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**COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS**  
*COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS*

**CHA Community Meeting, Mt. Vernon**

August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012

6:30 – 9:00pm

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*The meeting was called to order at 6:36pm.*

**Roll Call**

Commissioners Present: Lillian Ortiz-Self, Ana Ruiz Peralta, Cynthia De Victoria, Gloria Ochoa, Anita Ahumada, Ty Cordova, Manuel Reta, Jennifer Ramirez Robson, Rosalba Pitkin, Sharonne Navas

Commissioners Absent: Ana Maria Diaz Martinez (excused)

Staff Present: Uriel Iniguez, Marena Lear. Interns: Jose Oliva and Osvaldo Guel

**Introductions and Acknowledgements**

Chair Ortiz-Self and Commissioner Reta thanked the community for attending, and thanked the panelists for their participation.

Commissioners acknowledged distinguished guests Representative Luis Moscoso, Burlington City administrator, and Nina Martinez (Vice-President of the Latino Civic Alliance)

**Agenda Review**

Chair Ortiz-Self outlined the agenda for the meeting, which began with CHA Official business, then a presentation on the Commission and the Latino community in the Mt. Vernon area, followed by a 5 minute presentation from each of the panelists. This was followed by public comment, wherein community members are asked to direct their comments to the Commission, which then poses the questions to the panel.

Chair Ortiz-Self introduced the staff and interns.

**CHA Official Business**

- Commissioner Navas moved to approve the minutes from the previous public meeting. Commissioner DeVictoria seconded the motion. 2 abstentions: Commissioner Ochoa and Commissioner Robson.



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- Chair Ortiz-Self acknowledged the end of Commissioner Cordova's term as vice chair, and thanked him for his service.
- Commissioner Reta motioned to nominate Commissioner Peralta. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ahumada. All in favor, motion carried.

### **CHA Presentation**

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*Panelists:* Mayor Jill Boudreau, Superintendent Carl Bruner, Jose Ortiz, Chief Ken Bergsma, Officer Mark Francis

### **Panelist Presentations**

*Mayor Jill Boudreau*

Thank you for inviting me here. I was sworn in just this year, and I've been in office 8 months. The night that I was sworn in I said this to the people that were there: you belong here. I mean that very sincerely. To all those that are here tonight and to all those that are out in the community: you belong in Mt. Vernon and you're a vital part of our community. As mayor, I am responsible for basic services that are provided to our residents, such as the library, the police department, the fire service, garbage trucks, etc. In these first few months we've been taking a look at how we reach out to our community, and specifically to our Latino population. I've been meeting with an informal group of people that are helping me figure out how to improve our services to Latinos. We are planning a community survey to find out what types of services you take part in, how do you receive information, and how do we make you feel like you can be a part of it and take responsibility. A few things that we provide: our library is a wonderful place, we have a lot of different programs for children, bilingual story hour etc. All people in our library feel lifelong learning is important. In the area of parks and recreation, we're looking at what types of things are more culturally relevant to the Latino community and what interests them. In terms of the police department, we offer incentives to officers that are bilingual. As far as outreach, we are working on a new website that will debut this fall, which will have a lot of information about community resources, as well as a translate button for Spanish. We'll start putting some of our budget towards putting more information on KSVR radio. We are going to conduct a survey and get out into our neighborhoods and establish relationships. Our mission is to reach out through our basic services and make sure that everyone feels that they belong in our community.

*Superintendent Carl Bruner*

Thank you for having me here. I am the superintendent of Mt. Vernon school district, entering my 9<sup>th</sup> year. The Latino communities are extremely important to us in Mt. Vernon within the educational system. They hold a special place in my heart because I was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. I am used to being a minority. I love that, it feels normal to me. Things we've made some progress on:

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- Our school district is the only Latino majority school district in western Washington. 53% is Latino, about 48% is white. It has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. As a result we have tried to focus on how to better serve that student population and connect with their parents.
- The on time graduation rate last year of Latino students was almost 88%, which is much higher than it has ever been. We have seen continued growth in academic achievement with Latino students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
- Gang activity has plummeted to an all-time low. We are seeing positive Latino student leadership like we have never seen before. There is a Latino educational achievement project club in middle school and high school which meets once a week. They work on activities in the school to encourage higher levels of academic achievement among all students, and it has made a significant difference.
- Higher levels of Hispanic parent leadership. The Parent Advisory Committee meetings are attended by 150 – 300 parents on a given evening.

