



STATE OF WASHINGTON
COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS
COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

Omak Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2008

Roll Call:

Commissioners present: Jorge Chacón, Victor Chacón, Lourdes Portillo Salazar, and Gabriel Portugal

Staff Present: Uriel Iñiguez and Alicia Luna

Chair Portillo Salazar called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

She proceeded by identifying which language to carry out the meeting; majority were English speakers; meeting was carried out in English.

Roll Call was taken: Commissioners Bob Cepeda and Ninfa Gutierrez were not present; Commissioner Cepeda is excused and Commissioner Gutierrez is not excused.

Host Commissioner Jorge Chacón welcomed the community of Omak, key guests, and panel participants.

Mayor Dale Sparber welcomed the Commission and individually introduced the Commissioners and staff to the residents of Omak.

Commissioner Portugal, timekeeper for the meeting explained the timekeeping process; Chair Portillo Salazar explained the agenda and the meeting format.

Chair Portillo Salazar also thanked the MECHA members for their great hospitality, the wonderful food, and their interest in the Commission's work. She presented Manny Dominguez, Mecha President with a certificate of recognition.

Director Iñiguez went over the CHA's priorities and shared the following:

- CHA's Mandate and accomplishments
- WA State distribution of Latino population by county
- Okanogan County, City of Omak, Brewster, and Tonasket's Latino Population
- ELL, Bilingual Education, and other education funds
- Projected growth of minority school-age population

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- Okanogan School District WASL scores and Latino High School graduation rates; including Omak, Brewster, and Tonasket
- Okanogan County Felony Convictions
- State Juvenile Recidivism rates

Panel Presentations

Michael Hassing, Family Health Centers, Okanogan, WA

- Centers in Okanogan, Brewster, and Tonasket
- Have increased access to healthcare in the last 12-18 months
- Collaborate with several partners including school districts, public health and the hospital

Daryl Pfitzer, Okanogan Community Service Office

- Outstations in Tonasket and Brewster
- Limited public transportation
- Have Interpreters and bilingual staff
- Encouraged people to come in for services and asked for input regarding lack of or how they could improve services

Frank Rogers, Okanogan County Sheriff

- 25 years in law enforcement; have largest county area and only 30 officers
- Distrust amongst the Hispanic community and law enforcement
- They don't easily talk to law enforcement officers; hard to solve problems when they don't talk
- Not many problems in Brewster and Tonasket

Roger Bauer, Okanogan Health Care and Medical Clinic

- Provided mental health services to 25,000-30,000
- 350 chemical dependency cases (34% were minority)
- 150 Developmental Disabilities (62% were minority)
- Has a staff of 71; 20% are of ethnic backgrounds
- Looking at more effective ways to communicate with patients
- Working with schools; counselors are available at school
- Public transportation is a major issue; cost of gas makes it more difficult
- Stable funding and recruiting professional help are also big issues

Pat Walter, Mayor of Tonasket

- Has been in city government for 18 years
- Workforce not very stable
- Shadow culture; Hispanic immigrants used to paying bribes to law enforcement in Mexico thus the distrust
- Illegal immigrants have family that are US citizens

Public Comments

Anna Guzman, DSHS Financial Service Manager

- Issue with decision on services provided by bilingual employees
- Difference in the way ESD employees and CSO employees get compensated

Commissioner Portugal asked if the level of need for bilingual services was high and was the decision a statewide decision.

Ms. Guzman replied “yes” to both questions.

Chevy Zarate, DSHS Bilingual Bicultural Employee

- Presented formal letter to CHA Chair regarding bilingual compensation issues
- 3 ESD bilingual employees are not being compensated
- Per the law ESD is supposed to offer the same services to the Hispanic community; unfortunately they are not
- Hispanic clients are not being treated equally in the provision of services

Miguel Cortez, Resident

- Is there a need for mental service for Hispanics; absolutely
- Okanogan Behavioral Health needs to look into the disparity in services being provided to Hispanic families
- Does Okanogan Behavioral Health serve the needs of Hispanics; **absolutely not**

Benito Camacho, Brewster Resident

- Had an accident in 1997; tractor hit him and damaged a nerve in his leg
- Accident occurred in Brewster; his L&I claim was closed with no resolution
- Time elapsed before he was finally operated; however continues to have problems with his leg

Tamara Fulwyler, Health Disparities Outreach Coordinator

- Working on a policy action plan to eliminate health disparities
- Vicki Ybarra working on plan which is to be completed by 2010
- Forms and survey have been translated into Spanish as well as other languages
- Please call and invite her to your communities; needs to hear from the Hispanic communities

Rene Maldonado, Omak Resident

- Latino community are leery of the police
- Undocumented residents have been stopped for a burnt out light and ICE has been called
- The word gets around; Latinos consequently stop calling the police
- Is there a hotline that one can call to file a discrimination complaint

Commissioners suggested that he call ACLU or the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project.

Parker Carsons, NW Justice Project

- They provide civil legal aid assistance to all people; staff of three
- Services include; assistance with landlord tenant disputes, consumer fraud, medical debts, benefit denials particularly medical benefits, and tax preparation
- Bilingual mental health services are very limited
- Okanogan Behavioral Health has very limited bilingual staff; however, making an effort to increase staff
- Court has received funding for additional court interpreters

Nancy Mendez Ash, Cultural Resource Manager

- Works with Okanogan School District; bringing medical services
- Promotora classes available; promote healthy lifestyles
- Currently offering services via Mid Valley Hospital
- Asked Chair Portillo Salazar how she as member of the Health Disparities Committee planned on reaching out to the Hispanic communities

Commissioner Portugal suggested that she contact her local Legislators and consider attending the Latino Legislative Day event.

