



Human Relations Advisory Council (HRAC)
County of Lehigh

MEETING MINUTES
February 5, 2024

The meeting of the HRAC was held at 12:00 p.m. by Zoom video conference. A recording of this meeting is available at <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Community-Economic-Development/Human-Relations-Advisory-Council>.

ATTENDING

Maryanell Agosto (MA), Angela Baio (AB), Carmen Bell (CB), Liz Bradbury (LB)(Vice-Chair), Tony Branco (TB), Guillermo Lopez Jr. (CHAIR), Luis A. Perez Jr. (LP), Paschall Simpson (PS)

Staff: Cyndi King (CK)

Absent: Commissioner Zach Cole-Borghi (ZCB), Yorman De La Rosa (YDLR), Frank Kane (FK), Nagi Latefa (NL),

Public: Jose Rivera

Special Guest Speaker: Norman Bristol Colón, Pennsylvania Chief Diversity Officer, PA Department of Community & Economic Development

CHAIR called the meeting to order.

Roll call. Quorum obtained. Meeting is being recorded. Public will have access to that recording on the department's website (see opening paragraph above).

CHAIR asked for a motion to approve the 1/2/2024 meeting minutes. TB made the motion; motion seconded by LB. Unanimous voice vote approval of minutes.

VICE CHAIR recognized Jose Rivera as a member of the public.

OLD BUSINESS

LB gave an update on the status of the proposed Ordinance which had a first reading on January 24, 2024. This version of the ordinance is supported by Commissioners Alvarado, Brace, Cole-Borghi, Hartzell, Irons, and Riddick. Commissioners Alvarado and Irons said they would second the motion to approve. There were no amendments to the proposed Ordinance. It will have its second reading on February 14. However, in the spirit of bipartisan politics, Commissioner Dutt created an Ordinance titled exactly the same as the proposed ordinance from Commissioner Cole-Borghi. To keep things somewhat organized there is the Cole-Borgh ordinance (2023) and the Dutt ordinance (2024). The Dutt (2024) ordinance protects some of the classes enumerated in the proposed ordinance (2023) but does not include “actual or perceived, ethnicity, color, creed, national origin, or citizenship status, ancestry, the part of sex that includes pregnancy, child birth, and related medical conditions, genetic information, familial status, GED rather than high school diploma, the terms mental disability, physical disability, relationship or association with [a] disabled person, source of income, the expanded definition of age or height or weight, veteran status, use of a guide or support animal, mechanical aids, domestic or sexual violence victim status. However, the most significant [item] that is different between the two ordinances is that the Cole-Borgh version defines an employer as a person who employs someone whereas the Dutt version defines an employer as a person who employs four people or more. LB went on to state that there are 375,000 people in Lehigh County. According to the L.V. Chamber of Commerce, 51% of L.V. businesses have 5 employees or less; so, if every business that has less than four employees is [removed from the protected class], it is reasonable to think that tens-of-thousands of workers would not be protected at all by the [Dutt 2024] ordinance. Also, Dutt’s 2024 version vaguely says, “all of the investigations would go to the State rather than having [Lehigh County Human Relations Commission] investigate complaints. LB finds this “strange” because the State has 1700 uninvestigated or back-logged cases. So, if even a small, easy to investigate [complaint] were sent to the State, that complaint would be put into the State’s back-logged complaint docket. LB went on to recall that one of the commissioners [at the January 24th Board of Commissioners meeting] asked what happens if it is a protected class that the state doesn’t protect (because the State doesn’t protect most of the classes that [LB] earlier referenced) to which Commissioner Dutt said [the complaint] would have to come back to us to investigate which LB again commented seemed “strange.” Commissioner Dutt put forth another resolution, supported by the HRAC, which declar[es] it is the public policy of the County of Lehigh to eradicate discrimination in all forms and it goes on to list protected classes which [Dutt] listed in his [Dutt’s 2024] ordinance without the protected classes included in the Cole-Borgh 2023 ordinance. LB reminded the group that a resolution is not binding; it just says that discrimination is not supported. Included is sexual orientation and gender identity which had previously not been included [by Commissioner Dutt]. LB believes the commissioners will probably support this resolution. She asked for questions. There were no questions.

GL recapped that the ordinance will have its second reading and be voted upon at the February 14 meeting.

