

**MINUTES  
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2012**

Chair Abrams called the 239th meeting of the City of San Diego Human Relations Commission (HRC) to order at 5:40 PM

- **WELCOME**

**Roll Call**

**Commissioners Present:** Bruce Abrams, Joyce Singer Abrams, Mark Dillon, Monica Bauer Federman, Shonee Henry, Gagandeep Kaur, Mitz Lee, George Mitrovich, Lorena Slomanson, Joel Tramley

**Excused:** Mary Alcock, Tiffany Harrison, Patricia Washington

**Absent:** Gracia Molina de Pick

**Staff:** Danell Scarborough, Executive Director; Pam Holmberg, Labor Relations

**Public Comment:**

There was no public comment

**Recognition of Service:**

The Commission recognized Shonee Henry for her service as Vice Chair of the Human Relations Commission and presented her with a plaque.

- **PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION**

**A Song for San Diego – Jesus Sierra**

Mr. Sierra was inspired by a conversation on the radio that commented that San Diego did not have a song such as “I Left My Heart In San Francisco” or “New York, New York” that was associated with it. Mr. Sierra created a song titled “San Diego, Sunny San Diego” in hopes of filling that void. He played the song for the Commissioners and passed our lyric sheets. The Commission thanked Mr. Sierra for his efforts and wished him good luck in his endeavor.

**Education Under Fire – Jane Senour**

Ms. Senour addressed the Commission on the denial of higher education to the members of the Baha’i faith in Iran and provided a copy of a documentary, Education Under Fire, on this issue. In 1987 the Baha’i community in Iran organized the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), a decentralized network of teachers who deliver college level classes in non-traditional settings to students that have been banned from universities because of their Baha’i faith. These courses, taught by accredited professors, are recognized and accepted for credit by more than fifty universities outside of Iran, allowing BIHE students to continue with graduate work abroad. In May, 2011 Iranian officials raided various Baha’i homes and arrested over a dozen BIHE teachers and administrators. Ms. Senour encouraged the

Commission to speak out on these human rights issues. Commission members can visit [www.educationunderfire.org](http://www.educationunderfire.org) and sign a petition urging the end of persecution of BIHE that will be sent to the Iranian government. She also encouraged the Commissioners to engage colleges, professors and other citizens to make them aware of the situation and encourage United State's institutions to accept BIHE credits.

### **Rainbow Flag in Hillcrest – Benjamin Nicholls**

Mr. Nicholls, a representative from the Hillcrest Business Association, provided an overview of the Associations plans to build a 65 foot flag pole in the median on University Avenue and Normal Street. The flag pole would fly an 18'x12' Pride flag. The Association would like to construct this piece of public art as an honor to the diversity of the Hillcrest Community. All costs associated with the project will be covered by private donations. Once constructed the on-going maintenance will become the responsibility of San Diego's Pride Parade organization and private donations/profits from parade activities would provide for upkeep. The plans for the project are currently going through the City's review process in the Planning Department. The project should come before the Planning Commission on April 14 and before City Council on May 8. Commissioner Tramley made a motion that the Commission send a letter of support to the City Council and Mayor. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Abrams. The motion passed unanimously with Commissioner Kaur abstaining. Commissioner Tramley and Executive Director Scarborough with draft the letter.

### **Update on status of CalFresh improvement efforts**

#### **Impact of changes being proposed for CalWorks**

**Joni Halpern, Supporting Parent Information Network (SPIN)**

**Dr. Bill Oswald, Springfield College**

**Don Davis, Caring Council**

**Maria Aceves**

The contingency spoke to the Commission about the County's administration of the CalFresh and CalWorks programs and their continued frustrations. They have all worked to get the County to improve access to the programs but feel there has been little progress in the last five years and that we should be able to better assist our citizens in need. The County created a review committee, the HHSA, to review the process and make recommendations on how to improve it. They made 69 recommendations on how to improve the process a year ago and they feel no progress has been made to make getting assistance easier. Only 245,000 individuals out of over 600,000 eligible in San Diego County are receiving food stamps. The County has had the lowest participation rate nationwide for five years in a row. The phone system drops many of the calls that come in and the County admits to falsely denying one in five submissions. Lines at the service centers often take hours and often don't lead to the resolution of people's problem. After going through a Managed Competition process the County eliminated case managers and the new system does not have anyone responsible for individual cases. Because of this many applications get lost in the system or it is nearly impossible to find anyone to answer questions about specific submittals. The County also has a policy that 100% of the applicants must be investigated for fraud. No data shows that fraud is a problem but this has become the County's top priority. These investigations can

add weeks to the application process and use valuable resources that could be allocated elsewhere.

