

AMENDED 6/4/2025

- Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes
- Meeting Date: March 5, 2025
- Present: Commissioners Linabury, Butler, Lance, Jacobson, Venero, Ware
- Guest Speaker: Rep. Jillian Gilchrest
- Members of the Public: Conor, Max, Robin, Debbie (last names not provided)

Meeting Called to Order: 6:50 PM

- Mark opened the meeting by welcoming all members and guests and explaining the Commission's role in promoting human rights awareness and addressing local issues.
- Mark outlined the agenda for the evening and read the mission statement

Public Comments

- Comments were received regarding concerns about the UN HRC and LGBTQ+ rights in the community.

Legislation on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Presenter: Rep. Jillian Gilchrest

- **Bill Overview:** Rep. Gilchrest provided an update on efforts to pass legislation banning female genital mutilation (FGM) in Connecticut. She noted that Connecticut is one of only nine states without a law addressing FGM.
- The bill aims to criminalize FGM, including when a young girl is taken abroad for the procedure, and create public awareness about the practice. The legislation also addresses the role of medical professionals who might perform the procedure.
- **Bipartisan Support:** The bill has gained bipartisan support, including backing from the Lieutenant Governor.
- **Religious and Cultural Concerns:** Some have raised concerns about the bill's potential impact on religious freedoms, particularly male circumcision. Rep. Gilchrest clarified that FGM is not a religious requirement and should not be conflated with other cultural practices like circumcision.
- **Next Steps:** The bill will undergo a public hearing, with written or in-person testimony being crucial to the legislative process. Advocates will continue to push for the bill to remain focused solely on FGM, avoiding unrelated amendments.
- **Support for Survivors:** While the bill does not provide direct funding for survivors, it will offer resources for reporting FGM and raise public awareness about the abuse. Various organizations, including Live Girl, are involved in providing advocacy and data on the issue.

Overview of Executive Order Regarding Withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council

- Dave provided an overview of the recent executive order by President Trump, which involves the U.S. withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The order also withdraws U.S. funding from the council and mandates a review of all U.S. treaties and international organizations.
 - Some - including members of the public and some commissioners - shared concerns about different historical actions by the UN and UNHRC.
 - Commissioners reiterated that the WeHa HRC would not be taking a vote or a stance on the UN HRC, rather this agenda item was meant to facilitate a casual, general discussion to understand how – if at all – our withdrawal from the UN HRC could impact human rights in the local community.

Addressing Local vs. International Issues as the WeHa HRC:

- In response to concerns raised by representatives of the Grassroots Jewish Women of CT about the rise of antisemitism in the community, Alana will look up research done by the ADL to find out more about incidents in West Hartford.
- Mark emphasized that the Commission should focus on practical and immediate actions within the local community, while remaining aware of broader global human rights issues. (See proposed amendment related to this bullet point above).
- A member of the public suggested that while the commission should address global concerns, it should prioritize local actions and examine what the Commission can do to help West Hartford residents in addressing human rights challenges.
- Commissioners agreed, noting the commission's focus should be on issues like those raised by the public guests that evening, such as concerns over increases in anti LGBTQ+, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic hate-speech, discrimination, and harassment.

Next Meeting:

- The next meeting will be held on April 2, 2015.
 - Town Manager Rick Ledwith will speak about Vision Zero.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM

Action Items:

- Follow up on the two current vacancies - Mark
- Conduct research on the prevalence and impact of antisemitism in West Hartford – Alana
- Confirm with Tiana when the 2024 meeting minutes will be included in the archived meeting records - Alana