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We need to continue to address the achievement gap. Our Latino students are not achieving at levels commensurate with their white peers. That is our most important issue. If they are going to have opportunities for college and careers, that's where we need to be.

*Jose Ortiz*

I've been serving this community for over 30 years. What we've seen over the years with the migrant population really hasn't changed. My grandparents and my parents, we all lived in migrant camps, and things were a lot better than they are today. The housing and immigration issues continue to be the same. We started running a program called summer meals. It is similar to the basic lunch program they have in schools. We knew there were many kids that were going hungry because their parents would go to work very early and not come home until very late and young kids would take care of their younger siblings while their parents worked. We go to 5 different sites to provide lunch and snacks, and we look out for them while we're there. It hurts to see kids living in those conditions, and especially to see them by themselves. With all the cuts we're seeing in our state, especially to daycare providers, there are more and more kids by themselves. Housing is becoming less and less available for farmworkers. We are even housing people in barns. I work with the youth core; youth come and spend a week at a time here with us, and we try to teach them about farm labor, and how hard the farm workers work. One of the painful things to see is that many of these workers labor very hard to provide food for other people, but they can't provide food for their own families. Secure Communities is a huge issue. My community is not any safer because of this measure. There are more drugs than ever. Gang violence has decreased significantly, but our community is still not much safer because people are afraid to come forward. We want to work together with you. We have regular meetings with law enforcement and the mayor, but there's a lot more work that needs to be done.

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*Chief Ken Bergsma*

I've been a police officer for 35 years, and I've been chief for the last 6 years. I want to talk about our policing philosophy. We do it through community participation. My role is to provide public safety for all people in the community. We want to make our department reflect our community. We have 3 Hispanic officers; one is bilingual and bi-cultural, another is bi-cultural. We try to reach out to the entire community to get their participation to help us solve crime and keep the community safe. We do have a gang issue, which we've been very aggressive with. We've been successful in solving many of these crimes. We have a partnership with youth and family services, the school district. Our philosophy is not soft on crime. If someone commits a crime, we displace the violent individuals. We have a couple of successful programs. One is we take juveniles and send them out to eradicate graffiti. We have block watches throughout. We have a citizen's academy. We have interpreters. We've had homicides of undocumented people. We solved the case through working together with the witnesses and the community. As a police officer, I really love Mount Vernon, and our citizens need to be involved and partner with us in reporting crimes and be actively engaged in making a difference. We believe it's more successful if we can engage the community.

*Officer Mark Francis, WSP*

On a personal note, the Latino community is very special to my heart. I lived in Mexico for 2 years. We don't work as closely as the local police department with the community, but for us it's very important. The WSP is serious about its target zero goal: zero motor vehicle fatalities by the year 2030. As 11% of our population, you are important to this goal. We work towards this in various ways, through education and enforcement. I am interested in reducing the number of fatalities as a state trooper. You will see me looking out for seatbelts and speeding, and reducing DUIs. It is important for us, because you are an important part of our community.

**Public comments**

Commissioner Cordova asked the public to please address the commission with their comments, state their names fully, and take no longer than 3 minutes to comment.

*Cristina Labra, Office of the Secretary of State*

I want to let you know that this year we have a huge election coming up. We have 6 ballot measures, and we're voting for president and governor. I encourage everyone who's a citizen to vote. We provide information in English and in Spanish.



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*Manuel Brito*

I've been here for 48 years. I worked in the labor camps, and they were horrific. I would like to ask if you have you heard a lot of complaints, and if so what is going to done about it. I would like to know if there are policies that can be changed.

