

Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (CIRA)
First Regular Meeting Minutes
111 N Front Street, Conference Room 205
Date: July 1, 2025
6:00 pm -8:00 pm

Attendance:

- **Commissioners:** Adeeti Jindal, Bartholomew T. Shepkong, Daniel Myungho Sim, Fernanda Diaz-Basteris, Kamran Syed Arif, Cassandra Aguirre Ramirez, Naima Ilmi, Sara Abou Rashed, Tasha Lomo, Rev. Dr. Alexander Y Sumo, Shahwar Ali, Jesús A. Valencia, and Nadia Jean-Jacque.
- **City Employees/Non-voting members:** Jessica Caceres, Joseline Martinez Cortez, Robert Tobias, and Lindora Howard-Diawara.

I. Call to Order & Welcome:

- The Chair welcomed everyone, thanked them for coming and called on Lindora to confirm the quorum. The roll was called noting the presence of 13 commissioners and the absence of two- Bashir Ahmed (Submitted a written excuse) and Mariam Isse (Gave birth). With that, the quorum was confirmed.
- The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:12 pm, and encouraged everyone to fully participate and approach the meeting with an open mind.

II. Adoption of minutes from July 1st Meeting:

Having had the opportunity to review and make comments, the past meeting minutes was accepted without concerns or questions. A request for a motion for acceptance was made by the chair. It was moved by Alex and seconded by Adeeti that the minutes be accepted and form part of the Commission's Archives.

III. Induction of Commissioner Jesús A. Valencia:

On Behalf of the Commission, the chair welcomed Jesús and asked him to introduce himself. In response, Jesús shared about his work and role at the House of Representatives. He is a U.S. born and of Mexican heritage. He speaks Spanish, English and is proficient in French. Afterwards, Rob Administered the Oath of Office and induction.

IV. By-Laws Presentation, Discussions, Review and Adoption:

The Chair yielded to the Vice Chair giving her the floor to present the By-laws reviewed by the working group:

➤ **Unresolved issues, proposals and/or concerns needing redress:**

- **Article II- Members, section 2- Removal of Board Members:** A proposal was made to allow for 2 absences to be enough for removal. Another was that removal be subject a super majority of a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote and not a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote.

- **Article III- Organization of Officers, Sections 2 and 3-Chair & Vice Chairpersons:** A proposal was made to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of both the Chair and Vice Chairpersons as well as highlight the need for both the Chair and Vice Chairpersons to have shared responsibilities.
- **Article III- Organization of Officers, Section 4-Committees:** A proposal was made to clearly define the formation of sub-committees and how they will work.

➤ **Discussions and Agreements:**

- **Article II-Members:**

- **Resignation-Section 1:**

- ✚ Tasha: Although a provision is made for resignation of a Commission member, the bylaws doesn't specify the need for advance notice and time frame.
 - ❖ Rob's comment: Ok. However, folks would need to be cognizant of emergency situations. So, indicating a reasonable notice could be ok.

- **Removal of Commissioners- Section 2:**

- ✚ **Rob:** provided expert opinion indicating that the by-laws cannot supersede what's in the statutes/code. Therefore, an increase cannot be made to a vote of 3/4 from 2/3 vote for removal. With that, the body agreed to disregard the proposal.

Agreement:

- ✓ That the requirement for a 2/3rd vote for removal remain as is.

- **Article III- Organization of Officers:**

- **Chairperson and Vice Chairperson- Sections 2 and 3:**

- ✚ **Rob:** Other commissions have no more than two consecutive terms. This allows for opportunity and continuity. But the Commission would need to decide. Having no more than 2 consecutive terms is a suggestion but not a legal requirement.
- ✚ **Alex:** Is there anything stipulated for the Vice Chair in the Statutes?
 - ❖ Rob: No but in practice, the Vice Chair serves as a substitute. But, the Chair could also delegate. Additionally, a shared responsibility doesn't have to be in the by-laws but both could share responsibilities in practice.
- ✚ **Sara:** What if we have alternating terms?
 - ❖ Rob: Recommends keeping it together and not alternate. That's standard, he said.

- **Committees, Section 4:**

- ✚ Sara: Should we limit representation of the number of people by community?
 - ❖ Rob's comment: Because this section was copied directly from the code, changing it wouldn't be advisable.
 - ❖ Jessica's comments: If inclusivity is a concern, it's implied that there will be some diversity.
 - ❖ Naima's comments: If our goal is to ensure diversity, then what we have provides a lot more room for flexibility.

