



Maine Human Rights Commission

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To friends and colleagues of the Maine Human Rights Commission ("Commission"):

Since March 2020, when communities in this country began battling COVID-19, our agency has continued its job of investigating complaints of unlawful Maine Human Rights Act discrimination and retaliation in Maine. Most of our small staff has worked remotely during this time, with the exception of our amazing and stalwart front office staffers, who have been coming to the office to receive and process pleadings necessary to keep our operations going. Our Commissioners have continued to meet monthly to hear and decide contested cases, albeit by Zoom. We have been so impressed by the patience and flexibility shown by individual parties and attorneys during this time; thank you so much for your cooperation!

As infections and hospitalizations dropped in the past months, our staffers and Commissioners became very hopeful that we could return to our pre-pandemic office schedules and that our public meetings would be able to be in person. Last week, we held our first in-person Commission meeting in 18 months, using a hybrid format (in person and Zoom). Even then, though, we were keeping a close eye on rising infection rates as the COVID-19 Delta variant tore around the world and Maine, leaving more and more people hospitalized. It's crushing to admit, but COVID-19 is again posing a critical situation in Maine. The State of Maine is postponing a return to office work for most state employees, so our long-awaited return to in-person work and meetings must wait.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 at this time, including its transmission to those who are fully vaccinated, presents an urgent issue that requires the Commission to meet solely via remote methods. Title 1 Maine Revised Statutes Section 403-B(2)(B)(1). In reluctantly coming to this conclusion, the Commission did consider a number of factors including (but not limited to): the current rates of infection and availability of intensive-care treatment in Maine and nationally; the many individuals considered "high risk" under Centers for Disease Control guidance among our Commissioners and staff, and individuals appearing before the Commission for public hearings; and logistical considerations such as the in-person space available to our agency for public hearings and its limited capacity to provide socially-distant proceedings. We look forward to returning to in-person meetings again, but now is not the time. **The Commission will hold remote-only meetings until further notice.**

Thanks for your understanding and cooperation, and please take good care of yourselves and others.

Sincerely,

Amy Sneirson
Executive Director