

Kern County Human Relations Commission
Kern County Administrative Complex – Civil Service Commission Hearing Room – First Floor
1115 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield
Tuesday, October 13, 2015 at 5:30 Pm
Monthly Meeting Minutes

Present: Michael Caves (Cav), Brady Bernhart (Ber), Louis Medina (Med), David Vivas (Viv), Henry Castaneda (Cas), Jewelle Scales (Sca)

Absent: Marcus Mitchell, Joseph Snyder

Others Present: Michael Goulart (Mg) Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Fatima Dadabhoy, Emad Meerza

Agenda Items: Called To Order at 5:30 Pm

1. Flag Salute: Commissioner Medina.

2. Public Presentations:

(Fatima Dadabhoy), Sr. Attorney for the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) Los Angeles Chapter, spoke to the Commission regarding an incident in which a local teenager “tweeted” about an attack on Muslims on the anniversary of September 11, 2001.

Ms. Dadabhoy told the Commission that CAIR is interested in working with the HRC to create a forum for discussion in Kern County that included other Muslims and provided an opportunity for the public to become educated about the religion. Ms. Dadabhoy said that CAIR has previously worked with the Orange County Human Relations Commission to create a dialogue and understanding between various segments of the community.

Ms. Dadabhoy also told the Commission that CAIR is working on a report regarding bullying of Muslim students that is currently happening in the schools.

(Cas) Said he liked the idea of a community educational forum and also said that “we” only know what we see and hear.

(Cav) Said the forum would fit well into a series of events about bullying.

(Ber) Said there seems to be pushback to providing any type of education on this subject in public schools and we need to support anti-bullying efforts.

(Sca) Discussed the Mission of the HRC and said that a forum would fit into what the Commission tries to do.

(Viv) Asked if the minor in the incident was reported to authorities.

(Ms. Dadabhoy) said that law enforcement deemed the minor to be within his “freedom of speech” rights.

(Viv) Spoke of a meeting that he recently had with a married couple. He said the couple told him that they were concerned about a recent incident that occurred at a salon. Commissioner Vivas said that the couple told him the wife was at a salon getting her hair done when a Muslim couple walked in. He was told the Muslim man walked through the salon looking for other men and finding none, locked the door of the salon. The man then told the operator of the salon that the door had to remain locked while his wife was getting her hair done. Commissioner Vivas said that a workshop will help people understand variations in religion and why incidents like the one described may happen.

(Sca) Regarding the incident that Commissioner Vivas described, Commissioner Scales asked MS. Dadabhoy if what happened was “normal” or if it seemed to be “way out” from what would be expected.

(Ms. Dadabhoy) said that it depends on the interaction between the particular couple.

(Med) Talked about a similar situation that he encountered that had nothing to do with religion. He encountered a handicapped man and a woman that was assisting the handicapped man in the restroom. Another man stood watch at the restroom door. The man assistant restricted the use of a restroom to only the handicapped man and the woman helping him. Commissioner Medina felt that the assistant did not have the right to restrict the use of the restroom to other men because it was a men’s restroom.

(Viv) Asked Ms. Dadabhoy, “who supports CAIR?” He also asked, “do you they receive funding from overseas?”

(Ms. Dadabhoy) said that CAIR Los Angeles gets less that 10% of funding from grants and all donations come from U.S. sources.

(Viv) Asked Ms. Dadabhoy, “what do you think of Sharia Law?”

(Ms. Dadabhoy) said that CAIR supports the U.S. Constitution.

(Emad Meerza) Mr. Meerza identified himself as the Emir of the local Muslim community. Mr. Meerza said that he thought it was odd of Commissioner Vivas to cite the example of the incident that happened at the Salon. He also said that the questions related to CAIR and fundraising were not appropriate.

Mr. Meerza said that he was at the meeting because threats and hate crimes are going on in our community. Mr. Meerza discussed a press release about an open house event that led to numerous disparaging comments about the event and the Muslim participants.

Mr. Meerza said that he is concerned about the Bakersfield Police Department and their evaluation of the incident with the minor and the message that was “tweeted.” He said he was concerned because it was a real problem for his community.

Mr. Meerza said that he supports Sharia Law but within Sharia Law there are laws that are not applicable today, just as in the Bible.

