



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
**COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS**  
*COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS*

Mattawa  
Public Meeting  
April 15, 2006

**Roll Call:**

Commissioners present: Ruben Baca, Victor Chacon, Faviola Contreras, Félix L. Negrón, Lourdes Portillo Salazar, Gabriel Portugal, Graciela Villanueva-Lopez, and Rebecca Villareal

Commissioners absent: Yvonne Lopez Morton

Staff Present: Uriel Iñiguez, Alicia Luna, Rogelio Burgos, and Caitlin Simmons

Meeting called to order at 2:10 PM

Co-Chair Portugal welcomed all attendees and thanked them for taking the time from their busy schedules to join us.

The meeting proceeded with introductions by all the CHA Commissioners present, the Director, staff and volunteers.

Commissioner Portillo Salazar was appointed timekeeper to insure that we stayed on schedule as per the agenda.

**GUEST SPEAKERS**

**Veronica Bronkema, WA State Labor & Industries**

Ms. Bronkema shared information regarding Worker Rights and the Minimum Wage. She informed the public that all workers regardless of whether they are documented or undocumented have a right to receive benefits for any on-the-job accident. She also informed them that they have a right to a break for every four hours of work, a lunch break of at least ½ an hour, and to be paid the minimum hourly wage (\$7.63). She added that adolescents have to be paid at least 80% of this minimum hourly wage. Last but not least she informed them that they have a right to a safe working environment. She said that safety issues should always be reported to Supervisors; however, if supervisors do

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not correct these safety issues employees have a right to file a confidential report with the department of L&I.

Ms. Bronkema introduced Ray Benavidez (509-454-3726) Safety and Health Consultant for the Yakima area, Estevan Zambrano (509-735-0101) and Ismael Rodriguez (509-735-0103) Pesticide Consultants for the Kennewick area.

Questions/Comments from the public included:

- While working at an orchard I got a sinus problem that made me break out into a rash. What do I do and to whom should I report it?
- What is the time frame for reporting accidents?
- Why does it take so long for L&I to pay injured workers?
- Will the claim continue if a person leaves the job where she/he was injured and goes another job?
- Why aren't inspectors inspecting the fields to insure that they are safe for workers?

Ms. Bronkema stated that it is very important to report an accident immediately after it happens even if the injured person feels fine. She added that reporting it to your supervisor will insure that there is a record of it. She also said that injured parties do have a year to report an accident; however, it is important that you not take too long to do so.

She also stated that claims take time to process due to the steps involved. She said that when a person gets injured, he or she goes to a Doctor; he/she then opens an L&I claim. She added that the claim involves paper work that needs to be filled out and sent to L&I but unfortunately sometimes there is a delay in the paperwork reaching their office. The other delay is that the pay does not start until 15 days after the injury. Ms. Bronkema advised the public that they can call the L&I office and inquire why the delay in getting paid. She also informed them that they need to know and understand that they will not be paid the full amount of their regular earnings. She added that the amount that they will receive depends on marital status, number of children, etc.

Ms. Bronkema stated that Safety and Health Consultants are available to inspect small businesses (free of charge) for safety issues. These consultants also do unannounced inspections of other businesses for safety compliance. She advised the public that anyone can call L&I and request for a safety consultant to come out and inspect any agricultural field or place of work that they feel is unsafe for them or their fellow workers.

### **Genoveva Morales-Ledesma, Washington State University in the Tri-Cities**

Ms. Morales-Ledesma informed the public that Washington State University Students can complete their bachelor's degree and/or earn a master's degree from WSU at the Tri-Cities campus. It also offers the Gear-Up program and the LIDER (Latino/a Initiative for Development of Educational Renewal) program. She stated that most of the kids graduating from High School are **not** prepared for college or for a university so she strongly urged parents to help their children in the preparation process. She stated that there is information available for parents; however, not enough information to understand the requirements. She informed them that the PSAT is a test that all kids should take to

gauge how prepared they are for college. She added that results of this test are beneficial in putting together a plan of preparation for college. She told the public that teachers are not always informed of the Gear-Up program because it is so new and that it was crucial for parents to become involved so as to assist their children in this endeavor.

Ms. Morales-Ledesma introduced Guadalupe Cruz from Washington State University Tri-Cities. Mr. Cruz is the LIDER Latino Outreach Coordinator. He is a Sunnyside High School and Pullman WSU Graduate. He informed parents that there are government assistant programs, scholarships, and plenty of money for college; however, Counselors don't always have the time or take the time to share this information with students. He stated that grades are very important. He added that a 3.5 grade point average or better and participation in school activities is a requirement to qualify for these programs.

