

**PERSONNEL AND COMPENSATION COMMITTEE
MINUTES
(REMOTELY)
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2020
3:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: John S. Vero, Chairman
Leigh J. Benton, Thomas Faggione, Kevindaryan Lujan
Paul Ruszkiewicz, Joel Sierra, Kathy A. Stegenga, Laurie Tautel

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader
Barry Cheney, Legislator
Peter Tuohy, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Steven M. Neuhaus, County Executive
Harold Porr, Deputy County Executive
J. Daniel Bloomer, Director of Operations
Langdon Chapman, County Attorney
Deborah Slesinski, Budget Director
Deanna Crawford, Budget Analyst
Gretchen Riordan, Budget Analyst

Mr. Vero called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. All committee members were present with the exception of Mr. Ruszkiewicz who arrived at 3:33 p.m.

Ms. Stegenga made the motion for discussion
on Human Rights Commission recent activities,
seconded by Mr. Lujan.

Mr. Vero stated that there was a Human Rights meeting held after the Legislative session last Thursday at 5:30 p.m. Some Legislators were able to join the meeting but some had trouble logging onto the Zoom call. He added that it took him about 18 minutes to get on the call. He thanked Ms. Esposito for having one meeting in the evening.

Ms. Esposito stated that they set their calendar every January and she is aware the Legislators have requested more than once to have their meetings on days that do not conflict with the Legislative sessions. The dates they pick have always worked best with the Human Rights Commission, she has no say on the date.

Ms. Esposito provided an update on recent activities with the Human Rights Commission and provided a presentation. She serves as a primary source for constituents when they have questions or complaints they want to file regarding human rights.

Mr. Vero asked if there has been an increase or decrease in complaints over the last few months with Covid-19.

Ms. Esposito responded that there has been a decrease in phone calls. She explained that people are in survival mode.

Mr. Lujan stated that because these people are in survival mode and the calls have declined does not mean there is not still a need.

Ms. Esposito agreed with Mr. Lujan's statement and added that discrimination has not gone away, stopped or decreased, people are focusing on their basic need.

Mr. Lujan added that he did not want anyone to think that there is less racism when reality is they are seeing a lot of issues and challenges.

Ms. Esposito stated that more and more people are coming out since the movement, not so much coming out to file a formal complaint. Whether they are coming to attend her presentations or meetings, they share their experience of discrimination, some recent, some current but also from the past. There has been an increase in people who are empowered to share their stories.

Mr. Faggione requested clarification from Ms. Esposito and stated that formal complaints have not increased but racism has increased in Orange County. He asked where can she cite the factual evidence for that.

Ms. Esposito responded that it is not that racism has increased, people feeling empowered to share their stories has increased. There is no way she could keep track because they are not formal complaints. She does not keep track of people sharing their stories of racism. There was a person, a black man, during one of her trainings who shared his first memory of racism. He was growing up down south in the 1950s, he was seven years old going into a bathroom getting yelled at by his mother because he went into the whites only bathroom.

Mr. Vero pointed out that things back then were definitely different in the south than they were in the north.

Ms. Esposito reviewed the workshops she hosts noting that some are more popular and often requested referring to "Racism, Racial Equality and Privilege Workshop" which has been the only one that has been requested over the last five months.

Ms. Bonelli commented on the signature workshops, particularly "Racism, Racial Equality and Privilege Workshop" and asked who was requesting them.

Ms. Esposito replied that she works with the Ramapo Library Systems and held two sessions for them. There were about 160 people combined and it was for the entire library system. There are multiple agencies including Recap, United Way, some not for profit agencies, Mental Health Association who had her come in and do all staff training. There were a few coalitions such as the Newburgh and Poughkeepsie combined Healthy Black and Latin Coalition. There was a group out of Valley Central called the Valley Central Parents for Social Justice who suggested she go in and do a workshop for community members. She did workshops for all of Monroe Woodbury School District administrators. The District Attorney's office invited her to do training for his office.

Ms. Bonelli asked if the ideas and concepts in the signature workshops are in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission and the Commission members or is this something that she created independently on her own.

Ms. Esposito stated that she independently creates the workshops. She can adjust the workshop to the needs of the agency but they are standard.

