

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

DATE: May 15, 2019

TO: Supervisor Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Schinika Fitch, Director of Community Relations – Office of the County Executive
Prepared by: Robert Smith, Chair, Human Rights Commission

SUBJECT: An informational report from the Office of the County Executive, and the Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission, regarding the organization and their contributions to Milwaukee County.

Background

Since our last report in May of 2016, the Commission adjusted its meeting rotation to every other month. While quarterly was too infrequent, we found that indeed monthly was too frequent as we need the months in between meetings for progress with our initiatives. Guests at MCHRC meetings have included representatives from Milwaukee County, Milwaukee Water Commons, and Nicole Brookshire of the Office of African American Affairs. Members of the MCHRC have also attended many community-based meeting related to our core human rights themes, as well as attending City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission meetings.

The MCHRC has one vacancy, and is currently composed of the following members:

Robert Smith, Chair (Term Expires 2/4/2020)

Martha Love, Vice-Chair (Term Expires 9/1/2020)

Danielle Bailey, Secretary (Term Expires 4/30/19, Seeking Re-Appointment)

Willie Brisco, (Term Expires 4/30/19, Seeking Re-Appointment)

Jason Rae (Term Expires 9/1/2020)

County Supervisor Representative: Supreme Moore Omokunde (Term Expires 4/17/2020)

Below are summaries of the most relevant developments and projects of the MCHRC in the last several years.

Human Rights Day

In collaboration with the City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission, the MCHRC has co-sponsored Human Rights Day celebrations in 2016, 2017, 2018. Human Rights Day, celebrated globally on December 10, is an international day of recognition with particular deference paid to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly. The anticipated 2019 celebration will occur tentatively on Dec. 7, 2019, and is still in the planning stages.

MCHRC, alongside the Equal Rights Commission and regional human rights organizations, have begun to use Human Rights Day as both a celebration and a connection point for organizations with similar missions. This has significantly energized our regional coalition building efforts. The MCHRC and ERC also present Human Rights Day Hero Awards, recognizing local champions for civil and human rights.

Several Commissioners also helped to facilitate a portion of the program for World Peace Day at Sherman Park in 2018.

Regional Collaborations

One of our primary goals for the upcoming years is to advance regional collaborations with institutions and organizations that embrace human rights advocacy in their mission and programming. To advance coalition building, the MCHRC has recently enlisted an intern from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Luke Soldner, to shape our communications and outreach strategy, as well as research relevant human rights related topics. Luke has begun work to support Commissioner initiatives, such as creating a County and State Guide to Re-entry Resources, creating a County and State Directory of Human Rights Organizations, and developing a Know Your Rights Card for Transgender resources. The MCHRC will also help amplify the work being done by local and regional human rights organizations via Letters in Support, press releases, social media posts, and more. We recently updated our website, after learning that it was not re-published as part of the County's revamping of its' website. We continue to utilize our social media to reach folks about human rights issues and events happening locally and regionally.

The MCHRC also has its eye on engaging with other organizations across the country that sit within local and county governments. Commissioner Jason Rae researched national human rights commissions and compiled spreadsheet of these like-minded entities. Next steps include connecting with some of these organizations identified that our similar to ours, to learn how we can improve efficacy and advocacy.

Voice & Presence

The MCHRC has earmarked the following themes to guide our human rights advocacy: Fair Employment, Fresh Water, Neighborhood Justice, LGBTQ Rights, Human Trafficking, Immigration, Housing Discrimination, and Gun Violence. These themes emerged given the expertise of our commissioners, and with keen awareness of how these issues manifest in Milwaukee County.

We have begun to expand our voice and presence locally through the work of our commissioners. Including but not limited to the following activities:


- Commissioner Danielle Bailey collaborated with the LGBT Bar & Equal Right Commission to create LGBT Know Your Rights for the State of Wisconsin, she regularly advocates for and speaks on topics of LGBT equality on various panels and educational platforms, making sure to highlight the presence of the MCHRC. Additionally, she is reaching out to individual County Board Supervisors to set up one on one's to learn how the MCHRC can better support human rights initiatives of the Supervisors in their districts and what they believe are the most pressing human right issues for their districts and the County. She is also beginning to research and compile a list of Re-entry resources for the County and State, with the support of the MCHRC Intern, with the ultimate goal of the creation of Re-Entry guide for formerly incarcerated folks. Along these lines, she is also working with the Wisconsin State Bar to understand their initiatives better with regard to disparities in Mass incarceration and finding creative ways to tie them into work being done at the County level and regionally.
- Commissioner & Chairperson Smith speaks regularly on issues of race and equity, and neighborhood justice, and recently wrote an OP-ED for Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service during the summer of 2018 titled, <https://milwaukeeenns.org/2018/09/10/three-reasons-to-read-milwaukee-blueprint-for-peace/>.
- Commissioner Martha Love is a vocal advocate in the fight to prevent human trafficking. She sits on a Human Trafficking Task Force, as well as, the African-American women's round table sponsored by the County Executive's office, and uses these platforms to push for reform in this area. She continues to encourage Milwaukee County to display signage to raise awareness around human trafficking, something the MCHRC supports, especially in the lead up to the DNC Convention in 2020.
- Commissioner Willie Brisco continues to work with EXPO, Wisdorn, and MICAH to raise awareness around issues of Mass Incarceration and racialized criminalization, and is a vocal advocate for these causes.
- Commissioner Jason Rae, is a vocal advocate for LGBT equality on behalf of the Commission, as well as, via working with his organization the WI LGBT Chamber of Commerce and the Democratic National Committee. As the Secretary for the Democratic National Committee, he is involved in the 2020 DNC Convention coming to Milwaukee, and will aid the MCHRC in highlighting the importance of human rights work being done and that which needs to be done still in Milwaukee and beyond.

- Commissioner Moore Omokunde acts as a channel between the MCHRC and the county board, providing the Commission with relevant updates related to its priorities and goals, and vice versa to the Board.

Our efforts continue to grow and expand, and we look forward to revisiting our chartering ordinance to further enhance our impact and reach. However, we will continue to be challenged given we have no budget or resources from the County to execute our efforts, initiatives such as creating and publishing guides for the County, publishing signage to raise awareness around human trafficking, co-hosting events with human rights organizations to raise community awareness around various issues, or hosting our own events to draw community member support, feedback, and raise awareness; these are just a few of the items the Commission envisions being able to accomplish, were we given any type of budget to support our efforts. Without any budgetary support, the Human Rights Commission is limited in what we are able to accomplish, but we continue to explore ways to get the work done for the county as it relates to human rights, because

This report is informational, and no action is required.

Prepared by: Robert Smith, Chair, Human Rights Commission



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Office of the County Executive

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