Mr. Cruz also informed the parents that Rancho Las Vivoras pays up to 90% of college tuition for kids whose parents are employees of this ranch.

Mr. Jesus Mota, Director of the Gear-Up program works in conjunction with Mr. Cruz. He stated that he is willing to work with any and all students even those not in his area. He added that both Mr. Cruz and he are both willing to come out to any community and present their program. They can be reached through Ms. Morales Ledesma's phone number 509-372-7308. The local Mattawa Gear-Up contact is Jessica Raigoza (509-932-4455).

#### **Mateo Arteaga, Central Washington University**

Mr. Arteaga informed the public that he was involved in the LEAP Latino Youth Summit in Olympia where he learned about the different programs available to undocumented students. He distributed a list to all interested parties with the websites that offer scholarships. He also stated that the "Running Start" program was available to all 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. He added that the benefit of this program is that the school pays for all the costs involved. A video was also presented regarding the Dream Act.

A person at the meeting asked if the University of Washington had a minority student quota and if the university had to meet it.

Ms. Morales-Ledesma stated that Initiative 200 prohibited preference in race when admitting students to college or a university. She added that selective comprehensive criteria such as: community involvement, student leadership, etc is what was considered for admittance.

Comments from the public included:

- Patricia Diaz, who works for NW Justice Project agreed that indeed there is lots of money for college. One just has to have a goal, energy, and to be willing to put lots of time and effort but that it was possible. The fact that she was a single parent with 10 kids and in her forties did not prevent her from going to college.
- Martin Ramirez stated that there were lots of problems in the Mattawa Schools. He also stated kids are shooting randomly in the streets and that school personnel don't care if their kids are learning or doing well in school.

**Debra Fisher, Washington State Department of Health, Migrant Farm Worker Housing and the Ringold Group**

Debra stated that Migrant Farm Worker Housing promotes and protects the safety of farmworkers. She said that the law requires regulation and community development of state's housing inspections, consultation and licensing, and construction.

- Consultation to growers and other construction entities of housing such as questions about the program and licensing
- Plan review inspections and final approval of housing; one benefit of this is that developers move faster and more efficiently
- Inspect housing for problems, enforce regulations, and correct problems
- Compliance plans and closure; the goal is for housing to be operating and in conformity with regulations

She said that if the grower does not make the necessary corrections in a timely manner; they close the housing down. She added that they try to avoid closure and that they work diligently at getting these issues resolved; however, if they do close the housing down, they stay engaged with the growers to get the corrections completed in a timely manner. She added that they find other housing such as a hotel, motel, etc. for those that have been impacted by the closures and that the cost is funded by the Economic Development.

Comments from the public included:

- Farmworker housing is not being provided in Mattawa
- There are a few mobile homes; but 3 to 4 families per mobile home
- Farm Worker housing is desperately needed in Mattawa, Beverly, Desert Air, Schwana, & others
- Go see for yourselves and you'll agree that there is a farmworker housing issue

Ms. Fisher stated that she was in agreement on the need for more housing. She informed them that she was part of a work group called the Ringold Group out of Franklin County and that their focus was to address the housing shortage issue. She added that they are looking on how they can increase housing via the use of existing homes, communities providing land for housing, or growers investing in housing.

**Judith Lurie, Lawyer, Northwest Justice Project**

Ms. Lurie informed the public that they had been asked to assist, "Entre Mujeres" with the many issues that they have encountered with 911. Myra Fierro, Maria Sanchez, and Claudia Zepeda presented the following experiences with 911 personnel:

- Myra Fierro was pregnant and had kidney stones. She called 911; however, none of the dispatchers spoke Spanish. She had to wait over 30 minutes before they could provide her with an interpreter who unfortunately spoke very little Spanish. She, therefore, had to wait another hour. This caused her child to be born prematurely. She stated that one could die waiting due to the lack of bilingual personnel and 911's inability to help them.
- Maria Sanchez, a single Mom with 7 children- Maria's son left home and did not come back so she called 911. She was told that this was not an emergency. She, therefore, went to the Police station and they would not talk to her. She explained that her son was using drugs and she was concerned for his safety. The

officer told her that marijuana and drugs are not bad and that he encouraged kids to use them. She subsequently moved out of Mattawa due to the lack of assistance from emergency services.

- Claudia Zepeda, mother of a 4 year old and a two month old. The child got a virus and was very ill. She took him to the hospital and was told to give him baby aspirin. Her child's temperature climbed to 105 so she called 911 and asked what to do. 911 personnel did not know Spanish so they had to locate an interpreter. An interpreter was located; however, was unable to understand her. 911 staff decided to locate another interpreter but because the child was crying non-stop Ms. Zepeda drove the child to the hospital.

