



MINUTES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

November 20, 2025

ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 19:03 by Ravi Srinivasan, Chair. Ravi Srinivasan, Chair, had arranged with Matthew Amaral, Township Communications Director, to have posted on the Township website.

Roll Call:

Commissioners Present	Ravi Srinivasan (Chair) Kevin Allen (Vice Chair) Matthew Frankel Kevin Pierre Sol Demefack (Montclair High School Liaison/Designee) Yvonne Bouknight (Board of Education Designee) Leslie Brown (Treasurer) Leonore Dickinson Joni Cohen
Commissioners Absent	Madeline Gale, Reubena Spence, Nelson Campbell (now resigned from Montclair Civil Rights Commission)
Other Parties in Attendance	Alisha Dawkins (Human Resources / EEOC Liason), Mayor Renee Baskerville (Town Council Liaison), Ruth Turner (Superintendent, Montclair Public Schools) Matthew Kadosh (Montclair Local)

Per Township website: There are currently 5 generic open vacancies / appointments for the CRC, and the MSU appointee position is also open.



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Meeting notice was provided on [Meeting Dates Township of Montclair, NJ \(montclairnjusa.org\)](#) as well as filed with the Township Clerk. Civil Rights Commission activities also listed in Montclair Local (Internet only news site) with link to Township site for meeting dates: [Montclair Civil Rights Commission: Come Be Part of Change - Montclair Local](#).

Public Session

Meeting Opening and Minutes Adoption

The meeting was called to order at 1903 on Thursday, November 20th. The minutes from the October 16th meeting were moved and seconded for adoption. The Chair explained that the meetings are currently being recorded manually, and the audio is processed through an application for dynamic minute generation; the audio files are subsequently deleted once the minutes are created and approved. Chair Ravi Srinivasan confirmed the meeting was in compliance with the New Jersey Open Meetings Act.

Dialogue with Superintendent Ruth Turner

The Chair welcomed Superintendent Ruth Turner to her first Civil Rights Commission (CRC) meeting, emphasizing the goal of building a stronger relationship and dialogue.

Budget Cuts and Equitable Impact

Discussions focused on the Montclair Board of Education's immediate and significant mid-year budget cuts necessitated by a financial deficit to ensure payroll could be met and state assistance secured. The Superintendent explained that the cuts, amounting to approximately \$20 million, were primarily implemented by reducing non-mandated services due to the limited time frame, and they impact all students. The CRC inquired about the potential disproportionate impact of these cuts on marginalized communities. Superintendent Turner clarified that affinity groups and clubs tied to identity and culture (such as the Black Student Union) will not be impacted; schools must find alternative resources or utilize volunteers to maintain these programs.

Financial Planning and Engagement

The district is developing a three-year financial outlook (for the 2026/2027 budget and beyond). Superintendent Turner stated that community engagement has been robust, including video interviews (such as one with the NAACP), and she has received relatively few negative emails regarding the necessity of the cuts, though concerns about the proposed tax increase are significant. The CRC was encouraged to participate in the budget co-planning process and offer feedback through the lens of equitable outcomes, as the budget should reflect the community's values and priorities.

Educational Outcomes and Instruction

Addressing student achievement, Superintendent Turner cited data showing poor outcomes, including 38% of fourth graders failing grade-level math. She stressed the need to be "laser focused in teaching and learning" and prioritizing resources (such as math coaches and professional development) to address these long-standing deficits. The challenge of improving instruction for tenured teachers was noted, leading to an emphasis on providing intensive support and feedback to non-tenured staff and enabling administrators to serve primarily as instructional leaders.

Multilingual Communication and Outreach

A major concern was the lack of mechanisms to disseminate information to multilingual families in Montclair. Superintendent Turner noted the district currently lacks the resources to translate information into the top five district languages.

Suggestions for communication included:

- * Using QR codes to allow individuals to download and translate information via their own phone apps.
- * Explore / learn more about a potential 24-hour live Paraprofessional translator contract (used for IEPs), as many families and staff are unaware of its existence.
- * Utilizing pervasive communication channels such as WhatsApp groups within the schools to reach families, especially multilingual communities.

Immigration and Student Safety

The district has shared policies with principals regarding potential engagement with ICE/immigration. The Superintendent confirmed that the district partners with MFEE (Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence) and is restarting a bilingual parent group to provide information and support to multilingual families. She confirmed that ICE has not appeared at Montclair schools.

CRC Administrative Updates

Kevin Allen nominated Matilda Carvajal to succeed him as Vice Chair, noting he will be leaving Montclair on December 7th since he stays in Florida in the winter.

Commissioner Leslie Brown reported on the Township's Health and Wellness Fair, noting that many employees were unaware of the CRC's existence or meeting schedule.

Hate Incident Follow-up

Leslie Brown provided an update on the hate incident she experienced in July. She confirmed she identified the perpetrator, but the police and prosecutor's office declined charges, citing free speech protections. The security camera near the incident location remains non-functional. She requested assistance in drafting a formal letter to her building management.



Town Council Appointments and Administrative Delays

Chair Srinivasan noted multiple administrative tasks pending with the Town Clerk and Town Council, including four open seats and the removal of appointed Commissioner Brille Kenner (who has moved out of Montclair). Mayor Baskerville confirmed that Town Council members sometimes choose not to vote on appointments, causing delays, and she refuses to submit the same forms repeatedly. The Chair and commissioners proposed a "full court press," including public comment at Town Council meetings and issuing detailed emails to the entire council, blind copying commissioners. It was suggested to CC all Council members on future CRC invitations to encourage engagement without violating state meeting laws or appearing to prioritize one council member.

Future CRC Strategy

The CRC discussed improving its visibility by going out into the community (e.g., hosting coffee and donut days at the library). The CRC will follow up to find the archived school study detailing the number of languages spoken in the schools.

[Action Items and Responsible Parties]

| Item | Responsible Party |

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| Budget Engagement | CRC Commissioners/Superintendent Turner/Yvonne Bouknight: Engage in budget co-planning discussions, focusing on equitable outcomes and priorities. |

| Language Data Research | Yvonne Bouknight: Locate and share the archived school study detailing the number of languages spoken in the district. |

| Communication Strategy | Ravi Srinivasan/Commissioners: Explore approaches for translation, including any existing contracts and WhatsApp groups

| Administrative Appointments | Ravi Srinivasan/Commissioners: Execute a "full court press" to follow up on pending appointments (four open seats, MSU appointee) and administrative changes (removing Bril Kenner, updating EEOC designee) by contacting the Town Council and Clerk, possibly utilizing public comment and blanket emails (BCC). |

| Hate Incident Follow-up | Ravi Srinivasan (with Leslie Brown): Assist Leslie Brown in drafting a certified letter to Bellclair Apartments management regarding the hate incident and the non-functional security camera. |

| Business Cards | Leslie Brown/Leonore Dickinson/Reubena Spence: Talk offline to expedite the ordering and printing of business cards, addressing the slow reimbursement process. |

| Future Speakers | Ravi Srinivasan/Commissioners: Plan for January meeting speaker, considering inviting Town Council members (via blanket CC email or other approach) to address delays in appointments/administrative contention. |

| Vice Chair Nomination | Commissioners: Discuss and vote on the nomination of Matilda Carvajal or other commissioner for Vice Chair.



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