

21 August 2007

To: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors
 From: Richard Botzler, Chair, Humboldt County Human Rights Commission (HRC)
 Subject: Annual Report July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007

The Humboldt County Human Rights Commission (HRC) meets every second Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. in Conference Room A of the Courthouse. The meetings are open to the public and guests are encouraged to attend and to speak if they have a concern or a comment. The agenda for the meeting is sent to the Clerk of the Board the week before the meeting and typically is posted on the Courthouse Bulletin Board. Community members attending the HRC meetings are welcome to address the commission on any issue that contributes to conflict or discrimination in our community. Periodically, we invite people to address the commission on specific topics, often having both sides of an issue represented.

Current Commission members - July 10, 2007

District One appointees: Jamila Tharp, Jean Munsee, Stuart Altschuler

District Two appointees: Larry Miller, Carol DePucci, _____

District Three appointees: John Lyons, Matt Filar, Neal Sanders

District Four appointees: Bud Tillinghast, Nita Brake-Mill, _____

District Five appointees: Byrd Lochtie, Rick Botzler, Jack Shaffer,

The terms of 5 Commissioners expired in June 2007 and they have been reappointed. Thank you for your prompt action. We also appreciate the recent appointment of 4 new commission members. However, there still is a vacancy on the commission. We appreciate that this past year, the Board adopted a more extensive application form for persons interested in applying to the Commission.

One of our past needs was for storage of records. We received a filing cabinet in September from the Supervisors and a place to store it. Thank you for that as well.

PUBLIC CONTACT AND INPUT

Commissioners hear concerns from community members about human rights related matters, at monthly meetings, through the phone lines, and through personal contacts with concerned citizens. Twenty-four guests (ranging from 0 to 8 per meeting) attended during the year. Issues raised by the public at our meetings include inquiries about Commission actions on current concerns such as law enforcement or mental health issues, complaints and requests for actions on some issues (e.g., changing the policies of an institution regarding treatment of clients or the public, reporting news about local human rights-related activities, interest in joining the Commission, condemnation of alleged police excessive force or a call for a police review board, expressions of appreciation (e.g., for work of the Commission, or of other agencies such as the Arcata Police Department for their professional response to a difficult situation with a suspect), and requests for involvement or co-sponsorship of community events.

In addition to public input at the monthly meetings, HRC depends on our voice-mail system for contact with the public. Each commissioner monitors the messages for 14 to 16 days, returning calls and providing information and suggestions as needed. Commissioners contact another commissioner for help in answering questions whenever appropriate. Records of phone contacts are used to provide information for this annual report, but names of callers remain confidential. We also respond to written communications and to concerns raised through the media or by our own members.

Telephone contacts to the Humboldt County Human Rights Commission
July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007

The information for this portion of the report was taken from the phone reports, the Commission minutes, and phone notes of the individual Commissioners. Commissioner Larry Miller compiled the information and is available to answer any questions concerning the data and how it was determined.

Below are the number and percentage of calls for both the 2005-2006 year and the 2006-2007 year. Overall, the numbers and percentages are relatively consistent.

CATEGORIES FOR PHONE CALLS:	2005-06 (N=143 calls)	2006-07 (N=137)
Just wanted to talk or tell someone about something:	24 (17%)	18 (13%)
Person did not leave a workable number	no data	16 (12%)
A request for information about or help from the HRC:	33 (24%)	48 (35%)
Request for information or help from available services:	11 (8%)	9 (7%)
Complaints of Alleged Discrimination:	11 (8%)	8 (6%)
Discrimination perpetrated by:		
Law Enforcement	3 (2%)	4 (3%)
Other Public Agency	1 (31%)	1 (1%)
Private Company/Service(s)	5 (4%)	1 (1%)
Private Citizen(s)	1 (1%)	2 (1%)
Other	0	0
Discrimination/Misconduct based on:		
Disability	0	0
Race/Ethnicity	1 (1%)	4 (3%)
Age	1 (1%)	0
Gender	1 (1%)	0
Language	0	0
Sexual orientation	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
Health	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Residency	1 (1%)	0
Mental Health	0	1 (1%)
Religion	0	0
Politics	0	0
Other	5 (4%)	1 (1%)