Ms. Lurie stated that she was made aware of a Domestic Violence incident where the Mattawa Police was called. She added that the Police responded but did not get access to the abused woman. She also said that a child was asked to interpret, however, was unable to do so. The abuser left to find an interpreter and was never seen again.

Ms. Lurie also stated that Mattawa's population is 80% Hispanic with the majority being monolingual Spanish speakers. She added that the city office and Police station personnel, unfortunately only speak English.

Ms. Lurie informed the public that a federal complaint had been filed with the above listed incidences. She said that 911 services receive state and county monies, through Title 6, so that they can provide emergency services to communities such as Mattawa.

Robbie Scott, NW Justice Project Lawyer from the Wenatchee office is representing "Entre Mujeres". He stated that there are many cases like these in Mattawa and they had written a letter to 911 on December 2005 citing some of these stories. He said that the 911 Director told NW Justice Project that before she would start an investigation she was going to need more specific information regarding these cases. Mr. Scott said that NW Justice Project asked the Director whether she believed the statements were factual and she responded by saying, "I don't know".

NW Justice Project made a mock call to 911 and fortunately it was handled with no problem and an interpreter was made available. Mr. Scott said that this perhaps is one of the few calls that did get a quick and efficient response, however, it does not indicate that there no problems.

Mr. Scott told the 911 Director that problems were occurring due to the lack of bilingual dispatchers. He said that the Director replied by saying that it would not be fair to only hire bilingual staff. Mr. Scott proceeded by informing the Director the benefits of bilingual staff and that the use of phone interpreters was not necessarily advantageous. He also told the Director that it was important for bilingual staff to have knowledge of the Mexican verbiage.

Mr. Scott stated that another letter was written to the Director regarding the hiring of bilingual staff. He said that he informed her that the Grant County offices have bilingual staff. In addition he informed the Director that dispatcher's salaries are good and that they should have no problem finding bilingual staff. He told her that in a mock recruitment of bilingual staff made by Northwest Justice Project nineteen had applied.

Mr. Scott's final statement was that we need to change 911's mentality and for all to unite and work towards resolving this matter.

**Duke White, Director and Angela Leslie, FMCS, El Camino, En AgapeProject S.A.V.E – P.A.P.**

Mr. Duke explained the programs which are presented both in English and in Spanish. The program is made up of several agencies that joined in this effort and is comprised of educators, the police department, family members, etc. Its components include counseling, gang intervention, assisting youth in returning to school, and as a support group to continue a healthy and drug free live.

Mr. Leslie stated that through the community awareness program; parents, educators, family, and community members are educated about gangs and how they dress, intervention programs, and how to deal with your children before they become involved in gangs. She also stated that it is very important to bring the community together to help with the healing of youth and their families. Their program has been successful and has worked because of the mentors, speakers, and community partners who know the language, what to look for, and how to overcome the mindset of gang members.

Tony McCain is a CAAP program Community Advisor. He stated that he was born and raised in Tacoma, WA y alcohol and drug addicted parents. He said the he was removed from his parents, put in a foster home, and then reunited with his parents. He added that he joined boxing and had much success but due to his bad roots he ended up in the street and became involved with gangs. He said that this led him to drugs and with a criminal record that included prison. He also said that during one of his drug deals he was shot and paralyzed. He added that he has since completed a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program and has changed his life around and that his goal now is to bridge the gap and work hard to break the bad cycles.

Brother Rico Leslie, Director of P.A.P. (Parent Awareness Program) was a gang member in California, served three years in prison, and saw his fourteen year old brother shot for \$50. Mr. Leslie shared a video that talked about the many different gangs, their attire, gang names, and where they are concentrated. He said that the unfortunately Hispanic gangs are growing and are very active and prevalent in the Yakima area. He also said that these gangs are made up of girls and boys. Mr. Leslie urged the public to nurture, love, and be involved in their children's activities so as to prevent gang involvement.

The following questions were asked by the public:

- What are the signs to look for?
- Are you willing to give your presentation anywhere in the state of WA?
- What s the cost involved?

Mr. Leslie informed the public that they as parents have every right to go through their kids rooms and to ask where they go when they walk out the door. He added that some of the tell tale signs are: late hours on the street, red eyes, no eye contact, money missing from home, colors of their attire such as burgundy, blue, or red, etc. He also stated that they are willing to go to any city in Washington state and that their presentations are free of cost if at least twenty people attend. He added that they are willing to help individuals, groups, schools, etc.

