



Commissioner Spotlight

Meet Commissioner Marisa Richmond

August 2019

Lodestar, leader—luminary—these concepts, among many others, capture the unique boldness of Marisa Richmond.

A native Nashvillian, Marisa’s path as an ardent activist is literally in her DNA—starting with her last name.

“When my great-grandmother gained her freedom in June 1865,” she notes, “she was living in Richmond, Texas. I honor her and all who struggle for freedom with my name.”

The following are Marisa Richmond’s reflections for our **Commissioner Spotlight**.

What are the formative experiences that influenced who you’ve become? I was exposed to politics at a very early age. My parents supported the sit-ins in 1960 in various ways, and my mother distributed literature for the Kennedy for President campaign that same year while pushing me in my stroller. by devoting their life to causes important to them.

What is your current job and what does an average day look like? I teach history and women’s and gender studies at MTSU. During the school year, it revolves around my class

schedule and holding office hours. When I am off campus, I don’t have an “average” day. I am constantly in meetings or giving talks. I get pulled in multiple directions

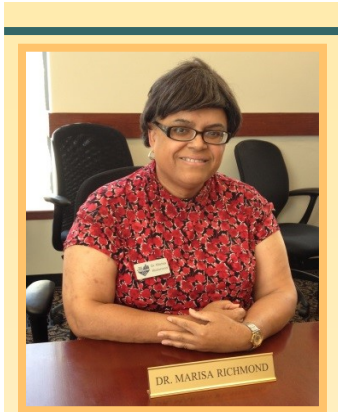
What do you enjoy most about your work? I like helping people learn new things as they expand their horizons. Along the way, I hope to make people better, more informed, and more tolerant, citizens.

What is the most challenging aspect of your work? Some people have pre-conceived notions that they do

not like having challenged. Some are unwilling to see the world in new ways.
What habits or leadership principles do you admire? It starts with listening. It is important to listen to various points of view in order to understand them. It is also important to have open lines of communication. Effective

leadership requires good communication skills.
What is the biggest personal risk you’ve taken? Coming out of the closet. As a black trans woman, I live in the highest risk category for discrimination and violent hate crimes. Every day that I am out, I know my life is at risk.
What is the boldest

professional move you’ve made? Coming out of the closet. I have no legal protections as an out transgender woman.
What’s an accomplishment about which you are very proud? Two things. On a personal level, finishing my doctorate. That has opened a lot of doors and created opportunities many others are denied. In my



Comm. Marisa Richmond

Commissioner Richmond, professor, academician, activist, author, equality agitator and tireless equity advocate, is the first transgender appointee to the Metro Human Relations Commission in the history of the Commission.

Marisa’s Tweetable Tweet

“Get involved.”



work for transgender rights, I am proud of the work I did to advance employment opportunities for transgender people in Tennessee. I worked to get the non-discrimination policies at both FedEx and Vanderbilt, the two largest private employers in Tennessee.

What is it about this accomplishment that has made such an impact on you?

The former, as I said, has opened doors. It gives me access to space to continue to help others. The latter is more emotional as I see others get jobs, with health care benefits, that allows them a certain quality of life.

Did you have a mentor who had a deep impact on the path you've chosen to take? My teachers were influential, helping me learn to write. Also, I appreciate the support of George "Citizen" Barrett and State Senator Avon Williams, who both encouraged my political work.

Have you ever had a mentee? If yes, what kind of impact do you believe you're having? I consider

all of my students mentees. Sometimes, one will even come back to me & tell me how important I was in helping them achieve their goals. That is always nice to hear.

What guiding principle or quote inspires you? *"I just want you to*



understand that your first duty is to humanity. I want others to look at us and see that we care not about ourselves, but about others."

Madame C. J.

Walker (1867-1919)

How were you introduced to the MHRC? When it was reorganized in 1995, I followed the battle over the nomination of Dr. Kathleen Malloy, and then-Mayor Bredesen's commitment to LG(BT) inclusion.

What causes or issues invigorate you? Commissioner Richmond has several, including, "affordable housing, equity and inclusion, law

enforcement/policing, LGBT rights in general."

Do you advocate for these issues through your role as a MHRC Commissioner? Yes. I try to,

keeping in mind that the Tennessee General Assembly has tied the hands of local government in addressing many issues, and Congress has, thus far, refused to pass the Equality Act.

What message would you like to share with Davidson County residents?

I appreciate the opportunity to serve my home town. It is an honor and a privilege to work to ensure that Nashville is a welcoming place for all residents and visitors.

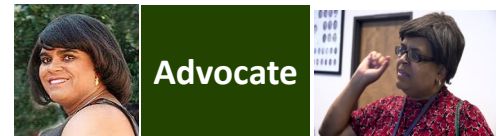
What advice you would give to your 15-year old self?

"Don't give up. Keep persevering. You are on the right track."



[On meeting President Barak Obama at the White House LGBT Pride Reception in June 2011:]

I also met Vice President Biden about an hour after the photo-op with the President. The President was very pleasant and he listened as I spoke on behalf of the transgender community since I was the only trans person getting a one-on-one with the President that day.



National voice for transgender rights

