



**Bloomington/Monroe County
Human Rights Commission**

**June 16, 2025 Meeting Minutes
Hooker Conference Room, City Hall
5:00 p.m.**

The Bloomington/Monroe County Human Rights Commission met at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, June 16, 2025, in the Hooker Conference Room of Showers City Hall.

Commissioners Attending: Sharon Baker, Katie Bensberg (online via Zoom), Amy Jackson, Ryne Shadday, Emma Williams, Lilliana Young.

Staff Attending: BMCHRC Liaison Michael Shermis (online via Zoom), BMCHRC Assistant Annabelle Vosmeier, Assistant City Attorney Taylor Brown.

Public Attending:

Call to Order

1. Shadday brought the BMCHRC to order at 5:00 PM and presented the Land and Labor Acknowledgment.

Approval of Minutes of May 19, 2025 Meeting

1. Jackson moved to approve the minutes from May 19, 2025. Williams seconded. Passed unanimously by roll call vote, 6-0.

Report from Staff

1. **Tabling Opportunities:** The BMCHRC will table at the ADA Anniversary Celebration (morning of August 2) and PrideFest (afternoon of August 23). Baker volunteered to table at both; Bensberg, Young, Shadday, and Williams will volunteer for PrideFest; Shadday and Jackson were potentially available for the ADA Anniversary.

Reports from Commissioners

1. **Williams** provided updates from her volunteer work at the jail; she volunteers there with New Leaf New Life about twice a week. Last month, she had said that the atmosphere was very negative and inmates had complaints about their conditions. She shared allegations that two women who were menstruating had been refused showers, clean clothes, and sanitary products, and that a pregnant person had not been allowed any extra food. Women seem to have more complaints than men. For example, women's rec time has been shortened and moved earlier in the morning so that they miss the opportunity if they sleep in. Jackson asked about how the jail handles gender identity and transgender inmates. Williams said that a year and a half ago, she met a trans man in the women's block who said he felt more comfortable and safer there, but Williams didn't know if he chose to be there. She has not met trans inmates since, but meets only a small number of people. Bensberg asked if current inmates have filed grievances. Williams didn't know,

but she has been compiling resources about how to file complaints and what avenues to take, as people do not know their options and ask her about them. Jackson suggested asking representatives from the jail system for a presentation on human rights at which commissioners could ask about these issues and the complaint process. Williams agreed. She stated that it generally seemed like corrections guards were not responsive, brushing off complaints and acting like inmates were making unreasonable requests, lying, or exaggerating. She worries about dismissing issues or retaliation. Shermis has connections with the sheriff and jail commander and can reach out to them to schedule a presentation. Commissioners agreed to invite them. Williams stated that she wanted to better understand their processes, and commissioners agreed.

2. **Shadday** met with city legal staff, who asked that the Commission be mindful while speaking about certain issues during meetings and when speaking in public on behalf of the Commission.
3. **Baker** is preaching at the First United Methodist Church this Sunday and will talk about the work of the Commission during the contemporary service.

Open Cases

1. Bensberg's racial discrimination in public accommodation case: The case was assigned but was quickly withdrawn when the complainant's issue was resolved.
2. Williams's racial discrimination in housing case: A position statement is due at the beginning of July.
3. Baker's sex discrimination in housing case: The respondent has made a settlement offer which is being negotiated.
4. Coover's racial discrimination in public accommodations case is set to be an automatic withdrawal in a few days.
5. Jackson's disability discrimination in employment case: The respondent made a settlement offer and the complainant rejected it. The respondent made another offer, which the complainant is considering.
6. Shadday's disability discrimination in employment: The complainant will likely withdraw since the state (ICRC) has an ongoing investigation.

Assignment of New Cases

1. Shermis stated that potential cases are coming in at a rapid rate.
2. The gender identity in public accommodations complaint, which has been in mediation for six months, has now been closed. The complainant decided to go public about the issues because they found that the respondent did not address them adequately.
3. Seven potential cases (racial discrimination in housing, racial discrimination in employment (x2), disability discrimination in employment, disability discrimination in housing, disability discrimination in public accommodations, national origin discrimination) of varying levels of likelihood and complexity; in the intake interview stage with racial discrimination in housing and both racial discrimination in employment complaints.

Unfinished Business

1. **Municipal ID program:** At the May 19 meeting, Shadday had asked Young to research how other cities mandated acceptance of the city ID. She found that South Bend does not

enforce it but requires it for some city services and does outreach to encourage other groups to accept it. Shermis reminded commissioners that CFRD (department chair, Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs liaison) does not believe that the community this is mostly likely to apply to (Hispanic/Latino) will find it beneficial at this time due to feeling like they are currently being targeted by the government. He also pointed out the likelihood of budget and program cuts for the next year, making it unlikely to add a new program. Jackson stated that she would like to propose it, knowing that the City would likely not accept it for this year but may table it for later date. Shadday asked whether the City would take it more seriously with a formal proposal and cost breakdown. Brown said that that would be helpful. Jackson proposed finding a third-party vendor. Bensberg said that she would like more clarity before proposing anything, such as how it would interact with other laws, state IDs, and home rule. The Commission decided to reach out to the South Bend program to request a cost breakdown or annual report and to invite them to attend a meeting and answer questions. Shermis will look into connecting with them.

2. **Bylaws:** The Commission reviewed bylaw changes about abstentions and about representing the Commission in public speech. The Office of the Mayor (OOTM) had provided new changes to review. Shadday said that he had first been asked to submit a speech to the OOTM after COVID under the previous administration. Byron Bangert, the previous chair, had never been asked to do so. Those practices have carried onto the current administration. Williams suggested that since commissioners are appointed, one would think that the City trusted them to speak on the issues they were appointed to discuss. Brown said that an appointed commissioner in a different commission “ruined it for everyone” by expressing private views as if they were the City’s views. Baker asked how it worked for her, a County appointment. Brown said that the county has delegated certain responsibilities to the city in the contract establishing the joint commission. Jackson asked if Commissioners could be guaranteed a certain timeline for approved speech since issues change so quickly. Shermis said that, as the Commission liaison, he has some authority to know which issues are controversial enough for his department director and OOTM to check; speeches congratulating the winners of the Human Rights Award, for example, have not been controversial. Brown said that statements would go from the Commission to Legal to the OOTM and that Legal would be able to prioritize urgent issues. Young moved to approve bylaws pending amendment to III.3 at further meetings. Baker seconded. Passed unanimously by roll call vote, 6-0.

New Business

1. **None.**

Public Input

2. **None.**

Adjournment: Chair Shadday adjourned the meeting at 6:24 p.m.