



STATE OF WASHINGTON
COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS
COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

Mt. Vernon
Public Meeting
September 24, 2005

Roll Call:

Commissioners present: Ruben Baca, Rosa Cabrera, Faviola Contreras, Félix L. Negrón, Ivonne Lopez-Morton, Gabriel Portugal, Homero Tamez, and Graciela Villanueva-Lopez

Commissioners absent: Diana Avalos, Lourdes Portillo Salazar, and Rebecca Villareal

Staff Present: Uriel Iñiguez and Alicia Luna

Meeting called to order at 9:25 AM

Approval of Minutes:

Commissioner Villanueva Lopez made a motion to approve the minutes from the Aberdeen public meeting. Commissioner Negrón seconded the motion. **Minutes approved unanimously.**

GUEST SPEAKERS

Marc, Brenman, Executive Director- Washington State Human Rights Commission

Mr. Brenman informed the public that his Commission is responsible for enforcing the Law against discrimination in housing, employment, and public access. He stated that all children have a right to an education regardless of their status in the US and that school officials cannot ask your immigration status. They have four offices which are located in Seattle, Spokane, Yakima, and Olympia. They hope to get a grant to hire a bilingual outreach coordinator in Yakima to educate farm workers on their housing rights. In Spokane, Sharon Ortiz is the contact for the migrant worker program on housing rights. Their toll free number is 800-233-3247. Mr. Brenman also informed the public that they can call and report if someone other than themselves is being discriminated.

Someone from the audience commented that there is discrimination amongst the Hispanic foreman's and that when they call the 800 number they get an answering machine and not

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a live person that can answer their questions. Mr. Brenman acknowledged and apologized for the way the office is set up. He, however advised the public that they could go directly to their offices and file their complaints.

Commissioner Portugal advised the public to file their discrimination complaints in writing either in English or Spanish and to include all the pertinent facts rather than verbal complaints since they tend to fly with the wind.

Commissioner Negrón stated that he was concerned that these issues still existed. He informed the public that CHA is trying to get a grant to educate Hispanics on their rights. Commissioner Negrón then read the Mexican Independence Proclamation which was signed by the Governor.

Sally Hinz – Senator Cantwell’s Office

Ms. Hinz thanked the Commission for inviting her to the meeting and informed the public that Senator Cantwell works hard to assist **everyone** with education and immigration issues. She advised them that the Senator’s office is available to all from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday thru Friday and they can call the toll free number 888-648-7328 with any issue they might have.

Kelly Owen – NW Justice Project

Ms. Owen informed the public that her non profit agency provides free civil assistance for low income persons. Their services include medical coupons, finding resources to pay your food or utility bills, immigration, work assistance, and assistance if you are not being paid the minimum wage. They will provide an interpreter if needed. Their local office is in Bellingham and it serves the Whatcom, Skagit, Island and San Juan counties. Their toll free number is 800-233-3247. Ms. Owen provided informational pamphlets for the public.

Consul Jorge Madrazo – Mexican Consulate

Consul Madrazo welcomed all and informed the public that the Mexican Consulate and the Commission on Hispanic Affairs were excited about their joint meeting and that the purpose of this endeavor was to better serve and address their issues. Consul Madrazo acknowledged the Commissioners and thanked them for their community service. He also informed the public of the CHA Director’s participation in their conference in Mexico. He stated that he hopes to continue having joint meetings in the future and that his office will work closely with CHA to make sure that all Hispanics are given their rights.

Ishnell Dickens – Columbia Legal

Ishnell informed the public that their not for profit organization provides legal assistance for low income and special needs people and organizations in the state of Washington. Their services include advice and education, court proceedings, and litigation. They can represent undocumented workers including prisoners and people in the hospital. Some of the areas that they are working on are access to court interpreters for mental health services for children, equal access to education, wage claims when people have been

released from work, and mobile home park rights. She also informed the public of the October 6, 2005 Washington Forum on Payday Lending. Their five offices are in Seattle, Olympia, Wenatchee, Yakima and Kennewick and their toll free number is 800-542-0794. Informational pamphlets were made available to the public.

Commissioner Lopez-Morton informed the public that Representative Rick Larson was unable to attend and that he had sent a letter which was read to the public. Highlights of the letter included the following:

- At the federal level there is the need to strengthen student-aid programs
- Fund Head Start and No Child Left Behind
- Fund Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language
- Expand Medicaid
- Ensure Spanish language services at all stages of the healthcare process
- Provide tax credits for small businesses to make health coverage a reality for their employees

Daniel Perez – NW Immigration Rights Project

Mr. Perez informed the public of their non profit legal services office that provides legal representation and community education to low income refugees and immigrants in the state of Washington. Services include obtaining citizenship, domestic violence cases, obtaining visas, etc. They get a large number of calls (600,000 in 2004) so it makes it very hard to help everyone. They did help 300,000 last year. They have two offices, one in Western Washington (800-445-5771) and one in Eastern Washington (888-756-3641) unfortunately the offices are only open two days a week. Simply call and leave your name and phone number and someone will return your call. Mr. Perez also informed the public that he is on the radio (KSDL 90.1) every two weeks and speaks on immigration issues. Informational pamphlets were also available for the public.

