



**BARNSTABLE COUNTY
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMISSION**

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Statement by Barnstable County Human Rights Advisory Commission (BCHRAC) in response to a complaint notice and review of certain events which occurred at the meeting of the Assembly of Delegates held on September 2, 2020, and in support of Proposed Resolution 20-06 regarding Public Participation Guide.

The Barnstable County Human Rights Advisory Commission is disappointed by Speaker Suzanne McAuliffe's actions during the Assembly of Delegates (AoD) meeting on September 2, 2020, when two women of color were muted and removed from the meeting. They were offering testimony during the public comment section of the meeting on Proposed Ordinance 20-17 dealing with the Charter Recall Amendment. This action did not appear fair and impartial since it was based on a subjective criteria of what constitutes a "respectful comment" and because there are no applicable code of conduct or standard mandating delegates to show respect and fairness to the public.

The Advisory Commission Observations

1. While there is a Code of Conduct for elected and appointed officials of Barnstable County (11/12/17), it only covers the behavior of elected and appointed officers towards each other but is silent on interactions with members of the public. In fact, the Speaker stated during the September 2 meeting, that the only recourse available to the public if there is uncivil behavior on the part of an elected or appointed official, is to vote the offending party out-of-office at the next election.
2. It was not clear that members of the public were informed of the Meeting Guidelines.
3. Speaker "excluded" the women from the meeting but continued to make public comments about the individuals, creating an unsubstantiated impression of prior difficulties in communicating with the women, but declining to share any details of those communications with other delegates. In subsequent talks with the BCHRAC, the women denied these allegations.

4. Whether intended or not, the handling of this unfortunate situation left the impression that the two women were being silenced, and that their human rights were being violated.

Recommendations for Proposed Resolution 20-06

BCHRAC believes that events such as the one that occurred at the Assembly of Delegates meeting on September 2 are preventable. Proposed Resolution 20-06 represents a starting point for adopting standards of behavior for elected and appointed officials. However, they do not go far enough. The BCHRAC wants to ensure business is conducted in a civil manner that is inclusive, promotes fairness and equal treatment. We support the adoption of this PR 20-06, with the following amendments.

The Advisory Commission recommends:

1. Specific language should be included stating that all actions taken by the AoD will respect the human rights and civil rights of the public.
2. Clear and succinct instructions for public participation should be highlighted on the AoD business calendar web page and included in meeting documents.
3. The Assembly of Delegate's Meeting Guidelines for Members of the Public will be updated to reflect the contents of PR 20-06 once adopted.
4. The standard of civility in proposed resolution will extend to all interactions between members of the public and elected and appointed County officials, while undertaking County duties.
5. PR 20-02 should include a mechanisms for lodging a complaint about the behavior of elected and appointed County official in respect of the Code of Conduct, include possible action by the County against elected and appointed County officials who breach the Code of Conduct.
6. Furthermore, the Advisory Commission recommends ongoing learning and developmental opportunities in the areas of unconscious bias, racial and social justice for all elected and appointed officials in Barnstable County. HRAC would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with the AoD further and help in finding the appropriate resources.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Barnstable County Human Rights Commission, October 7, 2020