

WOMEN'S RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Meeting - TEAMS
Tuesday, February 18, 2025
4:00pm

MINUTES

The Women's Rights Commission met virtually at the above date and time.

The following Commissioners were present:	The following Commissioners were absent:
District 3- Elisa Morales	District 7- Chairwoman Kathryn Lucero
District 5- Cynthia Retana	District 4- Vice Chairwoman Sandy Azcona
District 6- Myndi Luevanos	
District 2- Diana Ramirez	
Mayor's Office- Lisa Turner	

AGENDA

Call to order, staff and committee introductions

The meeting was called to order at 4:19 PM.

Attendance was taken by Symone Menchaca, WRC Board Liaison.

1. Discussion and action to approve the Minutes of the Women's Rights Commission Meeting of November 12, 2024.

Motion made by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Commissioner Luevanos and unanimously carried to **APPROVE** the meeting minutes of February 18, 2025.

AYES: Commissioners Morales, Retana, Luevanos, Ramirez, and Turner

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Chairwoman Lucero and Vice Chairwoman Azcona

2. Presentation on the Role of the Commission and its Legal Advisor, Karla Saenz, Assistant City Attorney, City of El Paso.

No Action Taken.

3. Discussion and action on the progress the Women's Rights Commission has made in regard to maternity benefits provided to City employees, submitted by Commissioner Turner.

The discussion began with Commissioner Turner expressing her disappointment that this item has not progressed as she had hoped. She highlighted the confusion surrounding its perception, as many view it as part of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) instead of a stand-alone maternity benefit. Commissioner Turner shared statistics from various organizations, including the CDC, El Paso's Public Health Department, and March of Dimes, regarding the risks associated with childbearing. She mentioned birth rates, infant mortality rates, and prenatal care. Notably, she pointed out that the majority of citizens in El Paso are female. She argued that if the City of El Paso offered a stand-alone maternity benefit, it would attract more individuals to seek employment with the City as opposed to other organizations that provide such benefits. Commissioner Turner suggested that past proposals may have failed in City Council due to an overestimation of the costs involved. She emphasized the importance of the Board developing a plan to present to Council before the upcoming budget session in June, with decisions expected in August. According to her, this initiative is crucial not just for city employees but also for the city's recruitment efforts. Turner stated that offering this benefit would enhance employee morale and contribute positively to the overall health of those involved. She reiterated that it should be considered a key component to help mitigate the costs presented to Council. Continuing her discussion, she referenced comments made by City Manager Dionne Mack, who indicated that attracting new applicants to the City of El Paso is challenging. Commissioner Turner acknowledged her efforts to gather accurate information but noted that the City cannot pinpoint how many women working for the City have spouses who are also employed there—information that is vital for assessing costs to present to Council. Ultimately, she expressed uncertainty about how the Board can formulate an appropriate plan to submit to Council, particularly given that previous cost estimates were deemed too high.

Commissioner Ramirez had some follow-up questions to further clarify what Commissioner Turner was discussing regarding the last proposal sent to the Council that failed. Specifically, Commissioner Turner is suggesting a new memo be sent to Council from the WRC Board. The proposal includes a stand-alone paid maternity benefit for individuals capable of childbearing, offering a total of 16 weeks of paid leave. This consists of 4 weeks that can be used during the last month of pregnancy and 12 weeks after the child is born, all at 100% of their regular pay. The plan also includes paid time off for both mother and child, and emphasizes the importance of monitoring the mother to help prevent postpartum depression. Additionally, sick days and vacation days will continue to accrue as if the employee were at work.

Karla Saenz, the Legal Advisor to the Woman's Rights Commission Board, responded to a question from Commissioner Ramirez regarding the possibility of meeting with Council members about a specific item. Karla explained that the process would involve creating a memo to submit to Council without meeting with them, in order to avoid forming a quorum. She added that the Board could indicate in a memo their desire to meet with

Council members to present and advocate for the item(s), aiming to ensure it is included on the Council agenda and voted on.

A motion was made by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Commissioner Luevanos, and unanimously carried to **APPROVE** the creation of a memo to be submitted to City Council Members by April. The memo will request one-on-one meetings with Council Members to discuss the Commission's Focus Areas. This will include a discussion on Stand-Alone Maternity Benefits for pregnant women, as previously mentioned by Commissioner Turner. Additionally, each Commissioner is tasked with collaborating with their respective Focus Groups to identify key issues to present to the Council, contingent upon the approval of the memo to meet with them.

AYES: Commissioners Morales, Retana, Luevanos, Ramirez, and Turner

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Chairwoman Lucero and Vice Chairwoman Azcona

4. Discussion and action on a proposed list of key items/ key elements to submit to City Council that was voted and approved during the November 2024 WRC Meeting.

The discussion began with Board Liaison Symone Menchaca seeking clarification, as this item was previously discussed in Item #3. Commissioner Ramirez suggested that the Focus Area subgroups come together to develop a proposed list of issues from their assigned Focus Groups. This list would be presented to City Council members if the memo for one-on-one meetings is approved. The aim is to prepare this before the budget season starts in June, with hopes for adoption in August.

Commissioner Turner made a motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Retana. The motion passed unanimously. It was **APPROVED** that each member will collaborate with their respective Focus Groups to identify key items related to a series of issues. These items will be presented to the Council in preparation for the upcoming meeting, following the approved memo. Additionally, the Stand-Alone Maternity benefit will be used as the baseline for the Wellness/Health Focus Group.

AYES: Commissioners Morales, Retana, Luevanos, Ramirez, and Turner

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Chairwoman Lucero and Vice Chairwoman Azcona

5. Discussion and action with any information pertaining to the Focus Area subgroup assignments and any updates from November 2024 to the present, submitted by Commissioner Luevanos and voted into effect by the WRC as a standing item for each meeting.

The discussion began with Commissioner Ramirez inquiring whether any of the Focus Groups had met. The response indicated that none had convened at that time.

Commissioner Luevanos noted that each Commissioner has access to each other's emails for communication with Focus Group members. Karla Saenz, the Legal Advisor to the WRC Board, clarified that they must remain within the confines of their group to avoid creating a quorum, and discussions between groups do not need to be submitted to Symone Menchaca, the WRC Liaison. Instead, these discussions should be openly shared as a debrief, providing any new information, updates, or findings to the entire Board during the next meeting. Commissioner Ramirez expressed willingness to lead the outreach to the members of the Equality in the Workplace group. She suggested that Commissioner Turner could take the lead in contacting the Wellness/Health Focus Group, while Commissioner Luevanos could reach out to the Supportive Environment to Thrive workgroup. Legal Advisor Karla Saenz confirmed that a motion was unnecessary for this item since the Board members are functioning as a Focus Group. **No Action Needed.**

During the meeting, Karla Saenz stated that City Staff members should not advise Board members who are working within the Focus groups. If any questions arise, they can be addressed during the WRC monthly meeting.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Luevanos, seconded by Commissioner Turner and the motion unanimously carried to **APPROVE the adjournment of the WRC meeting.**

AYES: Commissioners Morales, Retana, Luevanos, Ramirez, and Turner

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Chairwoman Lucero and Vice Chairwoman Azcona

Meeting adjourned at 5:46 pm.