Megan Stein – Agricultural Employment Mediation Program

Ms. Stein informed the public of the Agricultural Employment Mediation Program which is free and available for agricultural labor disputes regarding your rights as a worker, wages, working conditions, discrimination, etc that you might have with your employer. It is a much faster way of resolving issues between employers and workers. Their office toll free number is 877-943-2700. Informational pamphlets were distributed to the public.

Janet Abbett – Washington Department of Community Trade & Economic Development

Ms. Abbett informed the public of the Farm worker Housing Program which was established in 1999 as a priority and continues to be a priority for the state of Washington. Ms. Abbett stated that much work has been done but they still have a long way to go. Funds normally go to new construction and they do work with DOH to make sure housing is monitored for safety. Ms. Abbett also stated that a survey will be sent out next year to all farm workers and she encouraged all to participate in this survey. Their input is critical in determining where the funds will be spent.

A participant of the public meeting asked if DOH's monitoring records were public. He claimed that the only change that had been done in the last 30 years to the local farm housing was that they provided hot water.

Ms. Abbett stated that she believed the records were public and that any unsafe conditions in housing should be reported to DOH or legal services.

Commissioner Tamez stated that a dialogue on housing was to happen soon between the Governor and CHA.

Commissioner Cabrera asked Ms. Abbett what specific project was her agency working on and what was the scope of the project. She also asked if they monitor when growers get funding and if standards are the same or if they vary from county to county.

Ms. Abbett stated that only one project has been proposed and that it was in Skagit County, however, the decision has not been made on the priority of this project. She also stated that the standards are all the same.

Commissioner Negrón suggested that we visit the housing to see what the community is talking about. Conditions need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Rick Gastelum – Labor & Industries

Mr. Gastelum informed the public that they all have a right to a safe working environment, minimum wage, and breaks and that you do not have to have a legal status in the US to file a claim. All injury claims or any claim for that matter must be in written form so that there is a record of it. Action is **only** taken if there is a written complaint. Mr. Gastelum stressed the importance of documenting detailed facts on a card and having them readily available. He also informed the public that if they did not understand the English correspondence that they receive from L&I that they can take it to their office and have it translated. He stated that each claim is different and that they all have the right to an appeal if they do not agree with L&I's decision. He explained the Early Return to Work Program and advised the public that that they have the right to question on why they are being sent back to work especially if they are unable to return to work.

Alejandro Lopez – H&R Block

Mr. Lopez informed the public of their tax preparation training scholarship program. These scholarships are offered throughout the state of Washington except in the Mt. Vernon area. They hope to have them available in the very near future. This program will be available now and in the future. Tax preparation jobs will begin in January. Mr. Lopez's telephone number is 425-710-9625.

Chris Gregorich – Governor's Office

Mr. Gregorich advised the public that there are three regional representatives in the state that are available to come out to any community to discuss issues on education, human rights, and housing for Farm workers. He introduced Antonio Ginatta who is also from the Governor's office.

Commissioner Villanueva Lopez asked Mr. Gregorich to talk about the Governor's decision with Global Horizons.

Mr. Ginatta stated that Global Horizons claimed that there were no workers in the state to do the harvest so they brought in Tai workers to do the work. Tai workers were not paid minimum wage, their housing conditions were bad, and were charged a state tax which does not exist in this state. The state took Global Horizon to court and won the case. Tai workers were reimbursed for the abuse and Global Horizons was advised that if they broke the law again the state would suspend their license and not let them operate in this state. The Governor chose to settle so that the Tai workers would be reimbursed expeditiously. Global Horizons will be monitored very closely to insure that this does not occur again. In the future they or any other group will have to prove that there are no local workers before they can use the H-12Visa Program. Mr. Ginatta advised the public to report any of this type of activity to the WorkForce office.

Debbie Ethridge – Washington State Patrol

Ms. Ethridge from the State Patrol office in Bellingham informed the public that their priority is the safety of the community. She stated that they want to save lives and that they are not interested in your legal status. She also stated that 60% of all accidents in the state of Washington involve Hispanics and that it usually involves drinking and driving. They have many marked and unmarked cars so if you see them behind you do not be scared. If you are stopped please pull over to the right and the only documents that they will ask for will be your driver license, car ownership papers, and your proof of insurance. They are **not** affiliated with INS and all they are concerned about is your safety not your immigration status. Ms. Ethridge informed the public of their clinics on child restraint which are held in the autumn and invited the public to attend these clinics for the safety of their children.