Complaints of Alleged Misconduct.	64 (46%)	50 (36%)
Misconduct perpetrated by:		
Law Enforcement	30 (21%)	28 (20%)
Other Public Agency	9 (6%)	9 (7%)
Private Person(s)	4 (3%)	3 (2%)
Private Company/Service(s)	21 (15%)	10 (7%)
Misconduct relating too:		
Housing	15 (11%)	11 (8%)
Employment	6 (4%)	1 (1%)
Law Enforcement	11 (8%)	11 (8%)
Other Public Agency	3 (2%)	6 (4%)
Private Person(s)	16 (11%)	5 (4%)
Private Company/Service(s)	7 (5%)	1 (1%)
Health (including mental health)	no data	16 (12%)

Calls by month: July: 15 Aug.: 8 Sept.: 4 Oct.: 24 Nov.: 14
 Dec.: 8 Jan.: 16 Feb.: 12 Mar.: 5 Apr.: 15 May: 6 June: 10

Notes regarding HRC phone calls:

Note 1. Call totals do not include duplicate or follow up calls from the same person concerning the same subject.

Note 2. In some cases a call may have been included more than one category so some totals are greater than the number of calls.

Note 3. While discrimination is obviously a form of misconduct, it is reported here separately from other forms of misconduct.

Note 4. A caller reporting discrimination or misconduct may also have requested information or a referral; however only the primary purpose of the call is reported.

Note 5: Two new categories of calls were added. One is a category for calls in which the caller did not leave adequate contact information and the other is a subcategory relating to misconduct related to health issues.

Commissioners on phone duty July 2006 to June 2007:

July	1-15 Angela Ward	16-31 Rick Botzler
August	1-15 Jack Shaffer	16-31 Larry Miller
September	1-15 Jamila Tharp	16-30 Matt Filar
October	1-15 Larry Miller	16-31 John Lyons
November	1-15 Jean Munsee	16-30 Rick Botzler
December	1-15 Abdul Aziz	16-31 Jamila Tharp
January	1-15 Byrd Lochtie	16-31 Jack Shaffer
February	1-14 Matt Filar	15-28 Larry Miller
March	1-15 Angela Ward	15-31 Jean Munsee
April	1-15 John Lyons	16-30 Byrd Lochtie
May	1-15 Jean Munsee	16-31 Matt Filar
June	1-15 Byrd Lochtie	16-30 Rick Botzler

Summary of select work of HCHRC for 2006-07

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Although the HRC spends considerable energy responding to community concerns and problems presented to them, Commission members believe that community education also is essential to develop understanding of, and support for, diversity in Humboldt County so as to reduce the likelihood of these problems developing. At least eight commissioners participated in forums, workshops and Speakers Bureau presentations in the community with topics ranging from “What is the Human Rights Commission” to “Learning about Islam” to educational forums. Some of these events were open to the public; others were held for students at specific schools. Feedback from the community has been positive.

We presented 3 educational forums on an interactive workshop entitled “Sticks and Stones: Words Can Break Bones.” This forum is designed to help teachers develop an increased sensitivity to the effects of language in the classroom. Activities introduce the participants to skills and techniques to avoid demeaning words and phrases and to encourage the use of respectful language. Presentations were made at the Humboldt State University (HSU) Dialogue on Race (3 Nov 2006), the HSU Diversity Conference and Education Summit (4 Mar 2007), and as an in-service training for teachers at the Humboldt County Office of Education (April 2007).

We expanded the work on our website (www.humboldthumanrights.org/), providing easy access to useful information about the Commission and about human rights, and adding linkages to other pertinent web sites.

We reprinted and continued the distribution of our resource card with information (e.g., housing, food, clothing, shelter, 24-hr crisis hotlines, health, public transit, family resource centers) useful for anyone in the community. The cards have been well-received, with a number of requests for restocking. The printing costs graciously were funded by the County Bar Association.

We publicized Human Rights Awareness Month and received supporting resolutions from several cities and the county.

The Commission was represented at the HSU Community Volunteer Fair at HSU (9 Feb 2007), with an opportunity to talk to a variety of students and staff about the work of the Commission.

HRC initiated contact and networking with the Latino Net and the Community NETWORK, and we maintained similar contact with the ACLU, the Independent Observers Program, and the Coalition for Police Review. A formal presentation on the work of the Commission was made to Humboldt.net in August 2006.

We continued work to enhance the Cox Media Center program.

We have continued with the toll-free phone number for the Commission and have publicized the availability of that service.