CB clarified that the first read on January 24 was the version the HRAC had been referring to as the proposed ordinance “our version” comprised of all the protected classes to which LB replied that both ordinances were discussed. “Our version” is known as “2023” and the second version is known as “2024” but they have exactly the same name: Establishing County-wide Nondiscrimination Requirements for Employment, Housing, Education, Healthcare and Public Accommodations creating a Human Relations Commission authorizing the Human Relations Commission to investigate and enforce complaints of discrimination - Ordinance 2023 and the other is Ordinance 2024 but both ordinances are titled the same. Both Ordinances were put forward for discussion. LB believes that Cole-Borghgi 2023 version will be discussed first because it is the earlier numbered ordinance. LB believes that since six commissioners have expressed their support of the Cole-Borghgi 2023 Ordinance, it will pass and that the second Dutt 2024 ordinance will become moot. CB asked whether both ordinances came up for a first reading and that both are expected to go through a second reading. LB replied “yes.” LB met with the new Commissioners Alvarado, Irons, and Riddick wherein they had long conversations explaining the nuances of the [Cole-Borghgi 2023] ordinance to them and they had many questions which LB answered. LB intends to email Commissioner Brace about several items because there is a possibility [someone] may want to amend [the Cole-Borghgi 2023] ordinance although that has not been suggested but LB doesn’t want any additional amendments because it will delay the passage [once again] for [yet] another two-weeks. Further discussion ensued on particular comments made by various commissioners.

GL thanked LB for the time, hard work, commitment, passion, and knowledge which she put into this project. LB recognized the support of the HRAC who added and vetted and reviewed all of these things which LB didn’t have any clue about.

NEW BUSINESS

GL introduced the special guest, Norman Bristol Colón, Pennsylvania Governor Shapiro’s newly appointed Chief Diversity Officer. In this new role, Mr. Bristol Colon is responsible for drafting Pennsylvania’s Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEBI) agenda for more than thirty-three agencies under the Governor’s jurisdiction. In addition to serving close to 80,000 state employees providing the training that the state’s workforce employees need to ensure that people are being served independently of where they come from, the color of their skin, and all the discussion that [the HRAC] just engaged in is being done internally which was a campaign promise that the Governor made to the people of Pennsylvania and that is a promise that he is delivering. Mr. Bristol Colon referenced himself as being one of the very few Chief Diversity Officers in the nation who are of Latino descent. Mr. Bristol Colon mentions this because he believes that more needs to be done to include Latinos in the conversation. The Shapiro Administration is drafting an executive order [to help enable] Mr. Bristol Colon to do

the work that he needs to do ensuring that Pennsylvania is leading [the nation] in DEBI because William Penn established Pennsylvania with the hope it would be a place of inclusion and religious freedom so, after 300-years, by honoring our past, we recognize the many issues in the present and also [engage in the work of] building an inclusive, diverse future that includes all voices. Diverse nations all over the world are competing. Pennsylvania is competing with Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, and also with Germany and Singapore and nations all over the world. Some of those nations are doing better than ours because they have embraced values of DEBI or they have recognized their nation is so diverse. Mr. Bristol Colon believes that the U.S. must begin normalizing the fact that we are a very multi-cultural nation. In fact, maybe the most multi-cultural nation because for close to 250-years, the U.S. has received people from all over the world. Mr. Bristol Colon also stated that the U.S. is a bilingual nation. Data shows that the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world is Mexico and the U.S. is the second-largest Spanish-speaking country, more than any other country in the Americas and Spain, then without any doubt, [the U.S.] is indeed a bilingual nation without even adding all the other languages [spoken in the U.S.] from Europe and Asia as the country continues to grow. At the state level, in order to have this robust agenda, Mr. Bristol Colon reflects on the data as a tool to draft an inclusive policy for the entire Commonwealth. The U.S. has 65-million Latinos, 48-million African Americans, more than 21-million Asian and Pacific Islanders, and 7% of the nation's population identify as members of the LGTBQ community. Mr. Bristol Colon said that Pennsylvania has always been the mirror of the nation; as Pennsylvania goes, so goes the nation. PA is more diverse today than ever before. The same diversity seen at the national level is seen in PA. At the national level, Latinos are the largest minority ethnic group. In PA, African Americans are the largest minority ethnic group with about 1.4 million people. Latinos are 1.1 million in PA. It is projected that by the 2030 Census, Latinos will have become the largest minority ethnic group in PA. PA has more than 600,000 Asian and Pacific Islanders in the Commonwealth and more than 500,000 individuals who identify as members of the LGTBQ community. So, in order to serve the 80,000 employees and the more than 13-million Pennsylvanians, those numbers need to be looked at to understand how demographics have been changing all across the Commonwealth in order to truly represent the values of DEBI. To do this, the DEBI PA Office has been created to provide leadership to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor's offices but also to [identify and recognize pockets of minority spaces to protect lives in the event of another pandemic.] Mr. Bristol Colon said that he wants DEBI to be normalized because it is in the best interest of PA; it is not a Democratic or a Republican issue but rather an American agenda when we embrace DEBI. As an example of bipartisan dialogue, Mr. Bristol Colon suggested looking at the purchasing power of Latinos in the U.S.. It is more than 3 trillion dollars. He said that makes the Latino community of the nation one of the top ten economies in the world. He would like to attract that money to PA. Looking at the purchasing power of African Americans at 1.6 trillion dollars. The purchasing power of Asian and Pacific Islanders is more than 1.5 trillion dollars. The purchasing power of the LGTBQ

