



## GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

### POLICY ON PUBLIC COMMENTS AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

The DC Commission on Human Rights (“Commission”) is an agency within the Office of Human Rights (“OHR”) that adjudicates private sector discrimination complaints brought under the D.C. Human Rights Act and Fair Criminal Records Screening Act. The Commission also provides an appeals process to applicants who were found ineligible for employment under the Criminal Background Checks for the Protection of Children Act. Although the Commission is within OHR, the Commission acts independent of OHR in order to adjudicate cases in an impartial manner. The Commission supports OHR’s mission to eradicate discrimination, increase equal opportunity and protect human rights for persons who live in, visit, or work in the District of Columbia.

The Commission on Human Rights is a “public body” as defined by D.C. Code § 5-574(3) and is subject to the requirements of the Open Meetings Act, D.C. Code § 2-571 *et seq.* The Commission holds a bi-monthly public meeting on the second Wednesday of the month, during odd months, at 6:30 p.m. Meetings may be held virtually or in person. Meeting notices are posted on the OHR website ([www.ohr.dc.gov](http://www.ohr.dc.gov)), on the Open Meetings calendar (<https://www.open-dc.gov/public-bodies/meetings>), and published in the DC Register.

Neither the Open Meetings Act nor any other statute provides the public with the right to speak during meetings. However, the Commission recognizes that the public shares an interest in the elimination of discrimination in the District and will permit public comment at its public meetings only when the request is made and approved prior to the meeting. To this end, at its public meeting on November 8, 2023, the Commission adopted the following guidelines on public comments.

#### **POLICY**

- The Commission on Human Rights shall provide time for the members of the general public to orally address the Commission during its bi-monthly meetings.
- Public comments are limited to matters that directly pertain to the role of the Commission on Human Rights. The Chair of the Commission can reject a request to make a public comment that does not comport with the role of the Commission as stated above.
- There will be a public comment period noted on the agenda only when a request for public comment is received and approved in advance of the meeting (*see* “Procedure” below on how to make a request).
- The Commission will designate a time limit for the duration of public comments and for an individual comment.
- The Commission will ensure that all members of the public have an equal opportunity to address the Commission.

- Public comment is an opportunity for the Commission to hear public opinion, however, the Commission will not engage in dialogue during the public comment period. The Commission may, at its discretion, vote to have a Commission conversation regarding issues raised during the public comment period.
- No items raised during the public comment period may be acted upon by the Commission unless it was on the posted agenda.
- The Commission will respond to questions raised during public comment within 10 business days if a response is warranted, unless a response requires a Commission vote, in which case, it will be placed on the agenda for the next public meeting of the Commission.

### **PROCEDURES TO REQUEST TO SPEAK**

- Members of the public may sign up for public comment in advance of the meeting by sending an email, no later than 4:00pm, on the day that is three business days before the meeting, to [Commission.COHR@dc.gov](mailto:Commission.COHR@dc.gov). The email should include a brief description of the subject matter of the public comment so the Chair may determine if it falls within the role of the Commission.
- Requests received past the above deadline will be deferred to the next scheduled meeting.
- The Commission may restrict the number of commenters based on the amount of total time allotted for public comment.

### **TIME LIMIT**

- The total amount of time designated within the Commission meeting for public comments is 15 minutes. Each person wishing to make a public comment is limited to 3 minutes and is limited to speaking just once. The time limit may be extended at the discretion of the Chair.

### **PROCEDURES FOR ORAL COMMENT**

- Any person wishing to address the Commission as part of the public comment forum shall present their name and topic before speaking.
- Comments should be directed to the Commission Chair.
- The purpose to the public comment is to allow members of the community an opportunity to express their views. Therefore, the Commissioners will not respond to questions during the meeting but may follow up with an emailed response within 10 business days if a response is warranted.

- In order to ensure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to address the Commission, speakers may address the Commission only once until all others have had a chance to speak.
- If the public comment is regarding an item on the agenda, the speaker will be called on to make their comments at the time the relevant agenda item is open for discussion. All other public comments will be heard at the end of the meeting.
- Speakers will be courteous in their language and presentation and limit comments to germane topic issues.
- Should Commissioners wish to respond to public comments, they may do so by requesting a suspension of the rules.
- No items raised during the public comment period may be acted upon by the Commission unless it was on the posted agenda.
- Public comments will be reflected in the minutes only as “Public Comments Made by XXX.” If the speaker wishes for the substance of their comments included in the minutes, they may submit a written copy of their comments to be attached to the minutes. Only the speaker’s statements and no background or other reference materials may be included in the minutes.

APPROVED BY:



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Motoko Aizawa  
Chair, Commission on Human Rights  
Adopted: September 8, 2023