

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

June 3, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 370

Meeting Minutes

- Commissioners Present:** Michele Ramirez, Farhiya Mohamed, Mindy Au, Riddhi Mukohopadhyay, Michael Neguse, Jeniffer Calleja, Mariya Kochubey, Dori Cahn, Shree Ram Dahal, Roxana Norouzi, Veasna Adrian Hoy, Kianoush Naficy
- Commissioners Absent:** Simon Khin, Susana Mercado Alvarado, Tsegaba Woldehaimanot
- Guests:** Sandrine Espie, Regina Jones, Jasmine Marwaha
- OIRA Staff Present:** Aaliyah Gupta, Sahar Fathi
- Call to Order:** 6:00 pm

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

Shree opened the meeting and asked for a motion for the minutes. Dori gave a motion to approve the minutes and Jen seconded. All commissioners who had been present at the March meeting voted in favor.

The legislative “look ahead” was circulated and explained for the benefit of the new commissioners. There was a quick round of introductions for new commissioners.

Emerging Trends and Issues in the Community (Shree)-

It was explained that there were guests present because of the letter the commission had sent to Council on the preschool for all proposal. The commissioners spoke to this item, and discussed the history of the commission’s involvement on this topic. The education subcommittee has been working on this for two years because early childhood is an area that the City has a lot of funding and power. In particular, high quality education has become a priority for the commission, with an emphasis on immigrant and refugee children in the system. The subcommittee is generally very supportive of the preschool for all plan, but they have some suggestions to make it stronger – such as utilizing an RSJI toolkit. They also have concerns about contracting priorities and would like to see more clarity and target approaches to reach the most vulnerable populations. They are concerned that the workforce will not reflect the diverse demographics of the children and believe that teachers of color are important to connect with families and parents.

The commission was supportive of the family childcare pilot, raising teacher pay, and the bilingual teacher support. They were concerned by the quick timeline and want to make sure the voices they represent in the community are integrated into the system.

The commissioners spoke to the struggles of Somali families – indicating that they don't speak English, they don't have degrees, and they have children. They suggested trainings to help them have more options. Childcare providers from the same population as the children are beneficial for the parents.

Staff present from OPI indicated that there were a number of community outreach discussions and that a number of these concerns had been expressed during a meeting with the Mayor just a few weeks prior. They don't know what this will look like, but they needed to launch the program due to the quick timeline. They expect to hammer out these details in discussions going forward, and in the implementation phase. It was confirmed that there will be financial support for the workforce development component, and that there has been an enormous amount of discussion on this piece.

The commissioners were interested to see how much of their feedback has actually been integrated into the final plan. They pointed out that it is difficult to get a job for an immigrant or a refugee, because the requirements are so high for these populations. Softening some of these requirements to help them enter the workforce would be a model that other departments could look to when hiring for vacancies. They pointed out that many adult immigrants have academic degrees that don't translate in this country, and suggested that a tiered system where a person could begin to engage and simultaneously develop into a teacher would be a good beginning. OPI staff confirmed that this would be in the implementation process. OPI staff agreed that there are fabulous teachers in the community who do not have the credentials, but have great outcomes and enormous experience. There would be additional research to figure out what other jurisdictions are doing to surpass these barriers.

The commission discussed alternate paths to credentialing and models that have incorporated English language learning in the training. They wanted to know the demographics of the workforce, and hoped that the City could help get that data from the Department of Early Learning. They also emphasized that families prefer culturally and linguistically appropriate teachers and that we should be sensitive to these needs. The group discussed diversifying the early learning leadership table.

Councilmember O'Brien's staff spoke to the amendments that Councilmember O'Brien was looking to include in the legislation. They walked through the language and explained that the overarching goal was transparency and making sure they knew who was being served. Councilmember O'Brien appreciated the commission's letter and he was interested in writing an RSJI amendment that would address the disparities and the demographic components. The group discussed the anticipated timeline.

The commissioners discussed the possibility of clarifying the demographics of the workforce, to emphasize existing childcare providers with no degree and little English. They were interested in additional financial support for these childcare providers. It was suggested that the colleges be paid to teach the classes for free at community centers.

The commission also discussed the Human Rights Commission resolution that was being proposed to divest city dollars from deportation centers. There was discussion about how to find out whether city dollars were currently invested, and the history of divesting funds. Shree entertained a motion to support the resolution and there was unanimous approval. Riddhi and Dori will be the liaisons on this topic. A brief update on the homelessness super subcommittee was given, and Mindy volunteered to participate on that team as well. Volunteers were taken for SPU's Strategic Business

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Plan community discussion on June 25 – Veasna, Farhiya and Michael agreed to participate. Volunteers were also taken to meet with CM Burgess on preschool for all – Roxana, Mindy, Kianoush, Riddhi, Veasna and Michele volunteered.

Director's Report (Aaliyah)

Aaliyah mentioned that the first round of the Director's interviews was coming up – they had 140 applicants for the position. She is working with Sahar to complete the Language Access Plan. She also shared good news about the first quarter supplemental budget.

2013 Work Plan

The group was asked to take a few minutes at the end of the meeting to huddle and find a regular meeting time.

Announcements (All):

Shree announced that they would like to expand the Executive subcommittee and that he would expand the discussion on this further at the next committee meeting.

Dori announced that there will be an upcoming event for the Cambodian deportees.

Michael announced that there were East Africans dying in the community from gun violence. Veasna stated that it was important to have more East African counselors/case managers.

Adjourn

8:10 pm.