Agreements:

- ✓ That no changes be made regarding definition, roles and responsibilities of the Chair and Vice Chairpersons.
- ✓ That both Chair and Vice Chairpersons serve no more than 2 consecutive terms.

- **Article IV- Duties of Members and Standard of Conduct:**

• **Absenteeism- Section 2:**

- + Cassandra: Will excuses be different or considered an absence?
 - ❖ Rob: If absences come to the point of chronic absenteeism, then the executive could discuss.
- + Alex: Who determines what’s excusable?
 - ❖ Rob: The commission will decide but right now, it’s assumed that folks reaching out to Lindora prior to meetings are considered excused. However, the Commission could decide on a number for excuses.
- + Joseline: Will a definite number of excuses also count for smaller meetings?
 - ❖ Rob: No, just regular meetings not committee meetings.

“No commissioner shall be absent from three consecutive meetings or five or more meetings in a year”.

- + Tasha: Why five or more meetings?
 - ❖ Rob: The number 5 is simply added based on the experience or model from the Civilian Review Board for example.
 - ❖ Adeeti: Suggested not cutting it to 2 meetings.
 - ❖ Rob: Indicated that 2 is only an indicator of being subject to removal.
- + Daniel: Suggested that an absence log be kept for future and public references. Is there a plan to have a central way of storing documents?
 - ❖ Rob: Yes! Lindora is expected to posts minutes and key documents including posting the Bylaws online for accessibility once adopted.
 - ❖ Jessica: The CIRA website is coming but if commissioners would like to create their commission Gmail as earlier discussed that will be ok.
- + Tasha: How long documents expected to be retained?
 - ❖ Rob: Document retention is based on the requirements of the city’s code on document retention and that implemented by all departments.

Agreements:

- ✓ That current procedures for reporting absences to Lindora be adhered to.
- ✓ That an absence log be maintained to track absences and help facilitate decision making processes regarding absences.
- ✓ All commission materials to be posted online to facilitate access to all commission documents. For time being, an official commission site is not yet live. Website of the Department of Neighborhoods and the City Council site referencing the commission will be used in the interim.

- **Article VII- Regular Meetings:**

• **Quorum/Official Action- Section 2:**

- + Tasha: Quorum is still confusing-Could it be specified?

- ❖ Rob: Quorum should be in the bylaws already. With 15 members, the quorum would be 8 ½ plus one.
- ❖ Fernanda: An addition could also be made to Article IV Section 2.

Agreements:

- ✓ That references to quorum in Article IV-section 1 and Article-section 2 be made clearer.
- ✚ Barth: Do we need an adoption based on the decisions made?
 - ❖ Rob: No, an adoption will be needed after the corrections are made and reviewed. Adopting the bylaws during the next meeting should be the goal.

V. Committee Formation Discussion

- Fernanda provided a context and made specific reference to the first meeting highlighting the details of each committee including the Executive; Community Engagement, Advocacy. Additionally, she indicated that to move forward with the formation of committees, key decisions would need to be made. To facilitate the discussions, the following questions were posed and discussions held:
 - ✚ How are we going set up sub-committees/Standing?
 - ❖ Rob: The Chair appoints.
 - ❖ Fernanda: How do we call/invite non-commissioners?
 - ❖ Jessica: What was decided was that members appointed would suggest others-community members/experts to be appointed.
 - ❖ Shahwar- Are the number of commissioners agreed upon going to be changed later?
Rob: Yes. There's always a room for change.
 - ❖ Naima: Maintaining flexibility is an important point but, we had discussed having technical expertise. Also looking back at the external state review done during the organizing meeting could help.
 - ❖ **Jessica:** Do we want to meet as chairs to draft something and then agree in August?
 - **Barth:** What are your thoughts comments and questions?
 - ❖ Rob: you'd need to decide.
 - ❖ Jesus: Should we change the committee to oversight committee?
Rob. No. It's standard.
 - ❖ Joseline: Suggested an odd number be selected for the total number of members on a committee and that seat be maintained for a young person.
 - ❖ Daniel: Suggested that a language for clarity about subcommittees also be added allowing for diversity and inclusion-ex, Allow more diversity.
 - ❖ Rob: The Commission still has to figure out an odd number for the sub-committees. Example- No more than 7 members on a committee.
- **To facilitate the internal recruitment/enrollment of commissioners to each committee, Joseline suggested using an existing interest form as an option.**