Teresa Medina, Okanogan Resident

- Has lived in Okanogan for 10 years
- Provides Parenting classes
- Parents want more ESL classes; currently there is 1 teacher for 25-30 folks
- There are different levels of proficiency; however all in the same class
- Daycare and transportation is a major issue
- Wenatchee College what prevents you from providing more classes

Shannon Mendoza, ESD Employee

- Has worked for ESD for 10 years; compensated 3 years for her bilingual services
- Paid \$1.20 an hour for her bilingual services while interpreters are paid \$45-\$70 and hour; she however has always provided bilingual services in spite of not being compensated
- Only 5-6 bilingual employees on call between the hours of 8AM to 5PM
- How can we develop our youth and adults without the needed support

Jessica Herrejon, Omak Resident

- Bridgeport and Brewster School Districts serve low-income undocumented children, youth, and adults
- There are urgent mental health issues amongst the youth
- 800 number does not always work and bilingual services are not provided
- NW Justice Project not timely in there response time
- Low income folks do not have computers

Luciano Arzate, Brewster Resident

- Had an on the job accident; fell from a ladder
- Doctor released him for “light duty” work; rancher denied him work sent him back to the doctor
- Doctors are documenting that he has diabetes and high cholesterol when in essence he doesn’t
- Has not worked for 14 years; he just gets the run around; they just laugh at him and accuse him of being lazy and not wanting to work
- The rancher, foreman, doctors, and L&I are all collaborating against us
- L&I investigators are following injured Mexican workers to see what they are up to
- Portland, Oregon doctors eventually performed the surgery for him
- Labor and Industry case never resolved

Commissioner Portugal suggested that Mr. Arzate call La Voz del Trabajador.

Ernesto Cerrillo, Tonasket Resident

- Came to this country when he was 12 years old; it was either work or go to school
- Graduated from High School and went to college in spite of being undocumented
- Has a degree in Diesel Technology
- Daycare and Transportation a big issue in Tonasket

Crispin Ramirez, Tonasket Resident

- Received text message that his car tires would be punctured and windows broken; called the Tonasket Sheriff's office yet they did nothing
- Sheriff looked at one of the three text messages
- A bottle was broken over his son's head
- His tractor tires were slashed and his 4 wheeler was stolen; Sheriff found the 4 wheeler but did not return it to Mr. Ramirez because he could not come up with the title
- A month has transpired and nothing has been done

Ulysis Maldonado, Omak Resident

- He is a bilingual Parole Officer
- What is the Commission doing to address the "gang" and "drug" issues

Baraquial Granados, Omak Resident

- Had an on the job accident in Okanogan; L&I denied his claim
- Only one surgeon in town for all the people; Mexicans are last when it comes to surgery
- He was told by doctor that L&I would cover his medical expenses yet they sent him the bill after the surgery was performed
- He continues to have problems, however, L&I doctors say there is nothing wrong with him
- He was released for work yet the employer sends him home
- He is getting the run around by employer, doctor, and L&I
- DSHS denied him services because he will only take the medical coupon; he says that he has no need for the food vouchers or other services

Questions and Comments from panel members

Commissioner V. Chacón asked Mr. Hassing for his reaction to the comments presented by the public.

Mr. Hassing stated the following:

- There is an issue with "specialists"; most come from Wenatchee and they might only be available one or two days a week
- The other areas where they might come from are Spokane or Seattle
- It is difficult to find more specialists and or attract them to an area with a small population
- At times they have to rely on "telemedicine" (session via video) from the University of Washington

Commissioner V. Chacón asked Mr. Bauer how he rated his interpreter services.

Mr. Bauers comments were:

- Interpreter services were excellent
- 40% of the staff is bilingual and bicultural
- Children's Hospital partners with Family Health Centers for telemedicine for children

Commissioner Portugal asked Sheriff Rogers is his staff does community oriented policing.

Sheriff Roger's comments were:

- In a rural community you know all your neighbors
- He has a staff of five and that they serve a very diverse ethnic group that includes Hispanics and Native Americans
- They deal with many orchard camp issues

Commissioner Portugal shared with the Sheriff that community oriented policing involved getting really close to the community. Community members see Sheriffs as friends.

Sheriff Rogers responded by saying that they are very involved in the schools and active with the community. They participate in the donkey basketball event.

When asked if Sheriffs call ICE, Sheriff Rogers stated that if a Hispanic is arrested and there is reason to believe that he or she is undocumented they do call ICE. He added that an arrest involves more scrutiny. When dealing with domestic violence issues ICE is not called.

Director Iñiguez recommended a relationship with the mainstream community. He added that by getting involved with the Latino community he could overcome the mistrust issue. Director Iñiguez informed Sheriff Rogers that in domestic violence situations the wife will not call because of the fear that she will lose her main source of income; how will she support her kids if he is incarcerated? He also stated that it was imperative that Sheriff Rogers communicate to the community his policy and or procedures regarding ICE.

Mr. Bauer stated that they provide mental health services to about 25-30% of Latinos. Unfortunately funding has been cut; he is willing to do more if given the resources. Mr. Bauer added that Bridgeport is a very difficult area to serve.

Mr. Pfeitzer stated that his office is open for ideas on how they can better serve the Hispanic community.

Mayor Walker shared that public transportation is going away and it is incumbent for our towns to bequeath money to buy buses. He said that it is imperative that they all work together as a community to address issues. He added that meetings such as this help them focus.

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Since there was no CHA official business Commissioner Portugal made a motion to adjourn the meeting; motion was seconded by Commissioner V. Chacon. Vote was taken with all in favor. The motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.