

MINUTES	Thursday, February 10, 2021 at 12:00 PM	
Human Relations Commission Meeting	Commission Room 1st Floor—City Hall 224 West Ninth Street Sioux Falls, South Dakota or by teleconference at 1-408-418- 9388, Access Code 2490 828 7585##	

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tony Burke, Kassidi Smith, Sheku Bannister, Karen Gourley, Nassir Yemam
PRESENT BY PHONE: Justine Schoolmeester
BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Anny Libengood, Megan Myers, Megan Grode Wolters
STAFF PRESENT: Sharla Svenes, Lyndsey Meier

CALL TO ORDER

In absence of officers, Burke chaired today’s meeting. Roll call was taken. A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 12:09 p.m.

ADOPT THE AGENDA

A motion was made by Yemam and seconded by Bannister to adopt agenda. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Smith and seconded by Bannister to approve minutes from the January 2022 meeting. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

BUSINESS OR PENDING ISSUES BROUGHT BEFORE THE BOARD

- A. Guest speaker: Tim Jurgens, LSS Center for New Americans. Jurgens serves a dual role as the Director of LSS Center for New Americans and the State Refugee Coordinator. Jurgens shared information about their program including history, processes, statistics, and projections.

Unlike immigrants who chose to leave their homes, refugees flee their homes because they are afraid for their personal safety and are unable to return home for fear of persecution. SD is one of 15 states that maintains a replacement designee status, meaning a private organization oversees resettlement rather than state government. LSS is the only resettlement agency in the state with its headquarters in Sioux Falls and offices in Huron, Yankton, and Aberdeen.

The U.S. is one of 30 countries that accepts refugees for settlement, with fewer than 1% of the world’s refugees being resettled into countries like the U.S. On average, an individual spends 15

years in a refugee camp before being resettled, with many individuals hoping to return to their homeland.

The Presidential Determination establishes the maximum number of refugees the U.S. will accept. For FFY 2022 that number is 125,000. This determination includes 65,000 Afghan's. There is an extensive background check process that typically takes 18-24 months before someone is approved for resettlement in the U.S. This involves multiple interviews and biometric security checks. New arrivals are required to quarantine for 14-days due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the first 90 days, which is known as the initial resettlement period, LSS provides wrap-around services focused on self-sufficiency. This includes securing housing, completing a family self-sufficiency plan, locating employment opportunities, ESL courses, and enrolling children in school among other integration factors. LSS emphasizes ESL courses during the resettlement process. Refugees are eligible for services through LSS for five years regardless of their income level. Jurgens spoke about the fallacy that refugees enter the country and rely on government social programs to live. This is simply not the case. Data provides that 93% of newly arrived refugees were self-sufficient households within 8 months.

LSS is currently anticipating 125-175 arrivals into SD for FFY22. Primary refugee population groups have remained consistent with most refugees coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, and Burma. Other population groups include Eritrean, Kunama, and Somali. LSS takes community needs and local infrastructure into consideration, wanting to ensure the community can sustain the number of refugees entering.

Jurgens discussed their annual event, Taste of Cultures, in which proceeds go directly back to refugees. Jurgens also shared LSS accepts referrals for all individuals and they can determine if they qualify for refugee status. Board discussed support to LSS and Jurgens shared they would like someone to represent the City on their Refugee Advisory Team, which is a collaboration of local agencies who meet monthly to discuss new entries and challenges they may face.

- B. Collaboration with other municipal civil rights boards. Burke shared he has been in contact with the Brookings Human Rights Commission Chair regarding collaborating with other city boards to discuss issues and initiatives in their respective jurisdictions. This is in the development stages and discussions will continue.
- C. Signage Initiative. Burke shared with the Board a recent initiative by the Brookings Human Rights Commission in which they produced and dispersed free signage promoting diversity in the community. The signs were made possible, in part, by a donation from the Fishback family. Burke shared that in conversations with other Board members, it seems that this had previously been discussed amongst HRC, but did not come to fruition possibly because of ordinance requirements. Discussions will continue.
- D. Working session agenda. Due to time constraints, this was not discussed and Commissioners are encouraged to contact the Human Relations Office with items they would like on the agenda.

UPDATE REGARDING HUMAN RELATIONS OFFICE

Meier shared there are two new appointments to HRC. Dawn Marie Johnson was present at today's meeting and introduced herself and shared background information. Elmar Delibasic has also been appointed to HRC. Johnson and Delibasic's mayoral appointments are awaiting council approval and

upon such, they will become active, voting members next month. These two appointments will bring the Board to full capacity with 11 members serving.

PUBLIC INPUT

No public input.

NEXT MEETING

March 10, 2022

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn made by Yemam and seconded by Smith. Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 1:06pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lyndsey Meier
Human Relations Specialist