

South Carolina Human Affairs Commission

Board Meeting

Thursday, June 25, 2026

10:00 A.M.

8301 Parklane Road

Columbia, South Carolina 29223

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT	STAFF PRESENT
Chairman Steve Hall Commissioner Sharon Sellers Commissioner Rosetta Daniels Commissioner Patrick Palmer Commissioner Christine Ruth Commissioner James Wilson Commissioner Leon Winn VIRTUAL Commissioner Martha Murtiashaw ABSENT Commissioner Mary Amonitti	Marvin Caldwell, Jr., Deputy Commissioner Clark Leslie, Deputy Commissioner General Counsel, Trey McLeod Lawrence Smalls, Deputy Director Tom Kaminer, Budget Director Nicole Laing, Housing Attorney Tarnya Whitmire, EEO Director Janeen Sanders, Executive Assistant

I. CALL TO ORDER

The South Carolina Human Affairs Commission ("SCHAC" or the "agency") held its Board meeting at its offices located at 8301 Parklane Road, Columbia, SC. Public notice was posted at SCHAC's main office entrance and placed on SCHAC's website. Chairman Hall called the meeting to order and asked Janeen Sanders, Executive Assistant, to conduct the roll call.

II. ROLL CALL

Janeen Sanders, Executive Assistant, called the roll of Board members. A quorum was established. Commissioner Mary Amonitti was excused due to illness. Chairman Hall noted she was hopeful to attend the next meeting.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Hall called for the approval of the prior meeting's minutes. A motion was made and seconded. Hearing no comments, questions, or concerns, the minutes were unanimously approved.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Hall acknowledged that the agency did not receive any request for public comments prior to the beginning of the meeting.

V. OPENING REMARKS

Chairman Hall provided opening remarks, reporting that the agency's relocation to its new offices is in its final stages, with staff expected to move into the new space within the next one to two weeks. He noted that furniture has been delivered and the space is in excellent condition.

Chairman Hall formally welcomed the newly seated and newly joining Commissioners — Commissioner Murtiashaw (joining remotely), and incoming Commissioners Rosetta Daniels and Christine Ruth noting that the appointment process for some members had been lengthy and expressing gratitude that the Board is now at full strength. He indicated that formal introductions of the new Commissioners would occur during Executive Session.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

No old business was raised.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business was raised.

VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Administration — Relocation Update (Clark Leslie, Deputy Commissioner)

Deputy Commissioner Leslie reported on the status of the office relocation. Key points included:

- The relocation effort has been multi-year in the making (three to five years, per Board member recollection), and credit was given to Alfredo Toral as project lead, along with numerous staff who assisted with planning and packing.
- The agency intends to complete the move within approximately one day to minimize disruption to intake services. Online intake services will remain available throughout the transition.
- A question was raised regarding what becomes of the current building upon vacating; this was not yet known at the time of the meeting.
- The new facility includes a dedicated auditorium and breakout training rooms, which will allow the agency to host and participate in larger community and training events going forward.
- Discussion touched on the change from individual offices to a cubicle environment for some staff at the new location; Board members with experience in similar transitions noted that open-format workspaces with natural light have historically improved team communication and collaboration.

B. Legal — Office of General Counsel Update (Trey McLeod, General Counsel)

General Counsel McLeod provided the Legal Division report. Key points included:

- Three employment-related cases are currently pending before the Board, including one matter described as having notable factual complexity.
- Mediation success rates remain steady at approximately 55–60%, consistent with historical performance.
- Approximately 270 EEO intakes were processed during the quarter, in which intake coordinators work directly with complainants to ensure that charges are properly drafted to state a prima facie case.
- General Counsel McLeod explained, for the benefit of new Commissioners, the legal meaning of a "cause" determination — namely, that taking the alleged facts as true, the

elements necessary to establish a violation of law have been satisfied. He noted that conclusory statements without supporting facts are insufficient and that complaints lacking adequate factual support are returned to the investigator for further development.

- On housing cause determinations: a finding of cause in a housing case requires the agency to immediately file a formal complaint, which then proceeds either before the Board or, at the election of either party, to the Circuit Court. General Counsel McLeod noted this differs procedurally from employment cause findings and flagged it as an area worth further Board discussion in the future.

