

Human Rights Board
Pinellas County
March 10, 2026 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
Ken Burke, Vice-Chair, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Wade Childress, Chief Human Resources Officer
Ricardo Davis, Unified Personnel Board Representative
Lisa McMurray, Employees' Advisory Council Representative
Jeff Rohrs, Chief Information Officer, Business Technology Services (BTS)
Adam Ross, Tax Collector
Mike Twitty, Property Appraiser

Not Present

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; whereupon, staff conducted a roll call of the members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – DECEMBER 2025 MEETING

Mr. Ross made a motion to approve the December 2025 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. McMurray and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one responded to Chair Flowers' call for public comment.

WEB ACCESSIBILITY UPDATE

Mr. Rohrs indicated that Pinellas County websites are required to comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 standards for local governments by April of this year; that staff have been working towards compliance since 2019; and that all websites managed by BTS will be compliant by the deadline.

Mr. Twitty arrived at 10:02 AM.

Mr. Rohrs related that, since 2019, contracts for third-party applications utilized by the County have included accessibility language requiring vendors to address identified deficiencies; and that BTS staff is unaware of the compliance status of any websites or applications not managed by BTS; whereupon, brief discussion ensued regarding accessibility compliance for websites managed by BTS and other County entities.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVICE FOR THE DEAF (TDD)

Ms. Baron indicated that the OHR collaborated with BTS to identify phone lines for consolidation into the OHR's phone system; that phone lines associated with Human Resources and the Property Appraiser's Office have been closed and redirected to the OHR due to concerns regarding constituents' inability to access services and inoperability of certain department phone lines; and that the consolidation efforts resulted in annual cost savings of \$180.00 for BTS; whereupon, brief discussion ensued.

In response to queries by Mr. Burke, Ms. Baron, with input from OHR Administrative Support Specialist Carol Strickland, briefly discussed the types of calls received by the OHR, including calls intended for other departments and calls unrelated to OHR services.

BUDGET

Ms. Baron referenced a document included in the agenda packet and indicated that the OHR budget was submitted on February 27; and that, based on feedback received from Mr. Burton, staff identified a budget reduction of 5.9%, which amounts to approximately \$90,000.00 in savings. She also related that, at the request of the Office of Management and Budget, she and Ms. Strickland reviewed budget trends and actual usage over the past three years.

In response to a query by Mr. Burton, Ms. Baron confirmed that the budget, as presented, represents the OHR's budget in totality, including all funded positions; whereupon, she provided a brief overview of line-item adjustments. Responding to queries by Chair Flowers and Ms. McMurray, Ms. Baron, with input by Ms. Strickland, explained that the reduction in contractual services expenditures was made based on a review of mediation services usage and the utilization of both in-house and third-party mediators.

Responding to comments by Mr. Twitty, Ms. Baron noted that the OHR is in the process of updating its devices and anticipates reimbursement from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for a majority of the associated costs; whereupon, brief discussion ensued related to extending device replacement cycles and associated cost savings.

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

Ms. Baron indicated that while HUD's budget was appropriated for the same amount as Fiscal Year 2025, training funds were reduced. She also related that the OHR continues to receive updates from HUD regarding staffing and operational adjustments; and that, despite the ongoing changes, HUD continues to defer cases to the OHR and provide technical assistance; whereupon, Ms. Baron noted that OHR staff are reviewing a 1040 tax form for funding from last fiscal year to verify reconciliation amounts; and that she hopes to have an update by June regarding the receipt of those funds.

Ms. Baron reported that the OHR received its contract from the EEOC for Fiscal Year 2026, which included an increase in case processing reimbursement from \$830.00 to \$850.00 per case while reimbursement per intake remained at \$125.00; and that, although no additional funds are attributed for outreach efforts, the EEOC continues to collaborate with the OHR on an event as part of its own outreach activities; whereupon, she indicated that the OHR is working toward closing out its EEOC contract; that the OHR has completed 50 cases and 10 intakes; that the goal for intakes has been met; and that the OHR is on track for HUD and EEOC case processing.

Responding to comments and queries by Chair Flowers, Ms. Baron discussed different payments and contract modifications utilized by the EEOC and HUD based on contract performance, case volume, and the types of cases closed.

PINELLAS COUNTY COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES UPDATE

Ms. Baron introduced Jay Burkey as the OHR's new Compliance Manager; whereupon, Mr. Burkey described his background and experience. Chair Flowers also briefly discussed his work with CareerSource Pinellas and welcomed him to the OHR.