community is relatively about the same as the Asian and Pacific Islander community which is 1.5 trillion dollars. When all of that purchasing power is combined, it would comprise the third-largest world economy just after U.S., China. In order for PA to compete with Maryland, Delaware, New York, Florida, California, and Texas, we must embrace the changes in our demographics, embrace those facts, and we must create a place where we are welcoming of everyone. This is not something new; it is the Pennsylvania way.

Mr. Bristol Colon ended by highlighting that he is not from Pennsylvania but was born and raised on the island of Puerto Rico. He says that he is only the first Chief Diversity Officer today because of people like those serving on the HRAC. Good people who saw in individuals like himself hope and opportunities, equity and inclusion and those are the reasons why he was able to come in from the poorest barrio in Guayama, be able to move to PA and graduate from Penn State University, work in state government for almost two decades and [this was made possible] because someone embraced those [DEBI] values. Mr. Bristol Colon said that we must continue expanding the American dream all across the Commonwealth in order for Pennsylvania to compete and to lead once again.

GL thanked Mr. Bristol Colon for speaking; LP thanked Mr. Bristol Colon for years ago, giving him the opportunity to begin working in the community. CB thanked Mr. Bristol Colon for the presentation and the work that he has done. CB is interested in the statistics that were used in the presentation; she would like to share those same statistics in the circles that she is in such as social services, healthcare, and general community who are not aware of that information. She agreed with Mr. Bristol Colon that disseminating these statistics and sharing the information will aid in support of the position [of DEBI] because some people will believe it is the right vision to follow but for the people who don't always follow their hearts, she will present the statistics that have financial impact to "bring them along." Mr. Bristol Colon spoke about the financial impact and the political significance of the Route 222 corridor. Mr. Bristol Colon will share his talking points and statistical references with GL who will share them with the HRAC. AB thanked Mr. Bristol Colon and asked if the strategy for the Commonwealth will be made available online. Yes; the administration will notify state employees and post online.

LB announced that she has been elected Chair of Keystone Equality which is the LGBT statewide political organization. LB pointed out that in speaking about minority communities and disenfranchised communities, sexual orientation and gender identity are not in PA state law. LB asked what initiatives Governor Shapiro has to compel the legislature to add sexual orientation and gender identity and expression to the nondiscrimination law of the state. Mr. Bristol Colon answered that the Governor has directed internal management directives, of which the governor has the power to change policy, such as nondiscrimination when it comes to providing the same salaries to LGTBQ individuals and people of color and to providing health care [to same sex] partners. Mr. Bristol Colon suggested that the data does not exist because it must be offered voluntarily [it cannot be asked] but this is something the Shapiro

Administration is going after the legislature to provide a way in which data can be collected [in an effort to get the numbers to enact a good policy]. So, thru Mr. Bristol Colon's DEBI office, they have been working with the data team in Human Resources to change the way they are looking at the LGBTQ community in order for the administration to really know who is joining the administration and if [the administration] doesn't have individuals from the LGTBQ community or individuals with disabilities. These two areas have been difficult to collect the data. Mr. Bristol Colon hopes to connect with LB in the future to advise him on ways to make state government truly inclusive and equitable.