Mr. Duke informed the public that they are also currently applying for additional funds to continue these programs.

### **OTHER PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chief Kent W. Porter Sr. informed the public of issues with a Moses Lake lawyer, Ted Mahr who unfortunately overcharged Mr. Estaquio Guzman for services which he did not render. Mr. Porter stated that this was not an isolated case and that there was an investigation in process. He also stated that it was very important to not give money out freely until you have verified that the lawyer is legitimate. He added that incidences such as these should be reported since there is a tendency to prey and take advantage of undocumented people.

Megan Stein from Alternative Dispute Resolution System-Agricultural Employment Mediation informed Mr. Porter and the public of her mediation program which was available for any agricultural worker regardless of whether they were documented or not. She also informed them that the mediation program assisted agricultural laborers resolve any dispute and that it was free of charge.

Alberto Hernandez expressed his concerns regarding public safety especially with the kid's excessive driving speed, drive by shootings, excessive trash in town and in their place of work, and theft of local businesses. He stated that Mattawa City representatives nor the Police are doing anything about it. He added that he realizes that the responsibility is mutual.

Santiago Iñiguez informed the public that he had lived eleven years in Mattawa and that when he left there was much community involvement in regards to education and health. He stated that he did not see that happening anymore. He added that the state will support you but if you do not ask for support than you are not going to get it. He also told the public that they need to organize and that this will lead to change.

Martin Ramirez stated that the schools in Mattawa were not doing their job in teaching the kids. Teen pregnancy and shootings were prevalent but nothing was being done by the Police.

Commissioner Portugal asked the leaders of Mattawa to step forward; lead and begin to correct these issues. He stated that CHA would assist with their issues but they first had to organize.

Claudia Perez Zamora from "Entre Mujeres" informed the public that they were trying to form a food bank and asked the community to help them in this endeavor.

Commissioner Negrón asked the public how many were registered to vote and could vote. He stated that anyone who could vote could also run for a city official slot and start making changes.

Commissioner Portugal asked how many people present were from Mattawa. He acknowledged those that raised their hands and asked them to form an Ad Hoc Committee to start addressing these issues. He advised them to write letters to the

Mayor, Police Department, and/or any others who needed to be involved for resolution of these issues. He also told them that they had the right to ask for a meeting regardless of their legal status and that Commissioner Contreras was available to assist them in preparing and organizing prior to the meeting. Commissioner Portugal also stated that they would need to assign a Chair for each issue and to have a written report of their issues available to give to the City. Commissioner Portugal added that this process worked quite well with a street lighting in Pasco.

Carlos Jiménez, Chair, Latino Hispanic Legislative Day Coalition gave the public a summary of the February 8, 2006 Latino Hispanic Legislative Day. He acknowledged CHA and the organizations who worked hard to make it possible. Mr. Jimenez also informed the public of the importance of being involved so that their voices could be heard. He invited all to join and support him in this endeavor.

Alexia Iñiguez, Secretary, Latino Hispanic Legislative Day Coalition also encouraged those present to be part of the solution, become involved in this endeavor, and to join them in the upcoming meeting in Kent on April 22, 2006. She asked parents to encourage kids to reach for the stars.

A question was asked regarding the upcoming Day of Naturalization in Yakima.

Commissioner Portugal informed the public that there were several locations throughout the state that were having a "Day of Naturalization" event. He said that they were all going to be on April 29, 2006, unfortunately we did not have the flyer with the locations. Commissioner Portugal asked them to call our toll free number and that we would provide the information of the various sites.

Mr. Jimenez, Grupo Mexico informed the public that the Seattle Immigration Solidarity march had been a great success other than a small incident with some painters. He said that their issue, however, was being investigated and they hoped for a positive solution. He also informed them that there is another march happening on May 1, 2006. He stated that in addition to the march they were asking folks to not buy any American goods and to not watch Univision. He added that Univision and Pepsi are against immigration reform, that they are not supporting any of the rallies, and that they are favoring whatever the Republicans decide. He said that Grupo Mexico is following up with Bustos Media to find out their stance on this issue.

Mr. Jimenez also offered the public Grupo Mexico's assistance in getting the Mexican Consulate mobile unit to Mattawa or surrounding areas.

Mrs. Cuevas acknowledged CHA and in particular the Director who she has known for years. She acknowledged that Mattawa has many issues. She stated that she has always been involved in helping but that the issues have increased and are overwhelming. She said that her son was shot and killed while walking on the street and that the school in Mattawa where her child attended fifth grade was unaware that she child was unable to read. She added that this is what convinced her to move from Mattawa.

