



Regular Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Thursday, February 25, 2021

Present: Co-Chairs Karin Lin and Karim Razzaz, Commissioners Marcio Macedo, Tsamchoe Dolma, Ashebir Gezmu, Elizabeth Badger, Jen Sparks, and Arantxa Ortiz

CIRC Staff: Interim Executive Director Vali Buland, Project Coordinator Crystal Rosa, and Immigrant Services Liaison Tagesech Wabeto

Absent:

Commissioners Subandha Karmacharya, Ana Mejia, and Aleksandra Ibrahim

1. Call to order:

Co-Chair Razzaz called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

2. Public comment

No public present at the start of the virtual meeting. There was no public comment.

3. Introduction to Interim Executive Director

The members of the commission introduced themselves to Vali Buland, the Interim Executive Director appointed after the retirement of Nancy Schlacter. IED Buland has worked for the City of Cambridge for several decades. IED Buland served as the General Counsel of the Rent Control Board and when Rent Control ended, she became an attorney in the City's Law Department. IED Buland served as Interim Executive Director of the Cambridge Human Rights Commission twice in the past years. IED Buland retired in 2018 but continued to work part time for the Law Department and volunteered with the Immigration Unit of Greater Boston Legal Services. Under the supervision of immigration attorneys, IED Buland initially assisted people with pro se asylum applications and now is counseling clients and providing trainings on the new Public Charge rule.

4. Review and approval of January 2021 minutes

Commissioners reviewed the minutes of the January 28, 2021 meeting. Co-Chair Lin moved to approve the meeting minutes, and Co-Chair Razzaz seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

5. Staff report

With 5 volunteer attorneys, CIRC and De Novo have served a total of 25 clients at the February virtual clinic. The need to recruit additional volunteer attorneys is immediate.

Immigrant Services Liaison (ISL) Wabeto Report

Immigrant Services Liaison (ISL) Wabeto provided a summary of her efforts during the COVID-19 shutdown. ISL Wabeto attended two CET outreach worker meetings where she shared challenges, ideas, resources, and discussed COVID-19 vaccine confusion among immigrant communities. ISL Wabeto also attended different COVID-19 vaccine related webinars. ISL Wabeto continued her outreach to advertise the Cambridge De Novo legal screening clinic and provided information about the other two immigration Legal Screening Clinics: (Boston Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement, Rian Center) to residents who needed additional dates. ISL Wabeto enrolled two parents into the Baby U program, a 6-week virtual workshop, which strengthen parent/child relationship and support parents to become a better advocate for their children. ISL Wabeto shared various resources on housing, ESOL classes with outreach workers and shared the Cambridge COVID-19 survey with immigrant community members. ISL Wabeto assisted 3 Cambridge Public School families with P-EBT (Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer) issues for school meals. ISL Wabeto called schools and informed the staff that P-EBT is not considered as a public benefit so that does not impact their immigration status. It is a pandemic school meal. ISL Wabeto helped a resident looking for work learn about Cambridge's Employment Program.

Family Policy Council Working Committee on Language Justice

Project Coordinator (PC) Rosa shared with the Commission her work with the Language Justice working committee in partnership with the Family Policy Council. PC Rosa has consulted on the development of a survey regarding the city's current practices regarding language access. The goal of the survey is to develop recommendations to improve language justice policies, practices, supports, and resources needed to ensure equitable access within Cambridge.

Cambridge Health Alliance and Cambridge Health Department COVID 19 vaccine information collaboration

ISL Wabeto and PC Rosa have been working with the CHA/Public Health Department collaboration on developing forums for addressing vaccine hesitancy and misinformation in different language communities that live in Cambridge. ISL Wabeto and PC Rosa are identifying local champions who want to use their language to outreach to their communities on why they have chosen to take the vaccine. The collaboration for the different forums is in progress.

6. Ongoing Business

Strategic planning

PC Rosa will follow up with the Commission to facilitate email coordination with each working group, Outreach to Health Centers (Commissioners Macedo, Sparks, and Karmacharya), and Undocumented Workers' Rights (Commissioners Dolma, Ibrahim, and Karmacharya). The Commission was interested in disbanding the working group on Family Preparedness because of the diminished urgency after the change of Federal Administration. Commissioner Badger suggested Justice at Work as a resource for fair labor issues.

Commissioner Dolma moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:58 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Ortiz.

The next commission meeting will be on Thursday, March 25, 2021, at 6 pm via a Virtual Zoom meeting.