

Human Rights Board
Pinellas County
July 7, 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
Wade Childress, Chief Human Resources Officer
Ricardo Davis, Unified Personnel Board Representative
Natasha Francis, representing Adam Ross, Tax Collector
Julie Marcus, Supervisor of Elections
Lisa McMurray, Employees' Advisory Council Representative
Jeff Rohrs, Chief Information Officer, Business Technology Services (BTS)
Amanda Smith, representing Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Mike Twitty, Property Appraiser

Not Present

Barry A. Burton, County Administrator
Adam Ross, Tax Collector

Others Present

Betina Baron, Director, OHR
Keiah Townsend, Assistant County Attorney
Katie Poviones, Senior Board Records Specialist, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/ATTENDANCE

Chair Flowers called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM; whereupon, at her request, staff conducted a roll call of the members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 2026 MEETING

Ms. McMurray made a motion to accept the minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Twitty and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one appeared upon the Chair's call for public comment.

ACCOMMODATION AND WEB ACCESSIBILITY UPDATE

Ms. Baron provided an update regarding the web accessibility compliance deadline, indicating that while it has been extended, BTS was already on track to meet the previous deadline; and that the OHR will continue to coordinate with BTS regarding compliance efforts; whereupon, in response to a query by Mr. Burke, she clarified that the new compliance deadline is April 27, 2027.

Ms. Baron also provided an update regarding reasonable accommodation requests associated with court processing, indicating that the OHR serves as the County's centralized Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator; and that the OHR is working with legal and court staff to streamline the accommodation request process for Pinellas and Pasco counties, address applicable ADA grant compliance requirements, and update the administrative order to outline the new process.

BUDGET

Referring to a budget document included in the agenda packet, Ms. Baron indicated that it is being provided for informational purposes; that the OHR presented its budget to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) on June 11; and that the HRB will consider the budget for approval in September; whereupon, Chair Flowers provided brief comments regarding budget reductions identified by the OHR.

Ms. Baron then noted that future considerations included in the budget identified the potential need for an additional Wage Theft Administrator due to an increase in cases and the workload of the sole staff member currently processing them.

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

Ms. Baron reported that the OHR received \$166,000.00 of its \$180,000.00 HUD funding obligation; and that the remaining funds are under review by HUD. She also noted that the OHR completed its HUD case processing period on June 30; whereupon, OHR Compliance Manager Jay Burkey indicated that the OHR closed 43 cases during the processing period; that 41 cases have been paid, while 13 remain open; and that the OHR is on track to meet its EEOC case processing goals.

Referring to performance metrics included in the agenda packet, Ms. Baron highlighted that the OHR closed 75% of its cases within 100 days, exceeding HUD's performance metric of 50%. She also reviewed housing discrimination case trends, noting that failure to make a reasonable accommodation was the most frequently reported issue; and that disability was the most common basis for complaints.

Ms. Baron then reported a significant increase in wage theft cases, indicating that 100 claims totaling approximately \$340,000.00 in alleged unpaid wages have been filed during the current fiscal year; and that 27 Special Magistrate hearings and 13 mediations and conciliations have been conducted, with approximately \$93,000.00 in wage theft ordered by the Special Magistrate; whereupon, she related that, in response to the increase in cases, the OHR is considering additional employer education and outreach regarding the wage theft ordinance.

Responding to a query by Mr. Twitty, Ms. Baron provided details regarding employers associated with recent wage theft claims and indicated that it is too early to identify a particular industry trend. In response to a query by Mr. Burke, she also clarified that administration of the wage theft ordinance is financed through the County's General Fund. Chair Flowers then related that County Attorney Jewel White had previously been asked to explore options for municipalities to contribute toward costs associated with wage theft claims originating within their jurisdictions; whereupon, in response to a query by Mr. Burke, Attorney Townsend provided an update regarding that review and considerations related to potential duplication and conflicts of interest under such an arrangement.

Ms. Baron indicated that the OHR is exploring the possibility of imposing administrative fees on employers found to have committed wage theft, potentially based upon the number of offenses; whereupon, she noted that approximately \$91,000.00 has been recovered through mediation and payments made to the OHR or directly to complainants; and that staff is reviewing potential changes to strengthen enforcement of the wage theft ordinance.

Discussion ensued regarding potential mechanisms to strengthen enforcement and recover costs associated with wage theft claims, including administrative fees, liens, and other means of holding employers financially accountable; whereupon, Attorney Townsend indicated that staff is reviewing the authority available under the existing ordinance and potential amendments.

PINELLAS COUNTY COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES UPDATE

Mr. Burkey reported that, following the retirement of the Chair of the Council for Persons with Disabilities, new officers were elected. He also provided information regarding

discussion at the Council's recent meeting concerning playground accommodations and indicated that feedback from the Councilmembers was subsequently provided to the County's Parks & Conservation Resources Department.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES / APRIL FAIR HOUSING MONTH PROCLAMATION

Mr. Burkey provided brief comments regarding recent outreach and efforts to increase public awareness of the OHR's employment discrimination and wage theft services; whereupon, he highlighted the OHR's participation in the Fair Housing Month Proclamation in April.

OHR UPDATE / CONSULTANT REPORT

Chair Flowers summarized the consultant report regarding the OHR, indicating that the analysis found that distributing OHR services among other County departments would not result in cost savings and could create additional staffing, certification, and service-access challenges. She also related that peer agencies were generally found to operate as centralized departments; and that, following discussion by the BCC, six of the seven members supported maintaining the OHR's current structure; whereupon, Chair Flowers noted that, as a result of the discussion, the Commissioners agreed to contribute a portion of their office budgets toward funding one or more scholarships for participants in the Youth Advisory Committee program.

DIRECTOR EVALUATION

Ms. Baron indicated that the Director evaluation responses received from the members were distributed. She also expressed appreciation for the feedback and recognition of the work performed by the OHR's staff. Chair Flowers then indicated that she would review with Ms. Baron any comments or requests from the members regarding matters they would like to see addressed and report back to the Board regarding the actions to be taken in response; whereupon, Mr. Childress noted that an executive evaluation form used for three other Appointing Authorities is also available for future consideration.

Ms. Baron requested consideration of a 20% salary increase to bring her compensation closer to the midpoint of the applicable pay range. Chair Flowers then indicated that, due to uncertainty regarding the County's budget outlook and potential funding reductions, she would like to defer consideration of an increase above 3% until additional information regarding the County budget is available. Discussion ensued regarding the request, including Ms. Baron's salary relative to comparable County positions, anticipated budget

constraints, and potential Countywide salary increases; whereupon, Chair Flowers related that the request will be placed on the agenda for the HRB's September meeting.

DISCUSSION

Ms. McMurray expressed appreciation to Ms. Baron for her leadership during the past year and thanked Mr. Twitty for providing information regarding property tax matters.

Ms. Marcus provided brief comments regarding the Supervisor of Elections Office's responsibility to remain impartial in matters related to elections and emphasized the distinction between providing education and engaging in advocacy; whereupon, Chair Flowers noted that elected officials are similarly limited to providing education rather than lobbying.

Chair Flowers recognized Mr. Twitty for his efforts related to legislation providing prospective homebuyers with property tax information prior to purchasing a home; whereupon, Mr. Twitty indicated that implementation will be fully effective in February of next year, with some platforms implementing the feature earlier.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Flowers adjourned the meeting at 10:48 AM.