Mr. Faggione asked if the workshops that she presents need to be approved by the Human Rights Commission and is there oversight as to what she is presenting.

Ms. Esposito responded no. She added that similar to any other department head, she is given the trust to bring forward correct information and the correct data representing the Human Rights Commission.

Mr. Faggione asked if she felt that Orange County Government has been established or inherited a systemic racial problem.

Ms. Esposito replied that like any other government, they have an inherited racial disparity that they need to look at and make sure they are working towards racial equity.

Mr. Faggione asked if it was true that it exists today throughout Orange County.

Ms. Esposito responded yes, 100%.

Mr. Faggione asked if Ms. Esposito believed in the critical race theory.

Ms. Esposito responded no.

Mr. Faggione asked if Ms. Esposito believed in the 1619 project.

Ms. Esposito responded yes she does.

Mr. Faggione asked Ms. Esposito if she believed in the United States Constitution.

Ms. Reed asked Mr. Faggione to cease his questions. Ms. Esposito was not on the witness stand, this is her presenting an overview of her department. Ms. Esposito's personal views are professional but this goes outside the line of questioning as to what her overview of her department is.

Mr. Faggione stated that he wanted background information.

Mr. Lujan stated that the District Attorney's office received training and in-light-of everything going on, they must have felt it was important to learn about racism, racial equity and privilege and the need for diversity and equality.

Ms. Esposito stated that she was contacted by the District Attorney's office and she provided one training for them. They were specifically looking for anti-bias.

Mr. Cheney thanked Ms. Esposito for providing insight through her meeting a few weeks ago. He asked if she had any requests from private businesses to do workshops for them.

Ms. Esposito responded that the most recent request came from Walden Savings Bank who wanted the Diversity and Inclusion training.

Mr. Cheney asked if any of the organizations pay a fee for the training sessions.

Ms. Esposito stated that some of them do pay a fee and some do not. The Human Rights Commission decided that they do not want to charge for these professional development trainings. If any organization offers to pay a fee, they tell them there is a suggested honorarium if you would like to donate towards the Human Rights Commission Scholarship fund, they can.

Ms. Esposito continued with her update on the Human Rights Commission by stating that when the Covid-19 pandemic first started they provided their trainings virtually. They held a three-part series on community resources and she brought in twelve different partners who spoke about resources for the community. There were four hundred people who attended and the numbers went up from there. She mentioned that the benefit of having the meetings virtually is that they can be recorded which they are and are available on the Orange County website.

Mr. Lujan commented on the workshops that he saw and noted how helpful they were and he was sure the community learned a lot. He particularly appreciated the Spanish portion and stressed how helpful that is to the community.

Ms. Esposito shared comments that people made on her workshops and the positive feedback.

Ms. Stegenga stated that she tried to make it to the Human Rights Commission meetings and she understood Ms. Esposito does not have too much input on the meeting dates, however, the way the environment is right now this is a serious topic. She has a hard time understanding why the Human Rights Commission are not willing to change the meeting date or change it to a different Thursday in the month to allow Legislators who want to be involved who want to help and want to support them, to do so. The Legislature makes the decision behind their budget and the things they do, why would they not want the Legislature to be more involved. She asked if Ms. Esposito could supply contact information for the members so they can contact them directly. There needs to be a way for them to change this so they can be involved.

Mr. Vero stated that they could have it go through Fred Cook who is the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission.

Ms. Esposito commented that she forwards the Human Rights Commission all the emails from the Legislature and the last few times she made sure Mr. Cook responds. On their behalf, it is not that they do not want the Legislature involved. Many of them are executive directors or have full-time jobs and they all look at their schedules and try to decide when to hold their board meetings but often have conflicts. They understand the value in having Legislators at the board meeting because she is the middle person and then has to advocate for many things.

Ms. Stegenga continued to state that if they really wanted the Legislature involved they would find a way to hold more than one meeting out of twelve meetings in the evening. She spoke with Majority Leader Bonelli and shared her frustration with not being able to log into the last meeting. The one and only meeting that they held in the evening they could not log into so she was upset.

Ms. Esposito added that when they voted on their calendar in January, they thought this would allow the Legislature to participate in at least three meetings since historically there were two meetings that the Legislature held in the evening. When they selected a September evening meeting, their mindset was that the Legislature has two night meetings.

