

HUMBOLDT COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (HRC) MINUTES

DRAFT

Meeting of 8 February 2005

Conference Room A

Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka, California

Vice-chair Byrd Lochtie called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

A. Attendance and Introduction of Guests

Present: Lochtie, Aziz, Lyons, Miller, J. Shaffer, Tharp, B. Shaeffer, and Botzler

Excused absence: Filar, Unexcused absence: None Guests: 17

B. Approval of Minutes

J. Shaffer moved (Lyons seconded) that 11 January 2005 minutes be accepted with one minor correction. Passed unanimously.

C. Public Comment

1. One man requested the Commission to make an inquiry or investigation with the California Fair Employment and Housing Agency about the possible discriminatory aspects of at-will agreements. J. Shaffer will inquire.

D. Special Topic: Proposal to the Board of Supervisors calling for support of same sex marriages.

A resolution was presented to the Commission by Tharp calling for "a resolution of Supervisors of the County of Humboldt in support of same sex marriages with full equality of rights and privileges as any heterosexual marriage." By consent, the proposal was presented as an idea for discussion rather than as a formal motion. Tharp introduced the proposal and read it in full.

Seven members of the public spoke in support of the measure, including representatives of Marriage Equality California, Humboldt Unitarian Fellowship Social Action Committee, the United Church of Christ, and some social service providers. Points raised by contributors included that past legislative changes in California to exclude same-sex marriage came from one particular, dominant religious perspective; that much cruel behavior has been directed to same-sex couples; that the American Psychological Association has publicly admitted they were mistaken to diagnose homosexuality as pathological and urged repeal of discriminatory laws against homosexuals; that there is a continued, significant economic cost to California (and society in general) from continuing discrimination against same-sex couples; and that exclusion of equality for same-sex couples is in conflict with the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. Several members expressed the opinion that proposing such a resolution was proper for the Commission, even though it was a difficult issue and could be expected to generate difficulty and controversy.

Several commissioners believed the proposal was well written and supported the current version. There also were concerns about some specific aspects of the proposal raised. Suggestions included were to phase in such a resolution through two steps: giving all rights associated with unmarried couples to homosexual couples and to then call for full rights for homosexual couples. Other concerns raised were to focus on a dictionary definition of marriage as a close union between two people rather than a man and a woman; to ensure that a civil union ensures rights; and to omit references to other forms of past discrimination. Lochtie called for commissioner's comments to be returned to Tharp and to have discussion of a revised draft at the next (March 2005) meeting.

D. Correspondence, Contact Reports, and Telephone Calls

Phone line reports

a. B. Shaeffer reported eight calls from 16 to 31 January. One caller claimed racially discriminatory treatment at a store in McKinleyville and was referred to Lyons. One caller claiming harassment by a former employer reported that the problem had been resolved. A Fortuna resident claimed being spied upon by the CIA and police and did not desire a return call. A houseless person claimed being stalked by the Arcata Police Department, the County Sheriff and several Humboldt State University (HSU) professors; he did not leave a phone number. A woman being evicted from her apartment was referred to Legal Information and Referral Service and Legal Services of Northern California. A woman seeking assistance to regain custody of her granddaughter was referred to Legal Services of Northern California. One caller sought to talk with Lyons and was referred to him. One caller claimed human rights violations but could not be reached when the call was returned.

b. Lyons reported nine calls. Four calls were with one man on a general charge of discrimination. One Hispanic caller reported racial slurs. One caller sought help with a possible disclosure and another caller was hoping to receive some assistance for meeting a mortgage payment. One caller sought homeless

Phone list for coming weeks.

Lochtie	1 to 14 February
Miller	15 to 28 February
Filar	1 to 15 March
Tharp	16 to 31 March

Aziz	1 to 15 April
J. Shaffer	16 to 30 April
	1 to 15 May
	16 to 31 May
	1 to 15 June

Miller and Botzler noted successful presentations on Law Enforcement Matters and Environmental Ethics, respectively at the recent Martin Luther King Day festival sponsored by Americorps at College of the Redwoods. Botzler also attended former Commissioner Eastman's presentation on volunteerism and noted it was very good. Aziz served as a Panelist of an HSU seminar on religion, spirituality, and homosexuality. Lochtie presented an overview of the work of the commission at the Rotary Club of Arcata. Aziz will make a presentation to the Kiwanis club on interfaith matters.

E. Committees, Liaisons, and Case Reports

1. Finance (J. Shaffer). There is no change in Commission finances; \$1150.32 is in treasury
2. Law Enforcement Matters

Miller requested another commissioner to serve as a lead person on this committee.

3. Independent Observer Program. Miller reported no new information.
4. Outreach and Education Matters (Shaffer)

a. Discussion of the committee goals will be addressed in April

b. Some suggested changes for the Visitor Orientation Information form will be assessed at the next meeting.

5. Lochtie will present the Commission Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors on 15 February.

6. Tharp reported on the inquiry to have the Commission make a presentation at the HSU Diversity Conference. She noted that past participation emphasized presentations rather than dialogue and were not always well received. It was proposed for this year's conference (4-5 March) that the commission set up a booth with materials. Discussion was generated on the possibility of the Commission sponsoring the Get Engaged Tour," a workshop of eliminating homophobia. It was moved (Botzler/B. Shaeffer) that the Commission provide \$50 from its reserve of hate crime funds to support transportation of the group from the Bay Area to Humboldt County. Passed.

F. Unfinished Business

1. Tharp reported that the Anti-defamation League is sending new public service announcements for use in the County.

2. J. Shaffer is writing an article for the local media on prejudice

3. Tharp and B. Shaeffer are writing articles for local media on human rights topics

4. The Law Enforcement Committee will be removed as a regular item on the agenda.

5. No further updates on finding a new intern. Tharp will assume the responsibilities for finding one.

6. Miller reported progress in updating the commission web-page. \$20.00 was approved to cover the costs for acquiring the commission domain name. The new intern, when identified, will have a primary responsibility for maintaining the web page in a current state.

G. New Business

1. Miller will provide an update on the establishment of a toll-free number next month

2. Discussion of information included in new members' packets will be addressed in March (Botzler)

3. Developing a revised vision for the Commission will be addressed in April.

4. Lochtie will invite a Supervisor to the March meeting to administer an oath of office to commissioners.

5. The matters of possible conflicts of interest between the commission and jurisdictional law enforcement matters, as well as discussion of recent HSU human-rights related videos were omitted, due to lack of information.

6. Miller presented a matrix for consideration in the collection and organization of phone line messages.

Several suggestions were provided for improvement and will be addressed at the March meeting.

H. Adjourn

With no further business before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned 8:40 p.m. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 8 March 2005, 6:00 p.m. in Conference Room A of the County Courthouse, Eureka.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Botzler, Secretary