



## **January – May 2019 Newsletter**



*Left: Chair Catherine E. Lhamon testifies before the House Judiciary Committee, March 2019  
Right: Chair Lhamon joins our Illinois Advisory Committee at its briefing on fair housing, May 2019*

### **STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SAC) ACTIVITY**

Our state Advisory Committees (SACs) continue to be incredibly active in investigating and reporting on civil rights issues in their states. We thank SAC members for selecting critical topics for investigation, hosting briefings, and issuing reports and advisory memoranda on important topics.

At the Commission's March 22 [business meeting](#), Commissioners heard presentations by three SAC chairs:

- Connecticut: [advisory memorandum](#) on solitary confinement ([released](#) September 2018);
- Oregon: [report](#) on human trafficking ([released](#) February 2019);
- Tennessee: [report](#) on civil asset forfeiture ([released](#) September 2018).

Video of the business meeting is available [here](#).

Our [Idaho](#) and [Oklahoma](#) SACs announced studies on Native American voting rights and affirmative action, respectively; [Florida](#) announced a study on voting rights.

The following SACs issued reports and advisory memorandums:

- Connecticut: [prosecutorial practices](#);
- Oregon: [human trafficking](#);
- Rhode Island: [voting rights](#).

A significant number of SACs held public briefings:

- [Arkansas](#): mass incarceration;
- [Colorado](#): backlog in citizenship and naturalization applications;
- [Connecticut](#): prosecutorial practices;
- [Indiana](#): lead poisoning;
- [Illinois](#): fair housing;
- [Massachusetts](#): hate crimes;
- [Massachusetts](#): human/labor trafficking;
- [Michigan](#): voting rights;
- [Mississippi](#): prosecutorial discretion;
- [Nebraska](#): prisons and mental health services (June 13);
- [Nevada](#): policing practices;
- [Ohio](#): education funding;
- [Tennessee](#): legal financial obligation;
- [Texas](#): voting rights;
- [Vermont](#): school discipline practices;
- [Virginia](#): hate crimes.

Chair Catherine E. Lhamon, on behalf of the Commission, sent [letters](#) to Arizona government entities transmitting the Arizona SAC's [advisory memorandum](#) on voting rights.

Alabama SAC Chair Jenny Carroll testified before a field hearing of the House Committee on Administration's Subcommittee on Elections, about the Alabama SAC's [work](#) on voting rights.

Our SACs will continue to gather information and report on a wide range of crucial civil rights issues. *Stay abreast of their activities on our [website](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).*



*Vice Chair Patricia Timmons-Goodson with our Vermont SAC at briefing on school discipline, May 2019*



*Commissioner David Kladney joins our Nevada SAC at its briefing on policing practices, May 2019*



*Our Tennessee SAC held a briefing on legal financial obligation, March 2019*



*Our Virginia SAC held a briefing on hate crimes, March 2019*



*Our Connecticut SAC held a briefing on prosecutorial practices, April 2019*



*Our Massachusetts SAC held a public briefing on human and labor trafficking, April 2019*

## **COMMISSION ACTIVITY**

### **January**

The Commission sent [letters](#) to members of the House Judiciary Committee transmitting our September 2018 [report](#), *An Assessment of Minority Voting Rights Access in the United States*.

## February

On February 22, the Commission held a [public briefing](#), *Women in Prison: Seeking Justice Behind Bars*, to evaluate deprivations of women's medical needs that may violate the constitutional requirement to provide adequate medical care for all prisoners; implementation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act; and the sufficiency of programs to meet women's needs after release. The Commission is examining consequences of discipline practices in women's prisons and the impact on families when women are placed far from home or parental rights are terminated despite their caregiving role. Commissioners heard from women who have experienced incarceration, state and federal corrections officials, academic and legal experts, and advocates. We invite you to watch the briefing's [morning](#), [afternoon](#), and [public comment](#) sessions, and to view panelists' [written testimony](#). The official transcript is available [here](#).