She also stated that another son was killed on his way to a wedding by drive by shooting in the city where she moved to. She added that poverty makes it bad but moving does not resolve issues so we need to unite, fight, and change things around. She said that although

she no longer has a need to be part of Ad Hoc committees, rallies, etc she wants to help improve the life of her community and other children. Mrs. Cuevas thanked the Commission for coming to Mattawa and asked that it not be the last time that we visit.

Commissioner Portugal thanked Mrs. Cuevas for speaking from the heart and for sharing her stories.

Félix Ramirez acknowledged that they do have lots of needs and unfortunately no representatives in their community. He said that his concern is the lack of follow through on a signal light at Government and 23<sup>rd</sup> St. He stated that eighteen people have been killed at this intersection and still no signal light. He also stated that the streets leading into orchards in other cities are paved except the ones in Mattawa. He added that he would like to see Wal-Mart, Winco, Arco, or a McDonald's because the local stores and gas stations sells all their goods at elevated prices. Mr. Ramirez would also like to see recreation facilities for the kids which he thinks would be a deterrent to gang activity.

Other comments voiced by the Community:

- The City has implemented new regulations that hinder our business at the local park
- The post office personnel are rude and barely make an effort to assist us
- The city has bilingual staff but they are also very rude

A South County Sun employee stated that they have a small section in their newspaper that is in Spanish and that the Hispanic community could use it to publish their issues. She stated that they need to get the articles by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month. She also stated that there are two Hispanic Council members, however, they are outnumbered and need support from them. She added that currently there is no participation from the Hispanic community at these meetings and that in order for change to occur or for issues to be addressed they needed to start participating.

Commissioner Portugal again suggested that they form an Ad Hoc committee and that CHA would give them the support and assistance needed. He also encouraged them to start attending City Planning meetings and present their needs, ideas, and suggestions. He added that it was very important to present facts (in writing) that would justify the need for the signal light.

Mr. Ornelas informed CHA that there was a five year plan to resolve the signal light issue. He stated that the plan was started in March of 2005 and that as of February of this year the city had installed bigger stop signs and had plans to eventually widen the street. He added that per the city, Phase 1 has been completed. He also said that Mattawa residents; however, do not know when Phase 2 will start or if it is evening going to happen.

Commissioner Portugal advised the public that we (CHA) could certainly assist them but we could not fight their battles. He stated that Commissioner Villanueva-Lopez from Yakima, Commissioner Contreras from Wenatchee, and he would be more than happy to assist the Ad Hoc committee. He also stated that CHA would also offer their support by writing letter to city officials. He, however, told them that they had the power and the voice to initiate changes and to not be afraid to make a stance and be heard.

**OFFICIAL CHA BUSINESS**

**Approval of Minutes:**

Commissioner Portillo Salazar made a motion to approve the minutes of the Olympia February 10, 2006 public meeting. Commissioner Negrón stated that a small correction needed to be made on page 6, first and second lines. He will send the correction to Alicia on Monday, April 17, 2006. Subject to this change, minutes may be approved.

Commissioner Baca seconded the motion. Since there was no further discussion a vote was taken which resulted in all “yays”.

**Minutes approved unanimously.**

The meeting was carried out in Spanish due to the number of Spanish speaking folks present.

Official business commenced at 6:36 PM.

Commissioner Negrón made a motion to have CHA write a letter to the City of Mattawa that strongly encouraged 911 Emergency Services to actively recruit and hire bilingual personnel. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chacon.

There was no discussion and a vote was taken. Vote resulted in all “yays”.

Commissioner Villanueva-Lopez made a motion for CHA to write a letter to the WA State Board of Pharmacy asking to **not** adopt a policy that allows pharmacist refusals to become a reality in Washington State. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chacon.

There was no discussion and a vote was taken. Vote resulted in all “yays”.

Commissioner Negrón made a motion for CHA to write a letter of support to the city of Mattawa asking to address the signal light issue. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Portillo Salazar.

There was no discussion and a vote was taken. Vote resulted in all “yays”.

Commissioner Negrón made a motion for CHA to write a letter to the Post Master General regarding the poor customer services by the Mattawa personnel. Commissioner Baca seconded the motion.

There was no discussion and a vote was taken. Vote resulted in all “yays”.

Commissioner Negrón made a motion to end the meeting. Commissioner Villanueva-Lopez seconded the motion.

There was no discussion and a vote was taken. Vote resulted in all “yays”.

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 PM.