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*Rufina Leticia Jimenez*

I would like to thank the commission. I want to share with everyone that for the first time we've received this parent guide. Many parents have benefited from this publication. We would like the commission to continue with this program because we definitely need it. It is like opening a channel for the Latino community.

*Leticia Rodriguez*

I have some questions about something that has not been discussed. I have 2 kids that I would like to apply for a work permit under the new law. I want to know who I can talk to for help in evaluating their eligibility and help in filling out the applications. I don't know if there is anyone that could assist us without charging to give information. I also have friends who need this information. I came to the last meeting, and the only thing they told us was that there would be another meeting on Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, but that is in 3 weeks, so as a parent I am concerned because this is very pressing. Maybe someone who is present here can help me. I live here in the Peterson apartments. Thanks for listening.

*Jim Justice*

I am the Chair of the Skagit Immigrant Rights Council. There is a checklist of documents that you need to start putting together for deferred action eligibility. There are legal clinics available. There is an earlier legal clinic that will be held on Tuesday, August 28<sup>th</sup> in Bellingham. You can talk to me later if you are interested.

*Linda Wright*

I'm running for state representative for the 39<sup>th</sup> district. I wanted to come and hear from the community what the concerns are. I'm a school bus driver, I work with children. As a citizen I go to Olympia and fight for our rights all the time. I fight for early education and preschool. I want to make sure we have affordable daycare for our families. The other concern that I have is to make sure that everyone has a pathway to become legal citizens. I want to make sure that if and when I am elected that you know that my door will always be open, and that I will work very hard for all people. I am truly a working class person.



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*Mariana Rosario Orta*

I'm Jose's assistant here. I want to talk about the migrant youth and workers. This is my 3<sup>rd</sup> summer here. We tell our youth that when you have a plant, you can either let it grow, or you can let it die. By letting it grow you have to take care of it. We go by the philosophy, "if you give a man a fish..." But the problem is that the resources we provide need to interconnect. If the community doesn't feel comfortable and doesn't have access to these resources, they will not work for us. A lot of migrant workers that we speak to are afraid to drive around the community. Our community lives in fear. And all the other things like education can't work unless people feel safe. There is institutional oppression that happens within the system and we need to change it. We need to stop this fear, and listen to the voices of the youth. We need to create workshops where the youth are the voice, not the older generations. It's time for the youth to take action. Why aren't we asking the youth also, instead of just the parents? The older generation needs to take risks with us, and see how we can work together.

*Lisa Heaton*

I work with the Department of Labor and Industries. One of my responsibilities is to let people know what services are available to them, such as worker's compensation. We provide services to documented and undocumented alike. We enforce a wage payment act. We also provide workplace safety and health rules, and rules on workplace violence. It's possible to file anonymously. We have a hotline 1 800 547 8367. We have bilingual staff that responds on that line. We've been concerned about H2A workers. Because they come for a very short period of time, we want to make sure they know their rights. If you have questions, you should call us.

*Berta Santos*

I've lived here for 25 years. I want to know what you're doing about the gangs, because we hear a lot of gunshots in my street, and we don't see it getting better. We want our kids safe.

*Araceli Quesada*

I'm a student from EWU. I've been doing needs assessment for the migrant and Hispanic populations. I came here when I was 20 years old. I worked and lived in the migrant camps for years. Domestic violence and abuse of children concern me a lot. I would like to find out if there are any programs in education and protection. We need to pay attention to what really is happening inside the homes. I was a foster parent for many years. There were many reports of abuse, but the state never acted on it. People are afraid, and there is not enough education. How can we allow people to come forward and say this is going on in our families?