TB thanked Mr. Bristol Colon for his presentation and clarified that he is the Director for DEBI strictly for state government to which Mr. Bristol Colon agreed. TB observed that LB did the majority of the work in drawing up the proposed ordinance and asked what the chances are that the state would utilize the HRAC ordinance and possibly expand the same into a state law [to add more protected classes] into the state law? Mr. Bristol Colon offered three items working in parallel but different: 1.) Human Relations makes certain that people abide by the state and [federal] laws in protecting the rights of individuals. 2.) Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) has personnel working in the [State's] Human Resource offices and that is to ensure that people (employees and employers) are following the federal and state laws. Mr. Bristol Colon sees DEBI differently than those two [sectors]. 3.) DEBI [does] community-building [work] in an office in state government. He offered that the HRAC proposed ordinance is more on the Human Relations Commission [sector] and not on the DEBI [sector]. [The first two sector's missions] are enforcing legal civil rights whereas DEBI work is directed to "change people's minds, hearts, and souls in a way that they don't feel we are demanding it but they feel it is the right thing to do without using the enforcement part."

LB asked for Mr. Bristol Colon's contact information: MBristolCo@pa.gov

GL asked for any further questions for Mr. Bristol Colon; there being no further questions, he asked for citizen's input on non-agenda items and; there being none asked for updates or announcements from the HRAC.

CLOSING AGENDA ITEMS

LB reminded the group that anyone can call or email her at any time about the ordinance. The second read and final vote will be 2/14/24. The time is unknown but LB suggested going to the County's website: lehighcounty.org under the Commissioners section to view the agenda and see the time. If there are any amendments, those will be listed the day-before the Board of Commissioners meeting.

GL will make certain that the HRAC receives Norman Bristol Colon's talking points when he receives them from Mr. Bristol Colon.

GL serves on the Marcon Justice Institute's board which is holding their 2nd Annual Radical Love Conference, February 14 – 17, 2024. Here is the link to register: <https://marcon.lehigh.edu/programs-initiatives/radical-love-conference>

There is a special event on Thursday, 2/15, ***Cena Bilingüe Comunitaria: Bilingual Community Dinner (Puerto Rican Quisine) You must register 6-7:30 pm | Hispanic Center of the Lehigh Valley***

En palabras de nuestro invitado de honor, [Guillermo Lopez](#), “Esta cena es otra oportunidad para cultivar espacios de pertenencia.” Guillermo encarna los ideales del amor en acción, así que únete a nosotros para celebrar al ganador del Premio Boriken de la Agenda Nacional Puertorriqueña, Guillermo López. Los invitados especiales incluyen a Marcon Mountain Hawk [William Rivera Nieves](#), quien ofrecerá una lección musical sobre los desafíos a la supremacía blanca encarnados en el hip hop.

To quote our honored guest, [Guillermo Lopez](#), “This dinner is another opportunity to cultivate spaces of belonging.” Guillermo embodies the ideals of love in action, so join us in celebrating the National Puerto Rican Agenda's Boriken Award winner, Guillermo Lopez. Special guests include Marcon Mountain Hawk William Rivera Nieves who will be offering a musical lesson in the challenges to white supremacy embodied in hip hop.

Register [here](#)

One of the special guests of this dinner will be the following day's keynote speaker, Samaria Rice, mother of Tamir Rice, the young man killed for having a toy gun in 2014 by a Cleveland police officer.

There will be discussions about the difficulties of language, of community, and how to make spaces that people feel more welcome. This event is in partnership with Lehigh Fellows.

Short discussion about when to conclude HRAC meetings once the proposed ordinance is passed. LB reflected that it is written into the ordinance that the County Executive has 90-days to convene the Human Relations Commission. Therefore, members of the HRAC who are interested in serving on that Commission are going to have to apply to it (filling out applications and statements of financial interests) and then there will have to be enough people to institute the commission and bring it about so LB suggested that the HRAC continue to hold its regularly scheduled meetings until the Commission actually meets. LB hopes [this process] will only take two more [HRAC] meetings after the passage of the ordinance. GL agreed. CB said that she believes she will be prevented from [applying for a seat] because of the current laws [concerning political party officers] and that she would have to be appointed as an advisory person. CB made it clear that she wants to continue to serve. LB suggested that it will be the County Executive who chooses who will serve or be appointed. There can be up to 13 people on the commission plus 3 advisors. LB reminded that it is a requirement that [a person serving on the commission] must come to the meetings. A person serving in this capacity cannot miss

more than three (3) meeting or they will be “off” the commission. It is written into the law that people must come to the meetings.

GL thanked everyone for attending and called for any other input (none) and any other announcements (none) and asked for a motion to close the meeting. TB made the motion which was seconded by PS. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L. King