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COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES
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DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
City Hall 4th Floor Conference Room
February 13, 2012

Present: Cecile Brodsky, Dana Canevari, David Hicks, Jack Tsai, Elaine Quinn
Excused Absence: Matthew Ranelli
Staff: Michelle Duprey, Paula Pernal

Meeting was called to order at 5:27 p.m.

January Minutes

David made a motion to accept the January minutes as edited by Matthew Ranelli prior to the meeting. Jack seconded the motion. January minutes approved unanimously as edited. Elaine abstained from voting as her term expired February 12, 2012.

Chairman's Report

David reported that the legislature will be hearing testimony in the next week concerning Governor Malloy's Bill (HB 5016) to merge the Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities ("CHRO") and Office of Protection and Advocacy ("OPA" or "P & A"). Elaine mentioned she was fascinated by the item that Michelle forwarded to commission members, by the Yale Law School, on the subject of mental health as a human right. Elaine stated that the bill suggest a broader movement in both the areas of human and disability rights.

The question of whether a single 'umbrella' department would serve people with disabilities effectively came up. Dana offered a personal experience detailing difficulties she had at a social event, particularly in communicating her need for minor accommodation to the organizer. Tying this experience back into the bill discussion, she said that she is not sure if combining the two organizations is a good idea. David suggested that one result of the merger would likely be a downsizing in staff, and that this would almost certainly mean that there will be fewer individuals in a combined department working on disability issues.

David also pointed out that there would likely be conflicts of interest in a combined department, as it is common for OPA, on behalf of persons with disabilities, to challenge rulings by CHRO. He also questioned what would become of the OPA advisory boards, including one for individuals with mental illness, in a joint department. Michelle stated that some of these positions may be administrative in nature. Michelle stated that OPA has 36 employees and CHRO is now down to about 75 employees. Dana mentioned that she had placed a telephone call to CHRO and no one returned her call. David and Michelle suggested that if Dana wanted action, she should continue to call CHRO.

As prior to the meeting Michelle had been explaining how the Connecticut version of OPA was quite different from that of other states, David asked Michelle to brief everyone on these differences. Michelle stated that in most states P & A is not part of state government; it is a separate watchdog agency, non-

profit, that has no ties to the government. In many states P & A vigorously goes after the government for disability violations. Michelle mentioned that here in Connecticut she believes P & A does not go after the state because they are part of the state. Michelle stated that a merger might help those individuals with employment discrimination problems but not those with disabilities. She explained that the CHRO is a state enforcement agency that enforces civil rights laws.

Michelle continued that there might not be any changes even after a merger of the two organizations, at least from a practical standpoint. She also mentioned that the legislature may not go through with this merger. Michelle stated that there will probably be a lot of individuals at the public hearing. Michelle stated that she is not taking a position at this point because she does not have enough information about the final department.

David asked Michelle if she had any idea what the impact on each of the organizations might be. Michelle stated that the Commission could contact the CHRO & OPA or even Governor Malloy's office. David mentioned that the hearings are scheduled to start very soon--within two days, with the budget hearings beginning within a week, and that the bill is already to be taken up by the appropriations committee. David stated that it seems unlikely that the disability community will hear very much about the logistics of a combined department before this bill goes to committee. David suggested that the Commission might be able to follow the hearings on CTN. Michelle mentioned that the primary hearing is this Thursday evening. David and Michelle agreed that more information is required. David mentioned that Senator Martin Looney is one of the legislative sponsors of the bill. Michelle suggested that the Commission contact Senator Martin Looney.

David made motion to contact Senator Martin Looney.

Dana seconded the motion.

Motion to contact Senator Martin Looney approved unanimously.

David stated that, aside from the Governor's bill, he had been thinking about ways the Commission could assist with employment issues for the disability community. He mentioned that he had read a statistic that less than 20% of persons with disabilities are employed full-time. [According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the employment-to-population ratio for people with disabilities is 17.4%; the same ratio for people without disabilities is 62.9%.]

Dana discussed her interaction with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) for an internship/job. David mentioned that the director of Rehabilitation Services in New Haven, Iris Mellow Barnes, had met with the Commission [May 2007], but that no working relationship with BRS to conduct outreach employment work had resulted.

David asked Michelle if the City had any ways to help in this regard. He also asked Michelle about points of entry that the Commission might try to work on.

Michelle stated that City does not provide these programs but the state has workforce alliance programs to assist individuals with job searching capability. Dana stated that the disability navigators have been eliminated.

Dana mentioned that she has done volunteer work for Yale New Haven Hospital. Elaine pointed out that the hospital is the largest employer in the city. David asked Michelle about scheduling a meeting directly with Yale New Haven Hospital. Dana discussed the broken window theory and how it relates to empowering the disability community.

Michelle looked up statistics on the internet and stated that the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities in January 2012 was 12.9%, excluding those individuals that can't work or are no longer looking for work. Dana discussed that the disability community must be empowered in order to change the culture. Elaine mentioned that support groups assist in this capacity.

Department Report

Michelle stated that the MV-I vehicles just started coming out last week and they have been received well.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Other Business

None

Public Comment/Announcements

David asked Michelle about Robin Tousey-Ayers's appointment to the Commission. Michelle stated that Robin is already on the City website as of 2/15/12; Jason resigned; and, Elaine's term expired February 12, 2012.

Elaine stated that she will miss her fellow Commissioners. Elaine stated that she is working on getting someone to take her place on the Commission.

Elaine suggested that the Commission ask to meet with a representative from Yale New Haven Hospital. Jack stated that the internship program at Yale New Haven Hospital involves a lot of work. Dana confirmed that she had to have three forms completed by personal characters as a volunteer for Yale New Haven Hospital. David stated that the Commission should meet with Yale New Haven Hospital.

David made motion to adjourn meeting.

Dana seconded the motion.

Motion to adjourn approved unanimously at 6:35 p.m.