

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

January 7, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 360

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Michael Neguse, Tsegaba Woldehaimanot, Roxana Norouzi, Mohamed Sheikh Hassan, Devon Abdallah, Simon Khin, Jeniffer Calleja, Mariya Kochubey, Dori Cahn

Commissioners Absent: Shree Ram Dahal, Maru Mora-Villalpando

OIRA Staff Present: Aaliyah Gupta, Sahar Fathi

Call to Order: 6:00 pm

Welcome and Housekeeping/Approve November Minutes (Co-Chairs)

Devon opened the meeting with a general welcome and announcing the presence of the new director of OIRA. She also mentioned that it was the last meeting for herself and Mohamed. She asked if there were any changes to the minutes. Seeing none, there was a motion to approve by Tsegaba and a second by Mohamed. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Jeniffer led a discussion around a date for the 2014 Commission Retreat. Because of the number of vacancies, March or April were set forth as possibilities. Aaliyah suggested two tentative dates be set with an aim of the earlier date, but the option of a later date if the commissioner appointments take longer than usual. The two dates of March 16 or May 4 were set.

Director's Report (Aaliyah)-

Aaliyah introduced herself as the new director. She is really excited to work with the Commission and with the Office. She has lived in Seattle since 1995 and has been working on social justice and social change work since 1998. She was the founding Executive Director of Chaya, and that was her first deep work on issues that pertained to immigrant and refugee communities. She is a consultant, and an artist. The work she has done has been all about building capacity in the community – to be strong and healthy and her work with OIRA feels like a continuation of that work in a different way. She is committed to work with Sahar to build a strong department that has the capacity to grow and have an impact on the communities.

Aaliyah thanked the commission for all of their hard work, especially on the CIR resolution. She sees OIRA as being a key player in defining what our city is about–In our conversations about the Office we have been talking about the work we do in the context of building equity, access, and strength. “Equity” covers rights, policies, and how we are thinking of ourselves at the city. “Rights” ensure that our immigrant and refugee communities know their rights, and that their rights aren’t

infringed upon. OIRA needs to make sure policies are not adversely impacting the community and that any new policy takes into context what the community needs. OIRA needs to be thinking ahead around the policies we could put in place that would be good for our communities.

Further discussion in the equity bucket would be OIRA's work around background checks. OIRA is making sure that the language in our contracts is correct and that documents get translated so people know what they are signing. In terms of thinking ahead – Universal Pre-K has been a big headline. OIRA should be at the table as those policies get developed. We passed the CIR resolution, but what next? How do we create an environment supportive of DACA youth? Aaliyah emphasized “access” – giving folks a voice at the table, the opportunity for further and deeper engagement, and looking at hiring practices. She has also been thinking about “community strength.” She believes this done by fostering the ability of Immigrant and refugee communities to participate in civic ways. For example, what does it mean to be involved in your child's school?

Mohamed stated that he has known Aaliyah for the past twelve years, since 9/11. He urged everyone to accomplish a lot in the first 100 days. OIRA represents a lot of community. Mohamed mentioned the negative experiences of immigrants and refugees with the levy and that the funding was not reaching communities who needed it. Dori asked if OIRA will be different. Aaliyah said that she was helping develop a framework to organize all the work that has been ongoing. She will present the framework to the Mayor who is very committed to this office– and wants to see it succeed. The Mayor wanted someone to come in, take stock, assess and develop a plan. Devon noted that before the office was the new kid on the block and now there are new electeds and directors so OIRA will have more equal footing.

Mohamed stated that it was a good point to become like OCR. The Community has to bring solution to those problems. He wants to look at Family/Ed levy and the schools and find a solution to the inequity.

Aaliyah said prioritization or work is going to be key – there is value in doing some things very deeply and being very involved, and there is value in some areas to be in the “input role.” She sees the commission as bringing community voices to the table. OIRA has access to information but the commission has greater access as it represents the breadth of community. There is a lot we can do together.

