



April 20, 2026 Meeting Minutes
Hooker Conference Room, City Hall
5:00 p.m.

The Bloomington/Monroe County Human Rights Commission met at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, April 20, 2026, in the Hooker Conference Room of Showers City Hall.

Commissioners Attending: Sharon Baker, Kathleen Bensberg, Stephen Coover, Amy Jackson, Emma Williams (online via Zoom), Lilliana Young.

Staff Attending: BMCHRC Liaison Michael Shermis, BMCHRC Assistant Annabelle Vosmeier, Senior Assistant City Attorney Anna Holmes.

Public Attending: Ellen Wu.

Call to Order

1. Chair Williams brought the BMCHRC to order at 5:00 PM.

Approval of Minutes of March 16, 2026 Meeting

1. Jackson moved to approve the minutes from March 16, 2026. Baker seconded. Passed unanimously by roll call vote, 5-0, Bensberg absent at the beginning of meeting.

Presentation: Dr. Ellen Wu, Former Member of the Indiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission

1. Dr. Ellen Wu was invited to present on “Rethinking Hate Crime Policy in Indiana,” a 2025 report by the Indiana Advisory Committee (IAC) to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. She served on the committee from 2015 to 2025 and worked on issues such as the school to prison pipeline in Indiana, voting rights, and lead poisoning.
2. The U.S. Civil Rights Commission is a fact-finding commission selecting problems to investigate. It has advisory committees in every state and territory; the IAC includes people serving from all over the state with various political affiliations and backgrounds.
3. The IAC chose to pursue the hate crime policy report in 2021, following public instances of racially motivated hate. Hate crimes were not considered a category of crime until the 1980s, after a push from Jewish, LGBTQ+, and women’s groups. Laws framed certain kinds of violence with bias motivation, which is difficult to establish but often comes with a sentencing enhancement. Indiana passed a hate crime law in 2019, but critics point out that it does not include age, sex, or gender identity protections. The report was finished in fall 2025, but most of the testimony gathering took place in 2024 and the recommendations that were highlighted felt more realistic in 2024 than in 2025.

4. Wu highlighted some challenges: Very few law enforcement agencies in Indiana actually gather and report hate crimes. Data gathering also flattens intersectional identities. It is difficult to identify bias. The 2023 stabbing of an Asian American IU student on a public bus was pursued at the federal level because of challenges to pursuing hate crimes in Indiana. There can be uneven impacts; adding more law enforcement to Muslim, Black, or immigrant communities have other consequences.
5. The report was sent to state government officials and is intended to be used as reference material for future work. Shermis offered to share it with other human rights commissions in Indiana.

Report from Staff

1. **First Quarter Report:** Baker moved to accept the first quarter report as presented. Young seconded. Passed unanimously by roll call vote, 6-0.
2. **Arts/Essay Contest:** Art and essays are currently on display in the City Hall Atrium. The celebration event will take place next week.
3. **Human Rights Award:** Applications are open until May 1.
4. **Open Slot on the BMCHRC:** The Office of the Mayor is currently interviewing a candidate.
5. **Trinity Haven Bloomington Project:** Trinity Haven is an Indianapolis organization aiming to help place LGBTQ+ young people with host families if they cannot safely go home. A meeting about expanding this program to Bloomington was occurring at the same time as the commission meeting. Commissioners spoke positively about the project.

Reports from Commissioners

1. **Williams** presented the annual report at the City Council meeting with success. Shermis complimented Williams on her presentation.
2. **Jackson** had a brief conversation with Mayor Thomson upon entering City Hall for this meeting and expressed personal appreciation about the mayor's decision not to renew the Flock contract. Mayor Thomson thanked her, saying that while there could be value to such systems, they had determined that Flock is not trustworthy.

Open Cases

1. Jackson's racial discrimination in housing case. The complainant entered residential care after filing an appeal and, after months, probably will not follow through on the appeal.
2. Jackson's racial discrimination in public accommodations case. Sent affidavit to respondent; awaiting response.
3. Bensberg's disability discrimination in employment case. Found no probable cause. Bensberg was pleased with how forthcoming the respondent was and glad that through due diligence we were able to send the complainant information he had requested.

Assignment of New Cases

1. Shermis described several potential cases, including a sexual orientation discrimination in housing complaint and a disability discrimination in housing complaint. Another issue of racial discrimination in public accommodations had so many legal ramifications that the complainant needs to speak to a lawyer first. The next case would be going to Coover.

Unfinished Business

1. **Rights for Individuals Sleeping Outdoors.** Shermis spoke with Forest Gilmore, Executive Director of Beacon, about the upcoming law. Commissioners decided to hold back as downtown ambassadors and others take the lead on sharing information. Jackson would like to invite Gilmore to speak about the new Beacon campus. Bensberg stated that this issue is weighing on everyone's hearts and commissioners should stay aware of how it is affecting people. She also asked if commissioners could collect data directly by asking unhoused people about housing discrimination. Holmes referred to the annual Continuum of Care survey. They are looking for people to volunteer and could potentially include such a question.

New Business

1. None.

Public Input

1. None.

Adjournment

1. Chair Williams adjourned the meeting at 6:01 p.m.