

County of Kern
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION-MINUTES

Regular Meeting
Tuesday April 9, 2013

Commissioners Present: Andre Taylor (at), Jewelle Scales (js), Walter Williams (ww), Marisa Banks (mb)

Equal Employment Opportunity Officer: Michael Goulart (mg)

Commissioners Absent: Marcus Mitchell

Others Present: Ana Laven, Kamillah Holmes, Maribel Galvan, Brian Van Wyk, Greg Collins, Jina Kim, Tomeka Powell, Christian Valdez

Meeting called to order at 5:45 p.m.

1. **FLAG SALUTE**
2. **PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS:**

Jina Kim, Staff Attorney, Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance: Working with the Fair Housing Law Project. We are conducting a Fair Housing Conference on April 24, 2013. Our project is designed to help people investigate issues of discrimination in housing. We will have a number of speakers and cover state and federal laws and rights. The event will be at the Army National Guard Armory on Gateway Avenue.

Greg Collins: I am with Rebuilding Together Kern County. I have put in an application to be on the Human Relations Commission and there are numerous vacancies. I know that it is sometimes difficult for commissioners to attend meetings due to other responsibilities but it is unfortunate that meetings have to be cancelled. I ask the Commission to urge the Board to fill the vacancies. I have contacted my representative on numerous occasions but I have not received an answer about being appointed, either way.

(mg) Commissioner Mitchell is out of town but we spoke earlier today. One of the things we discussed is the need to meet with members of the Board to discuss vacancies on the Commission. Commissioner Mitchell intends to schedule meetings as soon as possible.

Ana Laven: As a representative of Supervisor Perez' office I can tell you that the there are no vacancies in her District. I would just suggest that you continue to be proactive in trying to get a response from your Board representative.

(js) I am in District 3 and your story is similar to mine. I had to be very proactive in order to get appointed to the Commission. Since all of the Supervisors are very busy I think that persistence is the key and I would recommend that you continue to

try.

Greg Collins: My main concern is the importance of the Commission and the number of vacancies on the Commission. I think that the Commission is important regardless of whether I am ultimately appointed or not.

(mb) What are the guidelines for the Board to make appointments?

(mg) When the Commission was created part of the policy was that appointments would be made timely. During last calendar year the Commission was audited by the Grand Jury and one of the findings in the report was that appointments by the Board need to be made timely in order to allow the Commission to function properly.

(ww) Can this be addressed by the Board at one of their meetings? We have people on the Commission that don't attend meetings. There are many people that are qualified and willing to serve and the Board needs to appoint people that are going to show up and do the job.

Ana Laven: You can use the two minute public presentations portion of the Board meeting or you can ask for an item to be put on the Agenda of a regular meeting. If the item is placed on the Agenda there is significant lag time to get the item placed.

(ww) That is good to know, we are going to do all of them. Put us on the agenda and we will also just show up so that they are on record that they have been notified.

(mg) Mr. Williams please be reminded that if you wish to do something like that as a representative of the Commission it needs to be discussed as a group and it cannot be a unilateral decision that one Commissioner makes.

(js) It is not the sole responsibility of the Board of Supervisors to sit up and take notice of our commission. It is our responsibility as well. I recently had the opportunity to represent the CSUB Alumni Association in Sacramento. We had the opportunity to go door-to-door and share with members of the legislature why we were there and why our cause, the CSUB system is important. I was sharing with Marcus today that I don't think we do enough of that. I know that our lives are very busy but we have a role on the Commission share with the Board why the Commission is important. We need to do that collectively as a group. It is time for us to be proactive and until we are I don't think we have done our due diligence as a Commission.

3. Presentation from Kamilah Holmes, GBLA: I am an attorney with the Youth Law Program. Every three years we conduct a community needs assessment. During the last assessment a lot of parents indicated they had issues with their children and school. We looked at some statistics and found that Kern County has some pressing issues related to discipline, suspension and expulsions. (Statistics attached in presentation materials).

KHSD had 79% of expulsions and 30% of suspensions in Kern County. These expulsions and suspensions can have a negative impact of the future of these

children. They may keep them out of the college of their choice or from joining the military. Studies indicate that students who are suspended or expelled are five times more likely to drop out and six times more likely to repeat a grade. They are also three times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system.

There is a term called the “school to prison pipeline” this means the most at risk students are pushed out of school and into the juvenile justice and justice system. Graduation rates are very low in Kern County and accordingly poverty rates are very high. There are plenty of programs that can resolve some of these suspension and expulsion issues such as the restorative justice program. There is funding available for these programs. BCSD received \$200K to implement one of these programs. GBLA provides legal advice and representation to these students.

The community should be appalled by these statistics. We need the community to speak out and parents need to be informed and involved.

(ww) What is the outcome when parents don't contact GBLA?

Holmes: parents give up rights to a hearing when they don't know what the rules are. We see children get involved in the system and they continue to have disciplinary issues. College and other future plans are affected.

(js) Does a child have to go through progressive discipline before they are suspended or expelled and what role or partnership has the parent and school created to deal with disciplinary issues?