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*Representative Luis Moscoso*

I want to thank the commission, thank Jose Ortiz for the use of the facilities, and thank Mayor Boudreau. I'm on the public safety and emergency preparedness committee in Olympia, and I've been working very closely on gang issues. The one thing I want to hear more about is how prevention and intervention are really the only ways to resolve these issues. I was fortunate enough to get a small bill through last year which turned into two grants to work on gangs in Yakima and Pierce counties. But it is not enough; we need a lot more money. I'm working with the Attorney General's Office as well as both the caucuses in Olympia to try to find more money. I'm looking forward to working with the police department here in Mount Vernon. Unfortunately no matter how good a job you do on suppressing crime, you still end up with the school to prison pipeline. We've got to reach out to our families before they get into trouble. That means reaching out through school programs. By the time kids are in high school it's almost too late to save them, so we have to work with them.

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**Break – 10 minutes**

Questions to the panel:

*Chair Lillian Ortiz-Self*

My first question is for the mayor. We've heard numerous concerns about safety and housing conditions in the labor camps. What is the city doing to ensure that children and families have safe housing, and what is your relation to the labor camps?

*Mayor Boudreau*

The city limits do not extend over the migrant labor camps, so we don't have jurisdiction over that situation. But we have great relationships with the farmworker housing associations within the city. When I worked with the police department, we did a lot of crime prevention work. Our officers are out there building relationships with children, so they understand our role and are not afraid of law enforcement.

*Commissioner Pitkin*

This question is for the chief of police: the Latino community is growing here, as well as in the rest of the state. How do your officers provide interpretation to the Latino community?

*Chief Bergsma*

We have three Latino officers, and others that are bilingual and bicultural. Two of our Latino officers went to Mount Vernon high school. If we have someone that needs interpretation services, there are two options: if the officers that are bilingual are working, they will come and assist. We also have a language



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line that we can call. If it's a serious crime, we call the language exchange, with which we have a contract, and we call an interpreter in for an interview, and then we'd use them. We have several options that we use on a regular basis.

*Commissioner De Victoria*

This question is for the police department. What is your department doing for gang intervention and prevention?

*Chief Bergsma*

We had a steep rise in gang activity in the mid-nineties. We went to Yakima and other places and learned from them. We established a gang reduction plan, we placed an officer in gang resources. We partnered with the school district and received a grant to place an officer in those schools, and when the grant expired, the school district has continued to pay for half of that officer's salary. We have a strong partnership with youth and family services, who work with gang offenders. Graffiti program. We work closely with the school district, with their security officers and prevention staff. We have an officer in k through 6 and also in the high school. We have a middle school officer with an after school program for kids. We have an officer that works with the National Forest Service, and on a regular basis takes kids in that neighborhood up into the national forest where they have field trips. This is an example of the way our neighborhood resource officer tries to make a difference with these kids. Those are a few things that we're doing. The main thing I can tell you is that we're doing the prevention side, and we're working with other departments on this, but we do have crime. We've been doing a lot, and we've been very successful.

*Commissioner De Victoria*

How do you bring families into the partnership?

*Chief Bergsma*

We have crime prevention officers who work in neighborhood conflict resolution. We have a couple of neighborhoods where there is a lot of crime, so what we do is have our crime prevention staff go and work with them to establish a block watch. The school district has prevention specialists, and we have officers in the school, so if we identify a person who has done criminal activity, we work with the school, and sometimes call in the parents and educate them on their child's situation. When we can we will use intervention strategies.

*Chair Lillian Ortiz-Self*



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This question is regarding after school prevention programs that the city offers through for example the parks and recreation department. Is there a program after school that engages parents in a positive educational way, as well as keeps kids in a structured environment?

*Mayor Boudreau*

We have amazing community partners. We have for example the Children of the Valley program: they work in the school district with at risk kids. They provide support to the kids with homework, etc. and they bring in the parents as well, and they've been very successful. They also partner with the community garden. We have a strong boys and girls club and YMCA program.

*Commissioner Reta*

Do you have a domestic violence committee? If so, do you have a bilingual or bicultural person on the committee?

*Mayor Boudreau*

There is a Mt. Vernon domestic violence and sexual assault services program. We have some officers that are specially trained and teach domestic violence in workplaces, etc. I don't know the makeup of the board, but they do provide a lot of outreach to the community with services and education.

