



## Seattle Human Rights Commission

*1963 – 2017· 54 years of championing human rights and fostering a just future*

July 10, 2017

Dear Mayor Murray:

We are in receipt of your Director of Council Relations Anthony Auriemma's July 7, 2017 letter to the Seattle City Council regarding CB 118984.

The Commission appreciates you and your staff's extensive involvement in crafting and debating this legislation. We also appreciate your support for expanding the SOCR commissions from 16 to 21 members. With that said, we strongly disagree with your continued, uncompromising resistance to allowing each commission to self-appoint four members rather than just two.

First, we dispute Mr. Auriemma's statement that the number of members selected by the commission would be "greatly expanded" under the legislation. Presently, three of the four SOCR commissions have 1 of 16 commissioners selected by the commission. This amounts to roughly six percent of the overall composition being commission-selected. The Women's Commission appoints 2 of 21 commissioners, or about nine percent. CB 118984 would change that to 19% being commission selected by the commission and double that (38%) being selected by the Mayor and City Council, each. The Get Engaged program would retain one seat. It is also important to remember that while the commissions do nominate for these commission-appointed seats, they are still subject to approval by the City Council; for instance, the SHRC's current commission-appointed commissioner, Yasmin Christopher, was approved by the City Council on January 30, 2017.

Next, we contest your position that allowing the commissions to appoint four members each would impair the Mayor and City Council in choosing people of their own selection to advise them. First, as stated, the Mayor and City Council will control the clear majority of seat appointments. And, for what it is worth, the Mayoral appointees on the SOCR commissions, in their advisory capacities to your office, are in support of this legislation in its current form.

But more importantly, this attitude can only create an echo chamber between the commissions and the City's political branches. In our experience serving as commissioners, the commissions bear a duty to promote policies effectuating their goals (e.g., our support for the Council's income tax legislation) and criticize policies that run afoul of social justice principles (e.g., removing diet sodas from the sweetened beverage tax proposal). In doing so, we support the

City's move towards greater compliance with human rights standards. We fear that your position imperils our role and disregards the community groups that we strive to partner with on pressing matters.

Furthermore, while we appreciate your proposed amendment “that indicates vacancies should be filled within a certain window of time,” this would only remedy part of the problem. It is difficult to see this statement as anything more than aspirational as your office has made this false promise time and time again, leaving our Commissions frustrated with appointment times that take six months to over a year. We do not doubt that your office has always sought to timely fill commission seats and so it is unclear what such an amendment would add. And we wonder how it might be interpreted in the next mayoral administration. Should that amendment be considered, it should have some teeth—for instance, having unfilled appointments revert to commission appointment authority after a reasonable period of time.

But CB 118984 is important not just because of appointment delays but because it is essential to staff the commission with persons of proper caliber. The SOCR commissions have repeatedly found that when commissions select their own members, they do so based on their own unique knowledge of commission personnel strengths and needs, and have experienced stronger participation and retention of those members. We also worry that a time limit to appoint commissioners would lead to the political bodies rushing to fill seats with less-than-ideal candidates, which only frustrates the progress we are seeking through this proposal. We therefore do not believe your proposed amendment is practically or philosophically reasonable, and we support passage of the current bill.

We understand that increasing the number of commission-appointed seats to four would be a shift from the current structure of most boards and commissions. But we question why, even if “unprecedented,” this is objectionable. It is certainly less unprecedented than previous legislative modifications of the statute, such as adding the Get Engaged position in 2001 or first allowing the commission to select one member themselves.

Frankly, the commissions are growing increasingly frustrated by your continued opposition to what seems to be such a minor but functionally important change. Still, we appreciate your service to the City and your engagement on this issue, which we honestly believe is in good faith. We hope that we can collaborate more effectively on issues affecting Seattle residents and workers moving forward based on mutual trust.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you or any Councilmembers would like to discuss this with the commission, please contact us at [seattlehumanrights@gmail.com](mailto:seattlehumanrights@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

The Seattle Human Rights Commission

CC: Members of the Seattle City Council, Anthony Auriemma, David Mendoza