

**Human Rights Board
Pinellas County
September 9, 2025 Meeting Minutes**

The Human Rights Board (HRB) met in regular session at 10:00 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

René Flowers, Chair, County Commissioner
Lisa Arispe, Employees' Advisory Council Representative
Wade Childress, Chief Human Resources Officer
Teresa Del Rio, representing Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Susan Morse, representing Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections
Jeff Rohrs, Chief Information Officer, Business Technology Services (BTS)
Adam Ross, Tax Collector
Amanda Smith, representing Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Mike Twitty, Property Appraiser

Not Present

Ken Burke, Vice-Chair, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Ricardo Davis, Unified Personnel Board Representative
Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections

Others Present

Betina Baron, Director, OHR
Keiah Townsend, Assistant County Attorney
Ashley Pabilonia, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

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

CALL TO ORDER/ATTENDANCE

Chair Flowers called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. Staff conducted a roll call of those present; whereupon, Chair Flowers confirmed the presence of a quorum.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JUNE 2025 MEETING AND JUNE 2025 SPECIAL MEETING

Upon Chair Flowers' call for a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Ross made a motion. The motion was seconded by Mr. Twitty and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

Mr. Rohrs arrived at 10:02 AM.

ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY

Attorney Townsend indicated that the Anti-Harassment Policy was updated to replace former OHR Director Jeffery Lorick's name with "Director of the Office of Human Rights"; whereupon, Chair Flowers noted that the change ensures that the policy reads effectively regardless of the individual holding the position.

Upon Chair Flowers' call for a motion, Mr. Ross made a motion. The motion was seconded by Mr. Twitty and carried unanimously.

OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS BUDGET

Ms. Baron indicated that, as discussed at the last meeting, the OHR was required to submit a flat budget; that there are no changes to the budget document included in the agenda packet; and that decision packages were approved during the June 3 HRB meeting; whereupon, Chair Flowers noted that the BCC will take a final vote regarding the budget at its last budgetary process meeting on September 18.

Upon Chair Flowers' call for a motion, Ms. Arispe made a motion that the Board accept the budget. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ross and carried unanimously.

LEGAL OVERVIEW

Attorney Townsend referred to the document titled *Human Rights Board Overview*, which is included in the agenda packet, and indicated that it contains information regarding the Board's creation, composition, responsibilities, powers, and duties; and that, as previously requested by Mr. Burke, the document also contains information pertaining to Chapter 70 of the Pinellas County Code of Ordinances, including details related to its purpose and what it authorizes the OHR to do.

In response to comments and queries by Chair Flowers, Ms. Del Rio noted that Mr. Burke did not have additional input; whereupon, Chair Flowers provided brief comments related to the OHR and its good work.

In response to queries by Messrs. Rohrs, Childress, and Ross, Ms. Baron, with input from Chair Flowers, provided information regarding counties and cities in Florida that have a department with similar functions to the OHR, including details related to their titles, origination, functions, and oversight structure; whereupon, Chair Flowers indicated that she will provide the members with a list of similar departments in other Florida counties and cities.

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD) / EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (EEOC) UPDATES

Ms. Baron indicated that the OHR's federal partners have not provided an update regarding funding; that, in terms of HUD, cases are currently in the reconciliation process; and that the OHR is working on completing its EEOC case processing period by September 30; whereupon, she noted that it is anticipated that the OHR will receive \$120,000.00 from HUD for case processing, as well as an additional \$8,000.00 for a cause-finding case, which will be applied in 2026; and that the OHR has closed 80% of its cases within 100 days, which is a HUD benchmark that the OHR continuously exceeds.

Thereupon, Ms. Baron related that it is anticipated that the OHR will receive approximately \$35,000.00 from the EEOC by the end of this case processing period; and that approximately 40 cases were investigated, with 10 cases being deferred to the EEOC.

Ms. Baron indicated that staff expects to receive settlements from wage theft hearings this month; whereupon, she highlighted a recent settlement of approximately \$1,300.00 and noted that an estimated \$240,000.00 has been paid to victims of wage theft over the past five years. She related that the OHR also has a couple of public accommodation cases that are currently open, which will hopefully be settled as well.

Chair Flowers indicated that she requested that Ms. Baron provide her with a document containing more in-depth details related to cases and revenue; whereupon, at the request of Chair Flowers, Ms. Baron confirmed that she will distribute the document to the members.

Ms. Baron indicated that staff will continue to provide updates regarding usage of LanguageLine and TDD; and that staff is considering adding another phone line specifically for individuals requesting accommodations; and that staff would also like to

determine if there is advanced technology that may help ensure that individuals are properly served; whereupon, Ms. Baron provided brief comments related to trainings conducted by the OHR.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES COUNCIL UPDATE

Ms. Baron indicated that there was a Persons with Disabilities Council meeting scheduled to take place yesterday, but it was not held; and that a meeting will be held in December.

Ms. Baron indicated that the Council's members have been communicating with staff from the County's Office of Consumer Protection and the Code Enforcement Division regarding the gas station ordinance; that the ordinance allows for a gas station attendant to provide assistance to disabled individuals at the pump, if two employees are present; and that efforts are being made to restart a campaign which would reeducate the community regarding the service; whereupon, brief discussion ensued.

During discussion, Mr. Rohrs referenced Ms. Baron's earlier comments regarding TDD and indicated that BTS would be happy to work with staff related to researching more advanced technology. He also suggested that, if the Council is aware of any individuals who are more familiar with TDD technology, they might be able to provide a recommendation; whereupon, Ms. Baron related that the topic will be placed on a Council meeting agenda.

Thereupon, Ms. Baron referred to a document included in the agenda packet and noted that she, Attorney Townsend, and the Chair of the Persons with Disabilities Council created an infographic that provides an overview of the Council's actions and discussions.

DISCUSSION

Deviating from the order of the agenda, Chair Flowers indicated that, during a recent budget discussion, Commissioner Chris Scherer proposed budget reductions, including cutting all vacant positions, merging several offices, and eliminating the OHR; whereupon, Chair Flowers related that she opposed Commissioner Scherer's proposal to eliminate the OHR; that the BCC decided that it will remain in place for the following fiscal year; and that at least one workshop will take place to discuss the responsibilities and future of the OHR.

Chair Flowers provided details regarding her thoughts, ideas, and concerns related to Commissioner Scherer's proposal and emphasized the importance of the OHR's impacts on the community, indicating that she believes that the OHR is worth retaining; that she

invited the Commissioners to meet with Ms. Baron to discuss their questions and concerns, as well as to learn more with regard to the OHR and its operations; and that she will inform the members of the date of the workshop; whereupon, brief discussion ensued.

Thereupon, Chair Flowers encouraged the members to meet with Ms. Baron to discuss any thoughts or ideas pertaining to potential ways to improve the OHR or streamline specific aspects; and that the members could also express their thoughts or ideas during an HRB meeting.

BEACH ACCESS VIDEO

Chair Flowers indicated that, as previously requested, a video will be displayed regarding beach access; whereupon, staff displayed the video, and brief discussion ensued.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Flowers adjourned the meeting at 10:52 AM.