Commissioner Portugal asked the public if they had any further comments or concerns.

Mr. Mendez stated that it was a great opportunity for their community to have had the presence of CHA and thanked the Commission. He stated that they do live in terrible conditions and that we cannot let these conditions continue.

Mr. Ramos was concerned with the WASL and the impact it would have with his daughters. He stated that his nine year old is having a tough time and that it is extremely hard for his children. He found WASL rather discriminatory and wanted to know what the Commission was doing to address this issue.

Director Iñiguez replied that the Commission is working on improving and changing the system. He stated that we would continue to have tests and what we needed to do was insure that our kids had the tools to be successful and able to pass these tests. He advised the public that he had met with OSPI and other school districts to address this issue. He also informed the public that the Commission could help them get organized and train them if necessary so that they could go to their school districts meetings and voice their concerns. It is imperative that their voice be heard. OSPI and the school districts need to hear their voice not the Commissions.

Commissioner Tamez informed the public that Pasco and Aberdeen School Districts had made a recommendation to do away with the WASL. He stated that we need to unite and or organize to make such recommendations.

Ms. Ryan who is studying to be a nurse informed the public that she wants to start a program where she could offer free services to the Hispanic community. Services such as education on childcare, pregnancy, diabetes, etc whatever the community was in need of. Ms. Ryan is willing to go directly to the camps and or migrant housing to provide these educational services.

Commissioner Portugal reminded all to make sure they kept copies of their detailed written complaints/reports for it would be very helpful in the future. He also stated that he hoped they had taken down the phone numbers of all the organizations that had presented at the public meeting.

CHA Official Business convened at 12:25 PM

CHA official business started with roll call and introduction of the Commissioners to the public.

Commissioner Lopez-Morton asked if there was any discussion of the Aberdeen Public Meeting minutes. There was no discussion; therefore, Commissioner Villanueva Lopez made a motion to approve the Aberdeen minutes. Commissioner Negrón seconded the motion.

Vote to approve the minutes was unanimous.

OLD Business

Commissioner Lopez-Morton asked if there was any discussion on the Latino Legislative Day. Again no discussion, Commissioner Negrón made a motion to approve Latino Legislative Day. Commissioner Contreras seconded the motion.

Vote to approve Latino Legislative Day was unanimous.

Commissioner Baca asked if there was any discussion on the proposed CHA 2006 Meeting Schedule. Since there was no discussion Commissioner Baca made a motion to approve the proposed meeting schedule. Commissioner Villanueva Lopez seconded the motion.

Vote to approve the proposed CHA 2006 Meeting Schedule was unanimous.

Commissioner Negrón read of the list of proposed Executive Committee Members and made a motion to approve the members. Since there was no discussion Commissioner Tamez seconded the motion.

Vote to approve the proposed Executive Committee Members was unanimous.

Commissioner Lopez-Morton stated that both the Spanish and English version of the Annual Report had been sent to all the Commissioners and asked if there was any

discussion. Since there was no discussion Commissioner Negrón made a motion to approve the Annual Report both the Spanish and English version. Commissioner Villanueva Lopez seconded the motion.

Vote to approve the Annual Report both the Spanish and English version was unanimous.

Commissioner Lopez Morton asked if there was any discussion on the Healthcare Resolution Proclamation. Since there was no discussion Commissioner Villanueva Lopez made a motion to approve the proclamation. Commissioner Baca seconded the motion.

Vote to approve the Healthcare Resolution Proclamation was unanimous.

Commissioner Negrón made a motion to approve the Legislative Agenda. Commissioner Lopez-Morton seconded the motion.

Vote to approve the Legislative Agenda: 6 yays

NEW Business

Commissioner Portugal informed the public that we had decided to do the CHA official business at the end of the meeting so that we could give their community the opportunity to voice their issues and concerns and to provide information to them via the agency/organization speakers.

The public meeting was conducted in Spanish due to the fact that the majority of the audience spoke Spanish.

Consul Madrazo again welcomed all especially the indigenous people of the community. He acknowledged that there are 56 indigenous dialects in Mexico and informed those of indigenous descent that he wanted to help them in their endeavor to educate their children in their respective indigenous dialects. He provided the community with 24 boxes of books that were in Mixteco, Zapoteca, Mixteco Guerrero, Trichi, and a combination of Spanish and the indigenous dialects.

Commissioner Baca thanked all that were in attendance for their presence and a special thanks to all those whose hard work and efforts made it possible to have one of the most successful public meetings in the history of the Commission.

Commissioner Négron made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Tamez seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 12:45 PM