Mr. Burkey reported that the County Council for Persons with Disabilities met last week, during which community partners provided presentations regarding various services and programs; whereupon, Ms. Baron related that Parks and Conservation Resources Director Paul Cozzie attended the meeting and was asked to provide updates related to parks, including details regarding accessibility components at newly funded parks.

Ms. Baron also related that she, Ms. Strickland, and Mr. Burkey are developing a campaign to reeducate gas station owners regarding an ordinance; that staff is collaborating with the Code Enforcement Division regarding enforcement of the ordinance; and that the Florida Department of Agriculture has provided the OHR with a list of gas stations and is assisting with ensuring that required stickers are accurate; whereupon, she noted that surveys will be conducted as part of the campaign process.

Thereupon, discussion ensued wherein Ms. Baron responded to comments and queries by the members and provided information pertaining to the reeducation campaign, including Code Enforcement's level of involvement, coordination with municipal partners, and instances in which assistance buttons at gas pumps were inoperable.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES/APRIL FAIR HOUSING MONTH

Referring to a document included in the agenda packet, Ms. Baron indicated that it contains information regarding community outreach, engagement, and education services provided by the OHR; and that it also includes details related to training completed by OHR staff. She noted that the OHR has recently received numerous requests for an overview of its services and, in response, staff has been providing presentations, pamphlets, and informational materials throughout the community; whereupon, she also indicated that the OHR will be conducting a collaborative fair housing training with the Pinellas County Housing Authority and hosting the upcoming Tampa Bay Fair Housing Symposium.

Ms. Baron thanked several members for their inclusion of the OHR in various outreach activities and events; whereupon, brief discussion ensued regarding the Kids Tag Art Pinellas Award Ceremony hosted by the Tax Collector's Office and opportunities to display and purchase the artwork submitted by participating children.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Burke indicated that he is nominating Commissioner Flowers to continue serving as Chair of the HRB; whereupon, the motion was seconded by Mr. Davis. Following Mr. Burke's call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Flowers indicated that she is nominating Mr. Burke to continue serving as Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ross and carried unanimously.

OHR UPDATE

Chair Flowers indicated that she requested that Ms. Baron meet with each County Commissioner and Constitutional Officer to answer any questions and receive feedback regarding the structure and operations of the OHR; that a public presentation regarding the OHR was also conducted; and that a study into the OHR is ongoing and will be given to Mr. Burton and Ms. Baron upon completion; whereupon, in response to comments and queries by Mr. Burke, Ms. Baron provided brief comments regarding her meetings with the Commissioners. Chair Flowers also confirmed that Commissioner Scherer still wishes to eliminate the OHR.

Mr. Burton provided an overview of information being analyzed as part of the study regarding the OHR's operations, including the amount of time spent on specific activities, impacts associated with potential restructuring, and related costs; whereupon, he indicated that the study is still in progress and will be presented to the BCC prior to development of the County budget.

In response to comments by Mr. Ross and Chair Flowers, Attorney Townsend provided information regarding procedures associated with changing the names of the OHR and the HRB; whereupon, responding to comments by Chair Flowers, Mr. Burton indicated that, since the BCC requested the study, it will first be presented to the Commissioners for discussion and direction at a Work Session.

Thereupon, discussion ensued regarding various topics related to a potential name change for the OHR, including naming conventions used by similar agencies and a prospective discussion regarding the topic by the BCC. During discussion, Chair Flowers

emphasized the importance of maintaining focus on the services provided by the OHR and ensuring equal access to those services for residents.

Ms. Baron described the volume of requests received for different types of cases. In response to queries by Ms. McMurray and Mr. Twitty, she also provided details regarding staffing, ongoing efforts to track industries associated with cases, and funds recovered through wage theft case resolutions; whereupon, additional discussion ensued regarding differences between Pinellas County's organizational structure and those of peer counties and related challenges associated with gathering comparative data for the ongoing study.

In response to comments by Ms. Baron, Chair Flowers suggested postponing consideration of composing a letter of support for the OHR on behalf of the HRB, with which Mr. Burke concurred. Further discussion ensued regarding potential scheduling conflicts between the next HRB meeting and upcoming Budget Information Sessions; whereupon, Ms. Baron expressed appreciation to the members for their continued support of the OHR and its staff.

DISCUSSION

No one responded to Chair Flowers' call for additional discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:02 AM.