HUD Guidance Update — Reasonable Accommodations for Assistance Animals (Nicole Laing, Housing Attorney)

General Counsel McLeod introduced Nicole Laing, the agency's new Housing Attorney, who presented a significant recent change in HUD enforcement guidance regarding animal-related reasonable accommodation requests in housing. Key points included:

- HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity had announced that, effective immediately, it will find reasonable cause and recommend charges only in cases involving animals individually trained to provide disability-related assistance. This mirrors the threshold under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), under which a service animal must be individually trained to perform a task directly related to the individual's disability.
- HUD's new guidance expressly states that provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship does not constitute "work" or a "task" sufficient to qualify an animal as a service animal under this framework.
- This guidance rescinds HUD's prior enforcement guidance, including its January 2020 guidance, which had established emotional support animals (ESAs) as a category of protected assistance animals alongside service animals, and which had permitted housing providers to request documentation of disability and the disability-related need for the animal.
- With the rescission of prior guidance, no replacement documentation standard has been issued by HUD for federal investigative purposes, and the burden in evaluating accommodation denials may shift as a result.
- Any HUD investigation currently open will be individually reviewed under the new standard; HUD will not pursue new federal investigations involving ESAs going forward unless the animal involved meets the individual training standard.
- Ms. Laing and General Counsel McLeod clarified that South Carolina state law (the South Carolina Fair Housing Law) independently provides that an emotional support animal may be considered reasonable accommodation, and that the statute limits permissible inquiry to two specified questions. Unless the General Assembly amends state law, SCHAC remains obligated to investigate ESA-related accommodation complaints under state law regardless of HUD's revised federal posture.
- The principal practical impact identified is financial: SCHAC may no longer receive HUD funding credit for investigating ESA-related cases under the federal workshare agreement, even though the agency remains statutorily obligated to investigate such cases under state law. General Counsel McLeod noted this raises a "Catch-22" the Board may wish to address with the General Assembly — namely, whether continued state-law investigation of ESA cases without corresponding federal funding warrants a budget conversation with legislators.

- Board members discussed the risk of repeatedly adjusting agency posture in response to shifting federal administrations, noting that state law changes more slowly than federal guidance, and that Deputy Commissioner Caldwell advised that the Fair Housing program can absorb the loss of the associated federal funding (estimated at \$80,000–\$85,000 annually) for a sustained period if necessary, and that federal guidance may shift again with a future administration.

C. Legislative Update (Commissioner Sharon Sellers)

Commissioner Sellers reported that the General Assembly is not currently in session and that there were no legislative matters to report at this time.

D. Personnel Update (Lawrence Smalls, Administrative Manager)

Commissioner Winn introduced Lawrence Smalls, Administrative Manager, who provided the personnel report:

- 61 total FTE positions, with 58 currently filled and 3 vacancies (two EEO Investigators and one Technical Services Trainer). Interviews for all three positions are scheduled for the coming weeks.
- 2 terminations occurred during the period (details to be addressed further in Executive Session, along with an agency restructuring matter).
- 2 resignations occurred during the period.
- 4 new hires are tentatively scheduled to begin August 2nd.
- Commissioner Sellers noted this reflects a marked improvement compared to roughly two years prior, when the agency had over 20 open positions — attributing the improvement to salary increases obtained through the budget process and substantial staff effort on recruitment.

E. Financial Update (Tom, Budget Director)

Tom Kaminer, Budget Director, presented the financial report. The agency reported a surplus position for the year. In response to a question from Chairman Hall regarding whether the term "surplus" should be of concern (as it might be interpreted in the nonprofit context), Tom confirmed that the agency is operating in accordance with all applicable state laws, procedures, and financial requirements, and that the agency's financial position is sound.

Discussion noted that new Commissioners will receive a walkthrough of the agency's financial reporting format as part of new Commissioner training.

The Board took a brief recess before proceeding with Commission Reports.

IX. COMMISSION REPORTS

A. Administration — Electronic Signature (DocuSign) Implementation

Commissioner Murtiashaw reported that DocuSign is now live and operational for agency use. Several Board members and staff noted they have already begun using the platform and found it to streamline document execution significantly, eliminating the need to print, sign, scan, and return documents manually.

- General Counsel McLeod emphasized that, notwithstanding the increased ease of electronic signature, Commissioners remain obligated to substantively review case materials before signing and that the efficiency gain should not be mistaken for a reduced standard of review. He noted that Commissioners retain final decision-making authority on matters submitted for signature and bear continuing responsibility for that review.

- Commissioner Murtiashaw concurred, framing the improvement as a customer service enhancement that benefits both staff efficiency and the people the agency serves, while underscoring that all parties take their review responsibilities seriously.

