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Home > East Lansing Commission Taking on Issues of Hate Crimes, Conversion Therapy, Police Oversight, and More

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## East Lansing Commission Taking on Issues of Hate Crimes, Conversion Therapy, Police Oversight, and More <sup>[1]</sup>

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**By:**

Alice Dreger



With Talyce Murray (above) taking on the chairpersonship of the East Lansing's Human Relations Commission <sup>[2]</sup>, the group will be continuing the last year's pattern of taking a relatively active approach.

On Sunday (August 18), the HRC will be hosting an open discussion about hate crimes as part of

its new "Coffee and Conversation" series. The casual meeting, the second in the series, will run from 1-3 p.m. at Espresso Royale Café at 1500 W. Lake Lansing Road (near Kroger) and people are invited to drop by for part or all.

Murray explains the series' approach: "we come prepared with general information about the topic overall and how we have seen it impact our community. However, the main goal is to allow the community to guide the conversation."

HRC members hope this open-format will lead to productive learning for commissioners as they work to support East Lansing's civil rights policy <sup>[3]</sup> and more generally promote civil and human rights in the area.

I asked Murray to share with our readers a little bit about her background and interest in the HRC.

She responded, "As a gay, black, female, college student, the idea of elevating the voices and concerns of the city's protected classes is something that hits close to home [for me]. I have been on the Commission since November of last year, and I have had the privilege to watch it grow tremendously in that time, and I am excited to get to lead us as we take our next step in being a voice for equity in our community."

She added, "As an East Lansing transplant, I know that there are times where my job is to listen and learn about the realities experienced here and advocate from that position, and I am looking forward to having those conversations to bring as many concerns to the table as possible in the upcoming months."

I asked Murray if she would agree with the assessment that HRC has become a much more active group in the last year in terms of citizen engagement and policy development. She did and said she was "proud to be a part" of that.

"We have such an amazing group of people that are dedicated to the ideals of equity outside of their work with the Commission and we are starting to really see that pour over into our efforts and conversations," she said. "Personally, one of my main goals is that the HRC becomes a true resource that all within our community know about and reach out to when they need help or see a concern to be addressed."

In the last year, with Daniel Baum in the chairperson position preceding Murray, the HRC has been working <sup>[4]</sup> on developing recommendations for a citizen review panel for complaints made by citizens against East Lansing police and fire personnel. At its most recent meeting, the subcommittee tasked with focusing on this discussed whether to add a non-voting police member to the proposed board.

At the August 7 HRC meeting, those present voted unanimously to support the anti-conversion therapy ordinance <sup>[5]</sup> put forward by Aaron Stephens, City Council member and liaison to the HRC. That draft ordinance is expected to come for a vote at Council's September 10 meeting.

Two citizens have raised concerns about that ordinance in a letter to Council [6], suggesting that the ordinance could lead to less-than-ideal care for young people who are uncertain about their gender identities.

Writing on July 8, David Shane of the Chesterfield Hills neighborhood and Steven Roskos of the Shaw Estates neighborhood worry that limiting what health care professionals can offer may ?make counselors afraid to probe to discover if some other serious issue is expressing itself as a gender identity claim.? Some young people who identify as transgender later find that that identity does not fit them, and they re-identify with the genders assigned to them at birth.

In the letter, Shane and Roskos (who is an MD) note that it is unlikely that any therapist in East Lansing is practicing what is generally considered to be ?conversion therapy.? (Aaron Stephens, who introduced the ordinance, has said the same.) The letter raises the concern that the way the draft ordinance is written, it could result in ?increased harm? by making therapists afraid to do exploratory work with minors.

The activity level of the HRC means this and other difficult conversations are being brought to the surface in East Lansing ? something HRC members are wanting as a general principal. The ?Coffee and Conversation? series is meant do just that: promote difficult dialogue that would not otherwise happen, particularly about how the community can best care for vulnerable members.

The third series event, the ?LGBTQIA+ Edition,? will be on September 22. HRC events are posted on the commission?s webpage [2].

As noted there, Karen Hoene, Chuck Grigsby, Liz Miller, Carla McWherter (Vice Chair), Pat Cannon, Daniel Baum, and Sean Perry Jr. also currently serve as Human Relations Commissioners for East Lansing. The HRC Chair, Talyce Murray, welcomes community members to contact her by email [7].

*John Kloswick contributed reporting to this article.*

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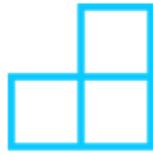
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