2013 Work plan recap (Committee leads)

Education subcommittee (Roxana) – Roxana stated that the committee began because the commission had some sense that there were big initiatives coming down the pipe. They looked at the faces of the students and the large diversity and felt it was important to weigh into the discussion. The jurisdiction around K-12 lies around public schools, so the commission had to decide where it is most strategic to focus their clout. They wanted to focus on items where the city is – levy dollars and early learning.

They have been involved in exploring the current levy through conversations with OFE. Some things they thought they could do were not possible because of the timeline –they are still looking into them. They have been working closely with Isabel Munoz Colon. They also have been looking at the resources available around parent engagement.

Roxana stated that the committee had thought building a relationship with Superintendent Banda was really important – they have spent about a year trying to get a meeting with him. They didn't

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know the Universal Pre-K Resolution was going to emerge and they have spent a lot of time and energy on it. It is an opportunity because it is not yet entrenched in this bureaucratic system. She mentioned that there is a lot of fear with immigrant and refugee communities that the money doesn't actually get to communities that need it most. There has been a lot of failure to build system that meets the needs of our diverse communities. The Committee has met with Universal Pre-K Committees to give input on things like workforce issues and immigrant and refugee women who make up the early learning field. The Committee wants to make sure parents, communities, and families are at the heart of the work.

The disproportionality between the North and South-end schools has led to work with SESEC. The Committee has been doing some advocacy around that topic, and they wrote a letter in support of SESEC to the mayor and council. The last goal is pushing the city to take more leadership role around bilingualism and a strong education system that reflects all of the diversity in the region. The Committee co-hosted an event in June celebrating the Seattle World School program, and the work to get students to get credit for their home language. The Committee would like to potentially pass a Resolution through City Council that is a statement of commitment to bilingual education. The Committee has also been involved in some of the Seattle Public Schools strategic plan and work around incorporating an RSJI filter.

Dori noted that there is a connection between Universal Pre-K and bilingualism – these are on a path line and they are trying to make clear that it is something that is important to support. The Committee also had submitted letter about dual-learning.

Homelessness/ACA (Tsegaba/Mariya) – Tsegaba reported on the committee's research on homelessness and the impact on immigrants and refugees. The Committee started by compiling a list of culturally appropriate shelters and resources that are available for immigrants and refugees. They were trying to gauge the availability of culturally appropriate shelters. They looked into 211, did a lot of research, and tried to organize the list. Ultimately they were not able to identify culturally appropriate shelters. Communities often respond to the issue of homelessness in unique ways. For example, the Ethiopian community comes together and rents an apartment and if anyone needs housing, the apartment is there for them. The Committee looked at churches to see how they were supporting homeless in their communities. They met with Lisa Herbold, Sally Bagshaw, Rick Hooper, among others. . The Share/Wheel program is really unique. They get churches to donate space and are self-run. Unfortunately, their programs are not appropriate for the immigrant and refugee communities. The Committee learned a lot and they compile the information together to determine next steps.

Mariya reported on the ACA. They gathered information, met with Public Health, and then compiled a fact sheet on how immigrant and refugee individuals are impacted and where they could go get help in their own language. They submitted the one-pager to Public Health for review and are waiting for feedback. Public Health wants to use on their website and offered to help get it translated. The Committee is working on a Q & A session that can be televised. They are still working out a time for this and are hoping it will take place at the end of January. They have been discussing how to make it more available in other languages. They were concerned that many people didn't get the info they needed when the Obama administration's website wasn't working. The goal is to see how organizations are faring – to see if they helped people and whether there are

still people who need help. Mariya would like to see if someone can walk her through the system in another language.

The Q & A session will be structured so that Public Health officials will answer the community's questions. IRC is collaborating with the Women's Commission. Mariya indicated that they could get the Fact sheet document out as a Commission document, get it translated and sent out, and this would expedite the process, rather than waiting for approval from Public Health. It is also possible to partner with some of the contracting agencies to disseminate the document through them.

