

New Jersey Civil Union Review Commission
Division on Civil Rights-6th Floor
Walter Lucas Commission Conference Room
140 East Front Street, Trenton, NJ

Meeting Minutes: July 18, 2007

PRESENT: Chairperson Frank Vespa-Papaleo; Vice Chair Steven Goldstein; Commissioners: Barbara G. Allen, Barbra Casbar Siperstein, Patrick De Almeida, Charles Blustein-Ortman, Robert Bresenhan, Stephen Hyland, Sheila Kenny, Joe Komosinski, Erin O'Leary, Kevin E. Taylor.

GUESTS: Nicole Brown, Assistant General Counsel, Assembly Speaker's Office

STAFF: Commission Liaison: Benn Meistrich, Special Assistant Bear Atwood, Legal Liaison Estelle Bronstein, Intern C. J. Griffin.

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo called the meeting to order at 1: 00 p.m. in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act. Present at the Call to Order were: Vice Chair Steven Goldstein Commissioners: Barbara G. Allen, Patrick DeAlmeida, Charles Blustein-Ortman, Robert Bresenhan, Stephen Hyland, Sheila Kenny, Joe Komosinski, Erin O'Leary. Commissioners Barbra Casbar Siperstein and Kevin E. Taylor arrived after the roll was called.

FLAG SALUTE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo asked for a motion to approve the Agenda for the July 18, 2007 meeting of the Civil Union Review Commission. Commissioner Kenny moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Commissioner DeAlmeida seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the June 18, 2007 meeting of the Civil Union Review Commission. Commissioner DeAlmeida moved to adopt the minutes as presented. Commissioner Komosinski seconded the motion. The motion passed with eight ayes, zero nays and three abstentions.

ELECTION:

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo suggested that the Commission elect a Commissioner to the position of Secretary to assist Division staff liaisons with any formal communications dealing with notices or the press.

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo nominated Commissioner Hyland, Vice Chair Goldstein seconded the motion.

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo asked for other nominations. There were none. He asked for the vote. Commissioner Hyland was elected unanimously.

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo distributed the Commission Directory, a short report of the Civil Union complaints received by the Division on Civil Rights, and a list of working committees for the Commission: Financial Impact Committee, Legislative Committee, Reporting Committee, and the Liaison Committee. Additionally, he reported that the Civil Union Review Commission website should be up and running in the next month.

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo informed the Commission that dates for the hearings were in the process of being set. Hearings are being scheduled in North Jersey-Newark and Central Jersey New Brunswick. The time is tentatively set for the evening hours. After much discussion, the Commission decided to add a third hearing in South Jersey in October and the time should be in the evening from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Commissioner DeAlmeida suggested that more notice be made than just the standard public meeting notice. He suggested that the Liaison Committee distribute invitations to the various interested entities.

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo shared with the Commission an upcoming Civil Union Review self-assessment tool for businesses that Division is designing. This tool will help employers review their policies to insure they are in compliance with regard to civil union, gender identity or expression and sexual orientation laws. He encouraged the Commissioners to review the tool's civil union piece and critique it.

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo asked the Commission if they would be interested in having the head of Monmouth University Polling Institute give a presentation at the next meeting.

Much discussion ensued on: whether civil union records were open to the public, Commissioner Komosinski stated that they were not, whether there was money earmarked for this sort of endeavor, Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo, said not yet, whether it was premature to poll civil union couples less than six months from the legislation going into effect, Commissioner DeAlmeida said that was a good question for the pollster. It was also discussed that an outside organization or group interested in civil unions could contract to conduct its own polling and submit the results to the Commission, if the Commission did not want to, or have funds for, hiring a polling institute.

Vice Chairperson Goldstein reported that 191 couples contacted Garden State Equality about employers withholding employment benefits from civil union couples that are available to married couples.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS:

Commissioner Komosinski's Report

Civil Unions	Reaffirmations	Domestic Partnerships
1359	48	14 (Since 2/19/07)

850 female 509 male	7 Massachusetts 28 Vermont 12 Canada 1 Amsterdam	5 female to female (over 62) 9 male to female
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Additionally, **Commissioner Komosinski** reported that he was collecting information from other states to determine how many New Jersey residents had entered into civil unions or their equivalent out-of-state. He is also trying to determine how many domestic partnerships have converted to civil union.

Commissioner Bresenhan reported that a couple contacted him to say that a couple called him to complain that the homestead rebate form only allowed for married or single. There was no check box for civil union.

Commissioner DeAlmeida stated that the form was correct because it was a rebate for 2006, before civil union legislation came into effect.

Commissioner Kenny suggested that the Civil Union Review Commission web-site have a frequently asked question component and a list of referral sources for newly civil unionized couples.

Commissioner Hyland brought up three issues: 1) The Department of Motor Vehicles requires civil-union and married couples who want to hyphenate their names to use their surnames first and add the one of their partner, e.g. Adams-Jones/Jones-Adams. This is clumsy and perhaps should be regulated. 2) The federal government is not accepting civil union certificates as proof of name change; is it possible to recommend some alternate-recognized by the federal government so civil union couples don't have to jump through extra hoops. 3) He recommended separate hearings be held for domestic partnership.

Commissioner DeAlmeida stated that the DMV is merely a recording agency and should not be dictating what people's names should be.

Commissioner Komosinski said that what DMV was doing was in complete opposition to what Vital Statistics does which is accept the names as presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo submitted a **Civil Union Data Collection/Inquiry Form** for the Commissioners to review.

Several suggestions were made and considerations brought up: "Name of Inquirer" should be optional, the explanatory introduction should state that the form is not a complaint form but a data collection form, if these forms are used by state agencies they become part of the public record, what happens if the information is released without the appropriate redactions. It was decided to go back to the drawing board on the forms and the distribution of the forms.

Chairperson Vespa-Papaleo reiterated the meeting dates for the hearings: September 26, October 10, and October 24.

ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION: Commissioner O'Leary moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:25 p.m. Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

NEXT MEETING: August 15, 2007 1 PM
Division on Civil Rights- 6th Floor
Walter A. Lucas Commission Conference Room
140 East Front Street
Trenton, NJ