*Commissioner Ochoa*

This question is for the state trooper. There have been concerns across communities regarding use of ICE for backup interpretation, which causes a lot of concerns because some people are detained for non-criminal activity. What is state patrol here doing in regards to addressing the need for interpreters?

*Lieutenant Jason Armstrong*

This is an issue that has cropped up in the last few months. We've worked with Community to Community on this. We have very few bilingual officers. Recently language line has become more of an avenue. However when we conduct criminal investigations, Border Patrol has been used. This is primarily for criminal activity, not for minor infractions. More recently we've backed away from that because it creates confusion. WSP has a very strict policy that states that we cannot retain any person because of immigration status. When we have to use interpretation, we really push to use the language line. This is a work in progress and we continue to get that message out there, and we continue to have these meetings and share these ideas.

*Chair Lillian Ortiz-Self*



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Are you aware of instances where Border Patrol or I.C.E. monitor the radio airwaves in order to hear of stops and show up while you're doing an investigation?

*Lieutenant Jason Armstrong*

I'm not aware of any specific instance of that. We're actually moving over to an encrypted system where if they don't have a key code they won't be able to hear the transmission.

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*Chair Lillian Ortiz-Self*

Same question to the chief of police.

*Chief Bergsma*

I'm not aware of ICE or Border Patrol monitoring radio frequencies. We don't work with that agency. There have been cases where they come to Mt. Vernon and get involved with serious gang crimes and felonies, and we will share information with them. When they go out and do their sweep through the community, we don't play a role. We don't work scene side by side with them.

*Commissioner Ramirez-Robson*

Question for the mayor, concerning the community survey: how do you plan to execute the survey? What are your strategies for engaging with the Latino community?

*Mayor Boudreau*

We've done an extremely successful survey where we had a page long questionnaire, and offered some incentives (drawings, raffle, etc.). What was found most successful was going door to door. Our group is deciding right now how to get the information we need with the focus on community services. One idea is to work with library staff. Another is to attend some soccer tournaments, go to church groups, etc. We're asking our Latino folks what's the best way.

*Chair Lillian Ortiz-Self*

This is a question for Jose Ortiz. I know that you work very diligently with migrant families. Are you hearing that they are being asked to engage in community functions such as schools, neighborhood watch, gang prevention, etc.? How well do you feel like they are being integrated into the community?

*Jose Ortiz*



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There's a huge lack of education. There are a lot of indigenous people who speak neither Spanish nor English. Besides the churches, there is not too much that is coming from the different departments. We need to find a way to educate ourselves in order to provide services to them.

*Commissioner Navas*

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Question to Dr. Bruner. You mentioned that your graduation rate is over 80%. Can you talk about how the school district has accomplished that? What is the dropout rate for Latinos before ninth grade?

*Superintendent Bruner*

I can't speak to what the dropout rate for Latinos is before ninth grade, but I'm sure it is higher than it should be. The transition between eighth grade and ninth grade is very important, because this is a time when many students are at risk of disappearing. We've used many different strategies, the most successful of which has been to hire bilingual advocates, and migrant dropout prevention specialists. The purpose of those staff is to remain in touch with those students day in and day out, with their counselors, so they know what their credit status is. They get in touch with parents if they see that students are falling behind. There are a variety of things that happened in between. We have a Hispanic high school counselor, who is constantly connecting with them and their families, to encourage better attendance, and use of credit retrieval programs. This helps us as a system to become aware of barriers that exist. Students have to sometimes get pulled to take care of younger children, to interpret for their parents, to work to support their families. The staff has helped us figure out different ways to work around those barriers to create programs that these kids can access.

There is a parent advisory council. It began as a migrant parent advisory council, but it became too heavily regulated. We opened it up to make it a migrant and bilingual parent advisory committee.

*Chair Ortiz-Self*

We've been getting lots of comments from community members that they'd like to see our parent education trainings continue in this area. Is this something the school district would be willing to partner with?

*Superintendent Bruner*

Absolutely, I don't think it's possible to do too much with that. We can't assume that parents know how to be involved in their student's education. Sometimes they just simply don't know the highest leverage activities in which to be involved, and it's because we have not done an accurate job of educating them.