B. Administration — Relocation Update (continued)

Commissioner Murtiashaw provided additional details on the relocation effort:

- The new facility was selected after evaluation of multiple buildings; Board members expressed strong approval of the final selection.
- Staff are receiving regular biweekly relocation updates from agency leadership and IT (Isaiah, IT Specialist) regarding move logistics and expectations.
- Commissioner Murtiashaw and the relocation team plan to offer Commissioners and Board members an opportunity to view the new space.

C. Administration — New Agency Logo

Commissioner Murtiashaw presented the agency's newly updated logo, noting that the prior logo had been in use for approximately five to six years. The update was developed collaboratively with staff input and went through approximately 20 iterations before finalization. Board members offered favorable comments on the more polished, professional appearance reflecting the agency's governmental role. The new logo will be incorporated into agency request lines, materials, and outward-facing communications.

D. Consultative Services — Community Relations and Outreach (Clark Leslie, Deputy Commissioner)

Deputy Commissioner Leslie reported on outreach activity and community engagement:

- Staff continue to circulate a regular events tracker (maintained by Robert and his team) reflecting agency outreach engagements statewide. Board members were encouraged to review the tracker and participate in events of interest in their regions.
- SCHAC's public accommodations (90-E/non-employment-related) enforcement was discussed. General Counsel McLeod and staff noted that the public accommodations law currently has limited statutory enforcement mechanisms, with much of the agency's role focused on facilitating dialogue between parties where one or both parties may decline to fully participate in conciliation.
- The agency participates in a range of community and business events across the state, including in the Greenville, Myrtle Beach, Hilton Head, Charleston, and Rock Hill/Charlotte-area regions, and maintains memberships in relevant professional associations. The agency covers travel costs associated with Commissioner participation in these events where appropriate, and Board members were encouraged to participate when events fall within their districts.
- Staff highlighted use of the new facility's auditorium and breakout training rooms for recent Technical Services and Training Division events.

E. Compliance Programs — EEO Enforcement and Fair Housing (Marvin Caldwell, Jr., Deputy Commissioner; Tarnya Whitmire, EEO Enforcement Director)

EEO Enforcement Director, Tarnya Whitmire reported on the EEO Enforcement Program while Deputy Commissioner Marvin Caldwell, Jr. reported on the Housing Compliance Program.

- The agency has seen a notable uptick in EEO cause findings this reporting period, attributed in part to strengthened collaboration between the Office of General Counsel and the investigative/supervisory staff.

- Approximately 25 cause findings have been reached out of roughly 100 cases processed against this year's contract to date; the contract period has not yet been concluded.
- In response to a Board question regarding the proportion of complaints resulting in cause findings, staff clarified that the agency does not encourage complainants to file as a "first resort," and that the Board's case review purview is limited to state-agency-related matters; private sector, county, and municipal cases are handled separately and are not brought before the Board.
- General Counsel McLeod relayed positive feedback received directly from EEOC contract personnel regarding the responsiveness of SCHAC's Commissioners in returning timely feedback on cases and thanked the Board for their continued diligence given the demands of balancing this responsibility with members' primary professional obligations.
- On Fair Housing: the HUD/FHAP contract period runs from July 1 to June 30. Staff noted a number of outreach events conducted during the period, including increased activity in April in recognition of Fair Housing Month.

X. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Chairman Hall opened the floor for Board member comments prior to moving into Executive Session, noting that formal introductions of incoming Commissioners would occur during that session.

Commissioner Sellers commended agency staff for maintaining a high level of service to the public throughout the demands of the office relocation and other concurrent operational responsibilities.

XI. ADJOURNMENT OF OPEN SESSION / TRANSITION TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Hall called for a motion to conclude the public portion of the meeting in order to proceed into Executive Session. A motion was made by Commissioner Winn and seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

[Executive Session matters, including formal introduction of new Commissioners, personnel matters, and the agency restructuring discussion, are not reflected in the public record of these minutes.]

XII. ADJOURNMENT

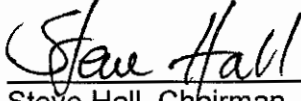
Upon conclusion of Executive Session, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent.

The next Board meeting date and location are to be determined.

Respectfully submitted by Janeen D. Sanders, SCHAC Executive Assistant.



Dr. Alisa Warren, Commissioner



Steve Hall, Chairman
9/10/26

Date