

HUMBOLDT COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (HRC) MINUTES

Meeting of 13 April 2004

Conference Room A

Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka, California

Chair Maura Eastman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

A. Attendance and Introduction of Guests

Present: Eastman, Lochtie, J. Shaffer, Stein, Tharp, Aziz, Lyons, Miller, deLeon, and Botzler

Excused absence: B. Shaeffer, Aziz Unexcused absence: deLeon Guests: 6

B. Approval of Minutes

Stein moved (Miller seconded) that the 9 March 2004 minutes be accepted as written. Passed unanimously.

C. Public Comment

1. One guest encouraged continued action on the Human Rights resolution on the Patriot Act that had been submitted to the Supervisors. Chair Eastman acknowledged that progress had been slow, but the joint Supervisor-Commission was becoming active again.

2. A second guest, from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) proposed that, in light of slow progress opposing the Patriot Act, that a Civil Liberty Zone be established in Humboldt County

3. A homeless man in Humboldt County noted that the lack of places for homeless to sleep in Humboldt County amounted to a crisis. He believed the "Continuation of Care" program was too limited in the number of qualified being provided benefits. He proposed that some of the oppressive laws in the County be rolled back, including the hard restrictions on camping for the homeless. He estimated about 100 to 200 homeless were on the HSU campus alone. He noted that there are no public toilets in much of the County. He also believed law enforcement should be more pro-active to assist homeless persons; instead police often treat homeless persons harshly. The media often seems to villainize the homeless. He estimated a nationwide population of about 3 million homeless, approximately 1% of the total population. He called for some community brainstorming for addressing the issues, and called for some rapid responses to the current crisis. He proposed more available space for homeless sleeping and also a homeless community-based management of these areas. In response to past South Spit problems, he noted that there were no adequate programs to control/remove trash or provide toilet facilities. He acknowledged drug and alcohol problems but noted that law enforcement often does not take calls from homeless persons as seriously as those from other citizens. He also stressed that many homeless are fearful of police. He believed that many of the social programs in place are set for failure. Guest 2 (above) recommended a Committee including both homeless and commission members to address some of these problems.

4. Another homeless person noted that the anti-camping ordinance even prevented a person from eating food in their vehicle (Code 93 – Eureka City Code). Many local laws currently are directed to discourage camping by homeless.

5. One guest spoke again to the Patriot Act and noted banks had a list of people being watched who were not allowed to open accounts. In relation to the homeless plight, he noted that it often takes more identification to open an account and cash checks than is always available to homeless people. Likewise, homeless often have their identification stolen and that it can be expensive to re-establish their identities and receive identification cards. He supported the earlier assertion of Guest 3 that an essential need for homeless was a reliable place to sleep. He proposed that the County be lobbied to suspend some of the oppressive laws on a trial basis and that efforts be made to find emergency places to camp or stay. In response to the question of good conditions attracting more homeless to the area, Guest 4 noted that there is some truth to that but, if homeless were allowed to be responsible for themselves, Humboldt County should be able to accommodate the estimated 1% homeless of the area. The idea of "travel hospices" also was raised as a possible solution.

6. A second ACLU guest noted an ACLU Patriot Award to be given on 6 May.

D. Correspondence, Contact Reports, and Telephone Calls

1. Aziz reported 5 calls

a. A Blue Lake man requested some assistance in filling out a Citizen Complain form, as was referred to Miller.

b. A Washington, D. C. human rights organization request contact information and was referred to Eastman.

c. A Fortuna man lodged complaints about the Fortuna Police Department and chief, and Sheriff. He also was disturbed by helicopters flying overhead. He called to inform the Commission and did not wish a return call.

- d. A caller complained about a transportation service for handicapped. On returning the call, the telephone service had been disconnected.
- e. A McKinleyville single mother did not have adequate funds from her welfare check to meet her monthly needs; she was referred to Eastman. Eastman reported that under the circumstances disclosed to her, there was little the Commission could do.
- 2. Eastman reported several phone calls
 - a. A Fortuna man called with several concerns about his personal safety and several other issues. He was believed to be the same person reported above by Aziz.
 - b. A woman on a hunger strike requested fresh juice and is receiving only powdered juice. It did not appear that the Commission had a clear role to play on this issue.
 - c. The Humboldt County Grand Jury asked the County if the HRC still needed file storage space. The County has an available file cabinet. Miller noted that he has a file cabinet with many past Commission correspondence and records. Miller will follow up.
- 3. Phone list for coming weeks
 - a. Miller 15 to 30 April
 - b. Botzler 1 to 15 May
 - c. Lyons 16 to 31 May
 - d. [Unfilled] 1 to 15 June
 - e. J. Shaffer 16 to 30 June

E. Committees, Liaisons, and Case Reports

- 1. Finance (Eastman). The current bank balance is \$713.49; there has been no change in the past month.
- 2. Law Enforcement Matters (Miller)
 - a. Miller reported that a Eureka Police Department officer with past complaints lodged against him had another complaint lodged by a Native American man who claimed he was harassed by the officer.
 - b. Botzler reported that he and Christina Allbright (Chair, Redwood ACLU) met with Chief Mendosa, Arcata Police Department, to discuss the ACLU's concern with treatment of relocated sexual offenders, including the requirement of the 290 PC Registrant Interview Report by offenders. Mendosa noted that the Arcata Police Department did not attach the notice of assistance from the Human Rights Commission to its citizen complaint form, on advice from the Arcata City Attorney. Eastman and Christina Allbright will send a letter requesting a reconsideration of that decision.
- 3. Independent Observer Program (Miller)
The group met today and was interviewed by the Times-Standard.
- 4. Outreach and Education Matters (Shaffer)
 - a. J. Shaffer will discuss Channel 12 opportunities further with B. Schaeffer.
 - b. Staff from the Humboldt County Office of Education requested a list of topics and speakers that the Commission could provide for consideration by teachers. Shaffer gave a copy of the list of topics he provided and noted the Commission policy of not directly naming potential speakers on the list.
- 5. Calendar review of upcoming events (Shaffer)
 - a. No specific events are scheduled in the near future for which the Commission should act.
- 6. Other reports and liaisons. None

F. Unfinished Business

- 1. Botzler collected the list of topics/speakers discussed; the Commissioners and will provide a revised set of suggestions about topics to be included, as well as their willingness to participate.
- 2. Botzler reported that all 20 Homeless Resource cards left with Arcata Endeavor had been distributed. Specific numbers of cards given to other homeless resource agencies in the County were not reported, but several Commissioners reported that they had been very well received by the agencies when they had been left with them. Jewell moved (Lochtie seconded) that Commission funds be used to print 1000 cards for distribution in the area, that the Commission apply to the County Bar Association and St. Joseph Hospital for additional funds, and that a longer-term source of funds for reproducing the cards be sought. Passed unanimously. Lochtie moved (Jewell seconded) that a printing of a Spanish version also be done, and included in the funding requests of the previous motion. Passed unanimously. Botzler will pursue one lead for a Spanish translation.
- 3. Eastman reported that a new Commission intern most likely would be planned for the fall. A suggestion was made for a Computer Information Systems (CIS) intern to help establish an effective web page.
- 4. Eastman reminded the Commissioners about a periodic column in the Times-Standard. Several topics were discussed.

G. New Business

1. Botzler will provide a Visitor Information packet for future meetings and will construct a new members packet.
2. The new proposed public service announcements (PSA's) will be reviewed next month

H. Adjourn

With no further business before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 11 May 2004, 6:00 p.m. in Conference Room A of the County Courthouse, Eureka.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Botzler, Secretary