*Commissioner Reta*



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What recruitment efforts are there for Latino teachers and police officers?

*Superintendent Bruner*

We do not have enough Latino teachers. Some are bilingual, but that doesn't always go far enough, we need many more. It is something we prioritize, but we have not been particularly successful. We're currently working with our classified employees, our assistants, etc. many of whom are Hispanic, to encourage them to go back to school and become certified teachers, and provide financial support for them. Also we have recent high school graduates being supported by us to become teachers, and that is going to be a long-term process.

*Chief Bergsma*

We have recruiters at the police department that go out to job fairs, one of whom is Latino. We also have a preparatory academy, and we bring in high school seniors. We strive to have the class reflect the community, so there are usually a few Latino students involved. Our goal is to hire more Latino officers, more women, and more minorities. This is a primary focus for us. We have 30% or more Latino population. We know we need to be able to reach our community, so it is a priority right now.

*Commissioner Peralta*

Question for all panelists. You are leaders, and leaders never take no for an answer. Housing is an important issue. To provide good housing it takes resources. Mayor, you have told us this is outside your jurisdiction. I know you all probably belong to other groups like the Kiwanis group, and you know the business community. I know we can work together to come up with a solution to this housing problem. We have an immigrant community that is vital to this city. Do I hear a yes?

*Jose Ortiz*

We have a committee that has been working on this, and we have built five apartment complexes. The church has done its part, but there's still much more that needs to be done. One of the biggest issues is having seasonal housing. The migrant camps are closing, and we've been hearing stories of farmers housing people in barns. We're trying to do our best, but we're trying to meet the growers halfway so we can build housing. But with all of the budget cuts, and everything going on in Olympia, they might put farmworker housing at the bottom of the list. We probably won't see any support soon.

*Commissioner Peralta*

We know that an educated community is more active. You have so many wonderful programs that are underutilized. Would you collaborate with Mr. Ortiz to do a tour, and show the migrant community what services are available to them, and where they are located? I assure you, as soon as they know what you



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do, you are going to be very busy. I was asked how can we engage the Latino community, and the first thing is to open your doors and educate.

*Mayor Boudreau*

I love that idea. The number of residents who don't know where city hall is always surprises me. Once a week I have a mayor's coffee hour, and anyone can come and ask questions and engage. I am excited about teaching people what municipal government does. I would be very happy to work with Jose and do a tour. There is a fee of \$80 a year to use the library if you're outside the city limits, so we gave out library cards to farmworkers in Conway. We had thousands of children in our summer reading program. We also changed it so that anyone in the school district can use the library for free, and that all ties in to education.

*Commissioner Reta*

Question for Jose Ortiz: what are the health conditions in the migrant housing? What are your suggestions?

*Jose Ortiz*

I've been doing migrant ministry for 30 years. I don't do tours; I like to call it ministry. Housing continues to be the same, it doesn't change. There are a lot of wonderful growers in our community, but there are some corporations that are getting bigger and bigger and sometimes we suffer because of that. There are tiny rooms with no insulation, using mattresses as walls, water dripping through. This is happening in our own backyards. It's embarrassing for me, it's my community, and I care about it. Migrant workers contribute a lot to this community. I invite you to come with me so you can see it for yourself.

*Chair Ortiz-Self*

We've heard a lot of issues tonight. What we know works well is parent engagement. We need to empower them. We'd like to encourage this community and our panel members to participate in gang prevention programs, parent education in schools, coffee hour with the mayor tailored to Latinos, recruitment efforts, and efforts to improve the housing situation. I would like to offer the Commission as a resource. Our local commissioner Manuel Reta is willing to sit on task forces and committees, etc. We need to include the voices of our parents and our children. We will make sure you get information about the deferred action on our website as we receive it. Thank you for being here, thank you to the panelists for valuing the voice of the community. Thanks to the catholic diocese and Jose Ortiz.



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Commissioner Navas motioned to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Peralta seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 9:03pm.