

Sullivan County Human Rights Commission
Minutes of the Monthly Meeting
Thursday, July 10, 2014

Meeting called to order at 5:15 p.m.

Present: Judy, Eric, Gabriel, Roland, Paul, Kathie, and prospective new commissioner, Peggy Johansen

- I. Approval of last month's minutes: Paul made a motion to approve, Gabriel seconded, all in favor

- II. Executive Director's Report
 - A. Attorney General's conference is July 17 in Poughkeepsie. Eric will attend the Round Table on civil rights. Eric is particularly concerned with voter registration and immigration policy.
Judy: What % of population is registered to vote? Of the eligible Hispanic population, 11% is registered. The only early voting is by absentee ballot.

 - B. Commissioners' business cards will be printed soon.

- III. Executive Committee's Report
 - A. Peggy Johansen's resume has been distributed, (and Peggy is in attendance tonight).
 - B. Commission's Budget – Judy went with Eric to the Personnel Committee meeting:
 1. We are not allowed to pay for refreshments (at HRC Forums) from the budget, even if we have raised those funds.
 2. Jonathan Rouis suggested becoming a 401C3 so that we could fundraise and control those funds.
 3. Judy suggested that we put \$\$\$ in budget to train facilitators for anti-bias workshops.
 4. Budget is due tomorrow (July 11).

- IV. Issues Committee Report
 - A) One complaint was referred to the dioces (in which the complainant is a volunteer)
 - B) Another complaint (student who was suspended after arrest, without being tried, losing credit for the semester) was filed against the college for depriving the student of due process.

V. Outreach Committee Report

- A) Tenants' Rights Forum was held and attended by three Commissioners, Jamie Sameral, and two community members.
- B) Rights of the Accused Forum – Eric will contact Tim Havas

VI. Old Business

Relating to our previous discussion of policy treatment of the poor in Sullivan County, Judy brought an article from the *Democrat* that says, "Homeless Problem Is Solved." Kathy Kreiter (Director of Federation for the Homeless) was at the meeting to share her work and the perspective of FH regarding poverty in S.C.

- A. There are changes in the County related to the effort to "root out fraud." The broad definition of "homeless" has changed.
- B. These are the main services that are available for the homeless in S.C., or those who are at risk for becoming homeless:
 - a community soup kitchen serves breakfast and lunch (M-F); emergency food bags that can provide 2-3 days of food;
 - a "client choice" pantry (requires ID & proof of residence, prior registration) alternate Fridays (some fresh produce and occasionally meat);
 - two housing programs (one through United Way that has a budget of \$5000/year; another through HIV/AIDS funding that has much more \$\$\$ available and can help up to 21 weeks/year);
 - a small clothing corner and an annual "spring fling" to collect clothing;
 - informal and formal work with landlords to maintain location of available housing.
- C. According to Kathy, these are some of the problems in our system:
 - County caseworkers are under pressure to get people off the rolls ("Put-in-your-time mentality," although some of the newer, younger caseworkers are more willing to listen more);
 - There are many, many legitimate reasons why people need to apply for social services, and while it's true that there are some who play the system, most just need some help;
 - At Social Services, the first person that an applicant sees is someone trained "to make them go away;"

- The people who are there for why the system is put into place in the first place are often the ones who don't know how "to work the system" and don't get benefits;
- People are set up to fail;
- Sometimes applicants are "accidentally" yanked from the process, and are not savvy enough to know how to follow up;
- Situations are often so complex that they are difficult to untangle, to assign responsibility, and to resolve.

D. Altogether, our discussion was very illuminating.

VII. New Business – The open Commission position will be posted on the County website for one month, and then a formal resolution will be sent to the Legislature requesting the appointment of Peggy Johanson to the Commission.

VIII. Public Comment – there was no public comment tonight

IX. Adjournment – the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.