- ✚ Cassandra asked for more explanation be provided for the Advocacy Committee as the other two-Executive and Community Engagement and Outreach- were better explained.
- ✚ Fernanda read the highlight of the committee presented by Council Member. Naima: Add a question that captures expertise- Committee members to indicate their valuable skills.
- ✚ Rob: If appointments are expected to be done by next the meeting, then the forms should be shared with the chairs. Secondly, it should again be noted that all committee meetings are subject to public noticing.

Agreements:

- ✓ That there be no more than 9 members of a committee.
- ✓ Joseline to share the interest form and ensure that the details of each committee shared during the June 3rd meeting be highlighted.

VI. Check Ins and Community Conversation:

- The Chair started this session by asking- how is everyone doing?

- ✚ Nadia: “My community is pretty much being targeted. I am in Pain. I am not ok. I am here. I’m listening. Everyone’s being silent. What can you guys bring me, or support me with? Nobody asked for the HHB (Haitian Humanitarian Parole). It was given to them. But this administration cut it off. “

With these sentiments expressed, Nadia added that she traveled for 2 days to Washington D.C. to make her case and advocate on behalf of The Haitian community at the senate. “They listened and sympathized. They took notes, but nothing happened. I would like for people to not stay silent. People are ready to sell their cars, etc. There’s fear. People are not going to hospitals, grocery stores, etc.”

With general support from the commission, the chair provided some words of encouragement to Nadia and assured here that commissioners were all there to support each other and that she should not feel alone during these times.

- ✚ Jesús: Not directly impacted by the current situation, but worries about his family. He also wonders what can be done to engage with young voters.
- ✚ Cassandra: expressed feeling overwhelmed. Stressed.
- ✚ Naima: Encouraged everyone including community members to take advantage resources and support available for immigrants and refugees.
- ✚ Alex: Assured Nadia that the Council of Churches is praying along and encouraged Nadia and to reach out.

- Moving on to discuss about a possible community conversation, Barth posed a second question about the Commission vis-à-vis the current political situation and

shared about the proposal for hosting the Commission’s first community conversation. Some comments are as follows:

- ✚ Jessica: Shared some brief background information about previous meetings held by City Council and the Mayor’s Office in February and indicated that Barth’s proposal /recommendation for a conversation stems from his report that many community leaders had been asking about the role of the commission given the current political context.
- ✚ Sara: Inquired about the timeline for the conversation.
 - ❖ Jessica: Mentioned August as a proposal. Additionally, she indicated that support can be provided by city employees as the commission is not yet ready lead considering that committees are not yet finalized.
- ✚ Tasha: Inquired about the “big take away” from the meetings held in February.
 - ❖ Jessica/Joseline and Lindora: Shared that both meetings created the opportunity for City Officials to engage with nonprofit and faith-based leaders to assure them that Officials are not only listening and following the trend but that they will continue to ensure that residents are supported. Secondly, more resources were shared including information about the availability of legal support amongst others.
- ✚ Naima: Concluded that while the commission is building out, everyone should be encouraged to attend other meetings to learn about support available across the city.

Agreements:

- ✓ That the community conversation be held in August.
- ✓ That the conversation will be led by city employees in consultation with the commissioners particularly the chairs.

VII. Community Events & Closing:

- ❖ Rob. Suggested that instead of outlining events during the meeting, everyone should share event information with Lindora before each meeting. Lindora can then share the list of events during the meetings.
- **Two events, however, shared were:**
 - ❖ Barth: July 26: African Festival.
 - ❖ Jessica: July 1st: Somali Independence Day illumination.

To wrap up the meeting, Barth thanked and encouraged everyone to stay committed. Meanwhile, Jessica shared information about the pre-meeting incident involving a lady who came to the meeting room hoping to get some legal support. Fortunately, Rob was in attendance and provided her some guidance in terms of where she could find some support.

Although unexpected, everyone agreed that the commission should not be surprised if similar situation occurs but be prepared to address issues as they arise or make relevant referrals.

With that, Barth asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Alex moved and Jesús seconded the motion.

The meeting ended at 8:02 pm.