County Administrator  
Susan Morse, representing Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections  
Jeff Rohrs, Chief Information Officer, Business Technology Services  
Peggy Rowe, Interim Director, Human Resources

**Not Present**

Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller  
Barry A. Burton, County Administrator  
Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections  
Kathleen Peters, County Commissioner  
Joan M. Vecchioli, Unified Personnel Board Representative

**Others Present**

Jeffery Lorick, Director, OHR  
Betina Baron, Compliance Manager, OHR  
Carol Strickland, Administrative Support Specialist, OHR  
Keiah Townsend, Assistant County Attorney  
Sitara Coyle, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
Other interested individuals

*All documents provided to the Clerk's Office have been made a part of the record.*

**CALL TO ORDER/ATTENDANCE**

Chair Thomas called the meeting to order at 9:58 AM; whereupon, Ms. Strickland conducted a roll call of the members and others present.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JULY 17, 2023 MEETING**

Ms. Arispe made a motion to approve the minutes of the July 17 meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Twitty and carried unanimously.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No one responded to the Chair's call for public comment.

## **EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (EEOC) UPDATE**

Mr. Lorick provided an update regarding various EEOC events and noted that via a workshare agreement with the EEOC Regional Office, the Pinellas County OHR will conduct investigations for cases that the Regional Office has received because it has exceeded its capacity to conduct investigations independently.

## **PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT (PWFA)**

Deviating from the order of the agenda, Mr. Lorick referred to a document included in the agenda packet and provided a summary of the PWFA, relating that the EEOC Regional Office has not yet finished writing guidance regarding it; and that until the guidance is provided, all complaints received will be forwarded to the Regional Office for investigation.

## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD) UPDATE**

Mr. Lorick indicated that the OHR has yet to receive payment for case processing from the federal government; that those payments comprise approximately 25% of the revenue within the OHR budget; that the Department is currently investigating eight Fair Housing Act discrimination cases; that 75% of cases this year were completed in under 100 days of investigation, which is a requirement; and that HUD completes a performance assessment of the OHR every two years; whereupon, he noted that the results of the assessment will be reported to the Board.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Lorick related that the increase in cases against unfair housing are for various reasons, including, but not limited to, disability, service animals, and unfair eviction, and provided comments regarding the shortage of affordable housing throughout the county; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding affordability of homes and housing stock.

## **ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY**

Referring to a draft of the *Pinellas County Anti-Harassment Policy* included in the agenda packet, Mr. Lorick, with input from Attorney Townsend, summarized the changes to the policy, noting that the Unified Personnel Board (UPB) recommended that the policy be revised so that it could be adopted as a Unified Personnel System-wide policy; that, if approved, the policy will be presented to the UPB for adoption; and that the internal operating procedures for how the OHR conducts investigations will be developed and presented to the HRB for approval at a later date.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Lorick, with input from Attorney Townsend, indicated that the changes made to the policy are not substantive, and therefore do not require employee acknowledgement; and that it is mandatory for all supervisors and managers to be aware of and trained on the policy; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding interpretation of the policy, and Mr. Lorick and Ms. Baron provided input.

Mr. Lorick related that there are about 20 to 25 complaints of harassment reported to the OHR each year, with only a few leading to cause finding cases; and that the OHR is not involved in any potential disciplinary actions taken by the department in which the complaint occurred.

Mr. Eddy made a motion to accept the policy. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and carried unanimously.

## **UPDATE FROM THE ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

This item was not addressed.

## **DISCUSSION**

Mr. Lorick provided information regarding support provided by the OHR during Hurricane Idalia, highlighting the Department's language translation services within the community.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Thomas adjourned the meeting at 10:40 AM.