(Sca) Scales said that the HRC sees the need for an educational forum.

(Emad Meerza) Said let’s begin with some mutual respect and not ask the type of questions that we had tonight. He said that he did not respect the questions that were asked of his guest (Ms. Dadabhoy) today.

(Cav) Commissioner Caves said that he cannot begin to start a discussion based on mutual respect of the baseline is “do not ask particular questions.”

(Sca) Said that she would like to begin a dialogue but unfortunately the Commission was over time for the public presentation portion of the meeting.

(Emad Meerza) Meerza stated that he was disappointed by the experience tonight.

3. Approval of Minutes:

Tuesday September 8, 2015. **Motion to approve with corrections: Medina Second:**

Bernhart Vote: All Ayes,

4. New Business:

a) Discussion of holding quarterly workshops on “hot button” issues.

(Sca) said that she is intrigued by information from the Kirwan Institute that Commissioner Bernhart shared with the Commission via email. She said that she envisions quarterly workshops for 2016 that may include: Immigration in the first quarter, Race, Gender and Housing in the second quarter, understanding the Muslim community in the third quarter and LGBTQ issues in the fourth quarter.

Commissioner Scales said that based on tonight’s discussion it may be appropriate to develop a workshop about issues in the Muslim community sooner.

(Med) Said that he didn’t see what the relevance was to the questions that were asked of our guest and that he was close to telling our guest that we report to the Board of Supervisors and he can tell them of his concerns.

(Sca) Scales said that this may be a good subject to address in committee.

5. Old Business:

a) Planning Matrix

Commissioner Medina provided statistics regarding the Veterans’ Stand Down event. 433 Veterans were served along with 42 of their dependents. 900 meals were served. 345 veterans

reported having stable housing. 36 reported having unstable housing. Seven veterans were at imminent risk of losing their housing. 45 veterans reported that they were homeless.

(Cav) Commissioner Caves said that this is the seventh year that he has participated in the Veterans' Court. Caves said that when the prosecutors, defense attorneys and court staff collaborate veterans can leave the event with a "clean slate."

(Med) Commissioner Medina said that "homeless court" is held several times each year.

(Cas) Commissioner Castaneda said that he spoke to veterans about their concerns, listened to what they had to say, and found the activity very rewarding.

(Ber) Commissioner Bernhart said that it was great to be there and to be able to listen.

(Sca) Commissioner Scales raised the idea of participating in the event again next year.

(Cav) Caves said that it was his first time working in a booth and it was interesting to see the different generations that were represented.

(Med) Commissioner Medina said that the Commission had previously discussed speaking to the Board of Supervisors about the Commissions Civic Engagement Event and the Proposition 47 Resource Guide.

(Cav) Commissioner Caves said that he has been working with schools to get instructor to make the Civic Engagement event an extra-credit opportunity for students.

(Sca) Commissioner Scales said that she has received RSVPs from local high school Government teachers. She also said that the Commission can revisit having a Proposition 47 follow-up event in December.

6. Committee Reports:

Community and Media Outreach:

(Med) Commissioner Medina told the Commission that information about the Civic Engagement event has gone out to many contact networks.

Education/Essay Contest:

(Sca) Commissioner Scales asked about the Commissions ability to change the name of a committee.

(Mg) Goulart said that the Commission has the ability to modify both the names and functions of Committees per the By-Laws of the Commission. An item would be placed on the November Agenda to discuss officially changing the title of some committees.

Housing:

(Ber) Commissioner Bernhart provided a handout regarding an upcoming Affordable Housing Summit. The event will be held on Tuesday, November 3, 2015 at the Bakersfield Marriott, 801 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield.

7. Staff Report: None**8. Commission Member Presentations or Announcements:**

(Med) Commissioner Medina provided two handouts. The first was from the Gay & Lesbian Center of Bakersfield, Your Guide to Understanding and Preventing Bullying. The second handout was an invitation for the Steward's Inc. 20th Anniversary Celebration to be held on Thursday, October 22, 2015 at Steward's Inc. 2211 H. Street, Bakersfield, CA.

9. Adjournment: Motion: Caves 2nd: Bernhart, Vote: all ayes 6:52 P.M.