Holmes: There is no set process. Schools are given a lot of discretion under the ED Code. The Code does allow for other options but often schools do not try alternative measures.

(js) Suspensions and expulsions are not mandatory?

Holmes: There is a small list of violations that are deemed mandatory but schools have discretion even with those.

(mb) This issue has been brought to the Commission and KHSD has tried to educate and inform us on what has occurred and changes in the process. We asked for information related to proposed changes and outcomes but they have not responded up until now. I would like to hear what commissioners think about this information and what the numbers mean.

(at) I think the statistics speak for themselves and I would support some additional activity if that means attending a KHSD Board meeting as a commission and sharing our concerns. I propose an action item to find out when the KHSD Board meets and discuss attending the meeting at our next Commission meeting.

(mg) I can get the information without the need of an action item.

(mb) The meeting with KHSD representatives was held on July 16, 2012, so it has

been almost a year.

Holmes: the majority of the suspension and expulsions appear to be related to “disruption” issues.

(mb) At the previous meeting one of the recommendations was for citizens to sit on the review boards.

Greg Collins: Can the HRC meet with Ms. Holmes in private to discuss these issues?

Ana Laven: I evaluated a safe schools grant in my former position. I was able to see success stories with school districts such as the district in Escondido. Through taking advantage of grant funding and creating programs they were able to improve attendance and discipline. This took a commitment from the district, parents and community based organizations. To look at other areas that have dealt with the same issues may be helpful.

Holmes: a website with related information is fixschooldiscipline.org

4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

February 12, 2013 Monthly Meeting

Motion to approve minutes (at), 2nd: (js), all ayes

5. **NEW BUSINESS:**

a) Brown Act training provided by Brian Van Wyk, Deputy County Counsel

Mr. Van Wyk presented information to the Commission in slide format. Training materials were submitted.

6. **OLD BUSINESS:**

a) Discussion of Annual Essay Contest

(mg) The HRC had planned to conduct an essay contest this school year. My recommendation is that the HRC does not conduct an essay contest this school year due to time constraints. The entire process from notifying schools to conducting an awards banquet typically takes 90 days.

(ww) What is the benefit and purpose of having an essay contest and how does it help what we are trying to do?

(js) One of the goals of the Commission is to educate and in having the contest it was a way to bring education and awareness to a group of students about issues that the Commission deals with, such as, prejudice, racism, gender and sexual discrimination. We view it as a way to get into the community to discuss these issues. The contest as a stand-alone doesn't have a lot of value. When we continue that relationship with the students and school districts that is where the

value comes from.

(mg) The essay contest is a component of an annual theme that the Commission selects. Students are then asked to respond to the theme in essay form. There is supposed to be a continuum of other items that the Commission works on during the year related to the theme.

(at) As a Commission we have a litany of issues that come to us and a variety of tools to use to address the issues. The essay contest is just one of the tools that we have at our disposal. I make a motion that we table further discussion of the issue until our next regular meeting.

Motion: (at) 2nd: (mb), all ayes

7. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a) Community & Media Outreach – (mb) in the last two weeks I was contacted by Anthony Bailey with Channel 29 about doing a piece on high school expulsion rates. He heard that the Commission has been involved in the issue and he would like to meet with the Commission to discuss.

b) Education/Essay Contest – No report

c) Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action – No report

d) Grants/Funding – No report

e) Housing – Commissioner – No report

f) Judicial & Legislative Review – (js) people are talking about immigration and we may see some people coming to discuss those issues with us. We are also awaiting a decision from the courts regarding proposition 8.

g) Law Enforcement - No report

h) Special Issues – No report

i) Access and Functional Needs – No report

j) Annual Report Ad-hoc Committee – Mitchell, Chair, Taylor – (js) This report is an advocacy piece. I have talked to Commissioner Mitchell about the importance of this piece. We have a lot of information but we just need to pull it all together.

k) Training/Mentor program Ad-Hoc Committee – Mitchell – (js) one of the things in this area is to remember that the youth of today will be the leaders of tomorrow. We talked about pulling our youth into the process and the potential of having a youth representative on the commission.

(ww) what youth are you talking about? Straight “A” students that have never

been in trouble or others that have been involved in some type of accidental situation and were expelled?

(js) We would have to create the criteria that we would use so that we can be reflective of our community.

(mb) In developing our criteria this would be a great thing to look at during the beginning of the school year.

(mg) We would want to get the information out to all youth and then see what comes back to the Commission by way of interest from youth in the community.

8. STAFF REPORT:

(mg) Commissioner Bernal's appointment has expired and she has indicated that due to personal and professional plans she does not have enough time to commit to serving on the Commission. She thanked everyone and said that she enjoyed working with all of you.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Ms. Laven and Supervisor Perez' office for being proactive in making appointments to the Commission and being aware of what the Commission's needs are.

I would also like to thank Mr. Collins for his dedication to seeking appointment and his interaction with the Commission. We appreciate all of your efforts.

9. COMMISSION MEMBER PRESENTATIONS OR ANNOUNCEMENTS:

No Commissioner Reports.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to Adjourn: (at) 2nd: (ww), All Ayes, meeting adjourned at 7:22 p.m.