Mr. Vero commented that two out of twelve is not too good of a percentage.

Ms. Bonelli stated that they have had this discussion for over a year and Ms. Esposito has gone back to the Commission every time we have asked. She personally sent emails to the Commission asking them to reschedule their meetings allowing Legislators to participate. It is confusing for her because the few times she was able to attend a board meeting they are very gracious and welcoming. They do ask for their input and they do have a good dialogue. She did not understand why they cannot look at the calendar and make the adjustment. They need a partnership and they do not have it and cannot have it if they both have meetings at the same time. It is the Commission that has to make the change, not Ms. Esposito, she is in the middle of all this. She asked Ms. Esposito how can they get through to the Commission because she needs her help. It is ridiculous and embarrassing. The Legislature stands ready to be a partner with the Human Rights Commission but they cannot if they have conflicts like this.

Mr. Vero mentioned that when it is time to confirm the reappointments to the Human Rights Commission the first question they should ask is, "Are you available the second Thursday of the month?"

Mr. Lujan stated that the Legislature did have more meetings in the evening in the past and maybe we can revisit that when we set our calendar. There are some upcoming events on anti semitism and asked Ms. Esposito to elaborate on that. Especially with the discussions they are having now with the RFP on the Diversity Intervention Initiative.

Ms. Esposito explained that part of what she does every year is she looks at what topics she needs to cover, what is trending and what is relevant for them to talk about. When she first took office she brought in the ADL, Anti-Defamation League, to do a training on anti-Semitism and bias but it did not seem like it was enough. The following year she brought in someone from the Holocaust Museum and Center for Studies. They did an excellent job covering anti-Semitism but when there were a few slides displayed specifically anti-Semitism for the Hasidic Community, she wanted to someone from Kiryas Joel come in to discuss "I know your neighbor" series. She reached out to the Jewish Federation and told them she wanted to have a conference and include them as a partner. The idea was to have a full day conference and bring in various partners. She has been planning this event since January this year but now it has been on hold because of Covid-19 so it led to a virtual series. They are now holding a three part series, first part will be two individuals providing the history of Kiryas Joel and the Satmar religion. The second series is going to be a husband and wife who live in the Kiryas Joel Community and will talk about being a part of the Kiryas Joel Community. The third part of the series will be conversations between herself and Rabbi Rubenstein from the Jewish Federation to talk about anti-Semitism and some actions on how we can learn.

Mr. Lujan stated that the RFP is linked to this information and it seemed that the upcoming event is something they can benefit from. He added that he is already registered for the event.

Ms. Bonelli stated that as many of her colleagues already know, they have been reviewing the applicants who answered the RFP for the Diversity Intervention Initiative. They had one meeting and in the second meeting they invited Ms. Esposito to participate in the question and answer portion. She has been very helpful. She is fully aware what is going on and how they plan to proceed with this. These workshops that are being held about anti-Semitism are very good but advised Mr. Lujan that there is no solution to anti-Semitism and stressed that she was being realistic. How do you get an understanding between communities and a respect, and how do you live in harmony with the diverse issues you are facing within your own community. This is something that Ms. Esposito is working towards and she appreciated her partaking in the interviews.

Ms. Esposito thanked Ms. Bonelli. She stated that she did not believe in terms like eradicating racism. When they talk about action and finding solutions, they look at that at an individual level and what can I do as an individual and what are my takeaways to help my organization.

Chairman Brescia commented on the Diversity Study and stated that the three party leaders have been reviewing it. They discussed it four years ago and it is finally coming to fruition, so this is a good place to start and then expand into racism and other areas of the county. Other areas in the western part of the county.

Ms. Stegenga asked if the meeting last Thursday via Zoom was recorded so that all of the Legislators who were not able to call in can watch it.

Ms. Esposito responded that the meeting was not recorded.

Ms. Stegenga requested that from this point forward if she is doing virtual meetings to please have them recorded so if they cannot make it, at least they can watch it and see what is going on.

Ms. Esposito pointed out that Legislator Anagnostakis was present at her training last week for "Understanding Racism" so if anyone wants the ins and outs on her training, he sat through a two hour session.

On the motion of Ms. Stegenga, seconded by Mr. Sierra, the meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.