Devon mentioned that Aaliyah had talked to her about changing the timeline. Given the turnover and time it takes for new appointments, there might be less pressure on the Commission if the IRC calendar timeline was April – April. The group agreed.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform (Jeniffer) – Jeniffer reported that everything on the work plan is complete. They wanted to support immigration reform that was inclusive and that had elements that were humane and focused on family unity. The main goal was to get City Council to a Resolution that would be sent to Congressional delegations. As the commission began to meet with other groups and Councilmembers, other commissions indicated their desire to join the effort. There was a lot of coordination and a lot of legal research. The Committee had a “Lunch and Learn” with Council – the Councilmembers agreed that the work needed to be done. The Resolution was heard in committee and then it was unanimously passed.

The Committee wanted to have immigrant and refugee inclusion at different levels. There were a lot of pieces around possible implementation. It was an important process – after speaking with Councilmember Godden they spoke about the need for proof of residence. The Commission recommended changing City Light bills.

Dori stated that the way the Committee approached the Resolution was to look at the bill that went through the Senate. They thought about what they would really like to have and brought other commissions in for the discussion. They knew they needed to talk about how CIR impacts women and women's roles and LGBT issues. There is a lot of fodder to go forward – there is a way to talk on the city level on how to model the approach to immigration reform.

****Brief pause to present Mohamed and Devon with recognition for their service to Commission and ending terms****

Brainstorm for 2014 Work Plan (All)

The group began the discussion by looking at each Subcommittee and discussing what worked and what didn't work in the past year, as well as items that they still wanted to pursue. Beginning with Comprehensive Immigration Reform, they wanted to do a comprehensive ethnic media campaign around it. It highlights the work done by five commissions and shows what that kind of collaboration looks like and what the impact is on national policies. Folks could be introduced around the community and there is opportunity in explaining the impact of immigration reform across the board. There is also value in letting other people know in other parts of the country that this happened in Seattle and this is something other cities can do. There were questions as to whether the budget office could do an analysis of implications at the local level when comprehensive immigration reform did pass so that they could understand the fiscal impacts and what the system will need to absorb these changes. The group also suggested looking into a place in the city that supports families of people who have been deported or the creation of a Deportation

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Ombudsperson. With that in mind, it was suggested that the City budget office be requested for an analysis on the impacts of deportation. One cross-issue area for subcommittees is DACA – bridging across immigration policy and education.

The group then moved on to the Education Subcommittee. They are still interested in pursuing a bilingual resolution, doing more on north-south disproportionality, and some work supporting more concrete parent engagement. The parental engagement piece will need to have a more robust overview including an analysis of best practices, which communities are being left out, better understanding around gaps and general needs. They would also like to be more proactive on Universal Pre-K as it goes forward - be intentional, focal point of the architecture, structure, and implementation. They would like to influence the spending of Levy dollars and build on the relationships that they created this year with the various staff and the Oversight Committee. Mohamed recommended a joint meeting with the Oversight Committee and the Commission.

The group indicated that around homelessness they are interested in exploring the Share/Wheel model and its possibilities in immigrant and refugee communities. They would like to reach out to more immigrant and refugee based organizations to learn more about issues of homelessness and do some joint-brainstorming. They would also like to find out more about the ten year plan to end homelessness, and be more involved with that committee. Finally, they would like to explore possible solutions to 211 frustrations and think about additional solutions outside of 211.

Around healthcare, the group stated that they would like to continue to work on translation of the one-page document they created about ACA and check in with providers to assess what is happening. They think it would be powerful to schedule a few in-person meetings with interpreters to see what the experience is and to gauge quality control and effectiveness.

Devon did a last pitch of voting rights for all residents of the City of Seattle.

Announcements (All):

Jeniffer announced that the Parks legacy plan has three open houses happening in January and that the community needs to attend so that priorities can be heard about the need for translation and other RSJI issues.

Adjourned

8:04 pm.