

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

July 1, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 370

Meeting Minutes

- Commissioners Present:** Michele Ramirez, Farhiya Mohamed, Mindy Au, Riddhi Mukhopadhyay, Michael Neguse, Jeniffer Calleja, Mariya Kochubey, Dori Cahn, Shree Ram Dahal, Veasna Adrian Hoy, Kianoush Naficy, Susana Mercado Alvarado, Tsegaba Woldehaimanot
- Commissioners Absent:** Simon Khin, Roxana Norouzi
- Guests:** Sabina Neem, Gunner Scott, Lauren Othon, Anthony Adero
- OIRA Staff Present:** Aaliyah Gupta, Sahar Fathi
- Call to Order:** 6:08 pm

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

Shree opened the meeting and moved to approve the minutes. Jen seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Presentation from the LGBT Commission (Sabina, Scott, Anthony)-

Representatives from the LGBT commission were in attendance to discuss how they could work with the Immigrant and Refugee commission to address the recent homicides in their respective communities – particularly the deaths of an East African Somali immigrant and African American gay man. There was discussion around how the commissions could come together and center voices in the community who would like to move forward the conversation about homophobia and transphobia.

There was discussion around how different immigrant communities arrive with their own cultural context and how this was an opportunity to begin a discussion. Lauren was participating in the discussion because she had attended a meeting with Lifelong Aids Alliance and some members of the Ethiopian community and they were eager to have a conversation that focused on reducing stigma for LGBT community members in the East African community. The discussion continued around the importance of working with leaders who are from the community to build trust. There are many immigrants who come from countries where there are extreme homophobic laws and they have experienced trauma. It is important to contextualize this history and integrate it with the discussion.

Both commissions agreed that it was important to know what the other commission was doing so that they could build relationships and be supportive of each other's work. It was brought up that there was a need to find immigrant leaders who are out and who could play a role in engaging their communities. It was stated that having conversations that are facilitated by LGBT leaders at the local community based organizations could create space for the broader immigrant community to have this discussion. Many agreed that there is a lot of stigma in the community and that this is a very difficult endeavor. It was suggested that there be organizing within the younger generation and then the older generation through these young voices. It was also stated that conversations were necessary to prevent more possible violence. It was agreed that this is a complex issue for many communities. It is important to take time to find out what the issues are and find community leaders. The commissions decided to move forward with a smaller group of commissioners. Lauren will reach out to Lifelong Aids Alliance and share what she learned in this meeting and see what their next steps are, and then follow up with everyone.

[LGBT Commissioners left the discussion.]

The immigrant and refugee commissioners continued talking about other ideas including – working with youth programs in schools, what hate crime training might look like, a possible community roundtable, and whether social workers/counselors should be consulted as well. Liaisons on this topic going forward will be Susana and Michele.

Emerging Trends and Issues in the Community (Shree)-

Per the Commission's request, Aaliyah gave more information on the Mayor's Summer Safety speech and initiative. Sahar gave an update on the Refugee Women's Institute.

There was discussion around extending the hours at the parks and community centers for the children who are out of school. There was hope expressed that the staff would reflect the diversity of the community.

Director's Report (Aaliyah) -

Aaliyah mentioned that a candidate has been put before the Mayor and she is very excited about this person. She will share more information when she is able to.

Subcommittee work plans (Shree) -

Shree mentioned that the Executive subcommittee is looking for a third co-chair to begin learning about the position. Nominations for the third person will be due to Sahar within the next week.

Shree also spoke to the need for term limits and proposed a two year term limit for co-chairs. Mariya seconded. All were in favor and the proposal passed. The bylaws need to be updated. The rest of the discussion on work plan reports was held for the next meeting.

Announcements (All):

The meeting was suspended to recognize Mariya's service and departure from the commission.

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

July 1, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 370

Adjourn

8:00 pm.