We assisted the Harvard University Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management to collect human rights information

Two Commissioners were interviewed on KMUD about HRC and marriage equality (4 Feb 2007). The chair participated in an interview with KHUM (7 June 2007).

HRC was a co-sponsor for the Marriage Equality Valentine Party at River Lodge Conference Center, 16 Feb 2007.

Several letters to the editor were published in local media regarding human rights matters, including civil marriage.

We are exploring working with Challenge Day and Northcoast Circle of Change in follow-up activities to their programs.

ADMINISTRATION

In consultation with the County Counsel's office, we developed a policy guide for commission e-mail communication consistent with the Brown Act.

We worked with HSU to involve an intern in our meetings and our work. Our intern, Will Mond, has helped summarize the structure, funding, and work of other human rights commissions in the state.

POSITIVE COMMUNITY RECOGNITIONS

The members of HRC believe that one way to enhance human rights in the county is to acknowledge and affirm the positive contributions of citizens and organizations in our community. We have written several letters in the past to people or groups who have contributed to the well-being of Humboldt County through their actions. One recipient this year was Abdul Aziz for his work in the community to strengthen religious tolerance (copy attached). We have added a community recognitions page to the Commission website (Oct 2006).

RESPONSES TO COMMUNITY CONCERNS

We developed a program to enhance access of county jail inmates to the Commission. With inmate permission, Commissioner Miller variously worked with jail staff, the Mental Health Department, and the Public Defender's office to address some of these concerns (see appended report). Commissioner Miller headed the program from August 2006 to March 2007, when it was terminated from lack of staff to continue the work.

In response to many concerns and questions expressed by the public, we proposed to the Supervisors that there be discussion on the possibility of more civilian oversight of law enforcement activities in the county and were encouraged to look further into this topic. Following an interview with the San José, California, Independent Police Auditor and some additional research we drafted a proposal for consideration. The proposal called for an ombudsperson with some investigative authority and a citizen review committee to engage in public education in law enforcement and to serve as a liaison between the ombudsperson and the general public. Some initial concerns have been raised about potential conflict of this structure with a recent court case and a part of the California Penal Code. We are interviewing some of the 18 other citizen oversight committees in California to determine how they have addressed these matters.

As part of our exploring this important topic, we also propose that the Supervisors support a public education forum that would address the role and nature of advisory groups associated with various governmental agencies. Potential panelists could include invited professionals to represent local mental health agencies, advisory groups such as the Mental Health Advisory Committee, and other interested groups such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). The area of mental health would serve as an example of one established working model. Additional invited panelists could include a representative from an established citizen oversight committee in another community, a member of the County Grand Jury, a representative of the Neighborhood Watch program, a police chief from one of the cities, and the County Sheriff. By starting with an established working model of an advisory group, such a forum could encourage and assist everyone in acquiring a better understanding of the roles of advisory groups, their limits, and their effectiveness. Such education also will help the public to comprehend and evaluate potentials and constraints of various types of citizen involvement in regard to law enforcement matters.

ONGOING ISSUES / FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

We are hoping to fill the remaining vacancies on the commission. In the past, some parts of the community have lacked consistent representation on the Commission; these include students, Native Americans and members of the Latino community. We are contacting key representatives in these communities with the hope of have a greater representation from them.

We continue to explore ways to address community concern with law enforcement accountability, with continued support for strong law enforcement work in the county. As part of this we are planning to revitalize our liaison program with local law enforcement agencies. We are attempting to reestablish a program with the Law Enforcement Chiefs Association of Humboldt (LECAH) to have a Commission observer attend LECAH meetings; this would provide an opportunity for the Commission to remain abreast of concerns in the law enforcement community as well as being able to represent concerns raised by community members or the Commission to the LECAH.

Goals and topics of concern for future work

Homelessness concerns.

Law enforcement concerns.

Newspaper columns on issues related to human rights.

Possible grants for projects.

Mental health concerns.

CONCLUSION

We of the Human Rights Commission take seriously our charge to eliminate discrimination and enhance appreciation of the diversity in our community. We advise the Board of Supervisors with specific recommendations on topics in which we believe they can contribute to these goals. We try to respond to all concerns raised by the public and try to help people find the resources they need to cope with human rights issues. We hope to educate people to help them understand differences better, and to value the diversity of our community. We welcome any suggestions from the Supervisors and the general public to help us achieve these goals.