*The Commission's public briefing on women in prison, February 2019*

## March

On March 12, Chair Catherine E. Lhamon [testified](#) before the House Judiciary Committee's Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties Subcommittee: *History and Enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965*. View her testimony at: <https://goo.gl/8KVE1v>. Chair Lhamon's written testimony can be found [here](#). In addition to sharing findings and recommendations from the Commission's national report, Chair Lhamon also highlighted the testimony, findings, and recommendations from the Commission's State Advisory Committees who examined voting rights.

At our March 22 [business meeting](#), the Commission issued a [statement](#) urging the Department of Justice and the Trump Administration to increase hate crime enforcement to address white nationalism. We also heard a presentation by Dr. Rebecca Erbelding, "American Responses to the Rise of Nazism and the Refugee Crisis in the 1930s and 1940s." Please see video of the meeting [here](#). In 2017, we [heard](#) from Dr. Erbelding regarding the voyage of Jewish refugees aboard the MS St. Louis during World War II.

Also at the March meeting, we heard presentations by our Connecticut, Oregon, and Tennessee SAC chairs (see "SAC Activity" section above).

Commissioners and staff were fortunate to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and its “Americans and the Holocaust” [exhibit](#).



*Commissioners and Commission staff visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, March 2019*

## **April**

On April 12, a Commission Subcommittee hosted a [public comment session](#), “The Condition of Immigration Detention Centers and the Status of Treatment of Immigrants in Detention,” hearing from members of the public, including impacted individuals and advocates. The Commission’s 2015 [report](#), *With Liberty and Justice for All: The State of Civil Rights at Immigration Detention Facilities*, addressed the status of detained undocumented immigration children. In July 2018, the Commission voted to reopen its investigation on the conditions of immigration detention, and appointed a Subcommittee to examine the issue further.

At our [business meeting](#) on the same date, the Commission issued statements [urging](#) passage of the Dream Act of 2019, and [condemning](#) past and recent comments motivated by or evidencing religious intolerance. We invite you to view [video](#) and the [transcript](#) of both the public comment session and the business meeting.

On April 18, Vice Chair Patricia Timmons-Goodson testified before the House Committee on Administration’s Subcommittee on Elections at a field hearing in North Carolina, speaking about the Commission’s [report](#) on voting rights. View her testimony [here](#).



*The Commission's public comment session on immigration detention centers and status of treatment of detained immigrants, April 2019*

## May

On May 9, the Commission held a [public briefing](#), *Federal Me Too: Examining Sexual Harassment in Government Workplaces*, to examine the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's enforcement efforts to combat workplace sexual harassment across the federal government, including the frequency of such claims and findings of harassment, the resources dedicated to preventing and redressing harassment, and the impact and efficacy of these enforcement efforts. The briefing looked at agency-level practices to address sexual harassment at the Department of State and NASA. Commissioners heard from current and former officials, academic and legal experts, advocates, and individuals who have experienced harassment. We invite you to watch the briefing's [morning](#), [afternoon](#), and [public comment](#) sessions, and to view panelists' [written testimony](#). The transcript of the briefing will be available on our website in the near future. The Commission continues to accept public comments on this topic, which can be submitted to [sexualharassment@usccr.gov](mailto:sexualharassment@usccr.gov) until June 10, 2019.



*The Commission's briefing on sexual harassment in federal government workplaces, May 2019*

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

On April 26, a documentary on the late Rev. Theodore Hesburgh - "[Hesburgh](#)" - was released, to general critical acclaim. The film offers significant attention to Hesburgh's work as a charter Commissioner (1957-1972) and Chair (1969-1972) of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. As president of the University of Notre Dame for more 35 years, Hesburgh was a national figure with strong ties to presidents, Martin Luther King Jr., and many more prominent national figures and leaders. From the documentary's synopsis: "Educator, civil rights champion, advisor to presidents, envoy to popes, theologian and activist, Hesburgh was called on by countless world leaders to tackle the most challenging issues of the day. He built a reputation as a savvy political operator with a penchant for bridging the divide between bitter enemies." At his 2015 funeral, former Presidents Obama and Carter [spoke](#) about Hesburgh's accomplishments and enduring legacy.

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*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and reporting annually on civil rights. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: In our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For more information, please visit [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).*