Joni Halpern reported that the Governor's proposed budget could cut services even further and cause much suffering in San Diego. 110,000 families in California would be cut off from assistance and more would have their assistance cut to 1987 levels.

The contingency asked the Commission to help with political pressure on the County to improve the system and answer specific questions on how they will go about improving the system. They would like to know how grant money is being spent and where resources will be coming from. They would like the County to work with those who receive aide to see how the process could be made simpler and easier for individuals to apply for. They would like specific answers to how the 69 recommendations of the HHSA are being resolved

Commissioner Henry made a motion that the Commission send a letter to the Mayor and City Council to ask for them to get involved, to monitor the system and see that it meets deliverables. Commissioner Slomanson seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Executive Director Scarborough will draft a letter with the Commissioners' assistance in the next 10 days.

- **ACTION AGENDA**

**New Business**

**1. Update HRC 2012 Priority Committees and Work Plan**

Executive Director Scarborough outlined the plan for the Committees and periodic updates at the monthly meetings. The Committees for 2012 are:

**a. Hate Motivated Behavior**

Commissioner Gungandeeep Kaur agreed to serves as the Committee Chair

**b. Education**

Commissioner Mitz Lee, Committee Chair

**c. Immigration Rights**

Vice Chair Mark Dillon, Committee Chair

**d. Access Issues**

Commissioner Lorena Slomanson, Committee Chair

**e. Special Projects**

Commissioner Mary Alcock, Committee Chair

**f. Outreach and Advocacy**

Chair Bruce Abrams, Committee Chair

- **INFORMATION AGENDA**

**CHAIRS REPORT**

**1. Meeting with State Department's International Visitors from the Near East and North Africa – 3/21/12**

Several of the Commissioners were able to meet with the contingency of 21 officials from the Near East and North Africa prior to the Commission meeting. It was an interesting experience for all and a great learning experience. All Commissioners are

encourages, as time allows, to attend similar functions in the future.

**2. Update on work with UMI Learning Center**

Chair Abrams and the HRC's legal intern will be meeting with the UMI in the next few weeks to help guide them through steps to gaining non-profit status and seeking assistance to help at the Center.

**Commissioners' Report:**

The Cesar Chavez Community Breakfast was attended by many of the Commissioners. The breakfast was very successful and keynote speaker Arturo Rodriguez, president of the United Farm Workers Organization was very interesting. The Commission's attendance was recognized. The Commissioners were encouraged to attend these community events when their schedule permits. It is a great chance to meet others with similar concerns in the community.

**Executive Director's Report:**

The HRC will be participating in the Thomas Jefferson School of Law Diversity Week, Panel on American Muslims Community Hate Crimes on March 26. Any Commissioners that are available to participate should contact Executive Director Scarborough

SDSU will be hosting These Hands Don't Hurt Awareness and Prevention Fair on April 10.

The HRC is a co-sponsor of the Harvey Milk Diversity Breakfast on May 25. Please contact Executive Director Scarborough for ticket information.

June 10 will be Diversity Day at the Children's Museum, an event that is free for all. The event brings together children of all types to exchange culture, dance, music and food. The HRC will have an information table at the event. The underlying theme of the event is recycling and Executive Director Scarborough invites any suggestions for a recycle project for the information table.

Hoover High School is hosting Peace Week March 26-30. The Commissioners have been invited to speak to classes about social justice for 30 minutes over the lunch break on March 28. The Commission participated in this last year and found it rewarding and challenging. Any Commissioners that are available to participate can contact Executive Director Scarborough.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.