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Commission on the State of Hate

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Minutes

Commission on the State of Hate Community Forum

Community Forum

October 25, 2025, 11:30 am

Commissioners Present
Chair Brian Levin
Vice Chair Andrea Beth Damsky
Commissioner Cynthia Choi
Commissioner Regina Cuellar
Commissioner Russell Roybal
Commissioner Bamby Salcedo
Commissioner Erroll Southers

Civil Rights Department (CRD) Staff Present
Julia Parish, Deputy Director of Legislation, Regulation, and Policy
Alec Watts, Assistant Deputy Director
Rebecca Goodsell, Research Data Specialist
Kevin Thomas, Research Data Specialist

Others Present
Approximately 15 members of the public attended in person.
An estimated 20 members of the public attended virtually.

I. Welcome

Commissioner Cuellar welcomed everyone to the Commission on the State of Hate's third community forum of 2025. She reviewed the process for closed captioning, provided a land acknowledgement, announced that Spanish and Mandarin interpretation were available for the meeting, introduced the rest of the Commissioners, and introduced Victoria Williams, a representative of the forum's community partner, Women in NAACP Pasadena Chapter (WIN).

Ms. Williams provided opening remarks. She highlighted WIN's deep commitment to addressing adultification bias, the harmful tendency to perceive Black children, especially girls, as older and less innocent. She also called for the implementation of a statewide K-12 program focused on empathy and equity education. This proposed program would teach emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and conflict resolution to move "beyond punishment, toward prevention" and ultimately work toward a society and education system grounded in empathy, equity, and care.

Commissioner Cuellar provided an overview of the Commission's responsibilities and CRD resources, including CA vs Hate and the Community Conflict Resolution Unit.

Links Shared in the Chat:
https://www.CAvsHate.org

https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/community-conflict-resolution-unit/

II. Panel Discussion with Invited Speakers

Commissioner Cuellar introduced the panelists:

- Debra Suh, YWCA of Glendale and Pasadena
- Emily Romero Rodriguez, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
- Alisa Osunfunke Orduna, Florence Aliese Advancement Network, LLC (FAAN)
- Kevin Gee, School of Education at UC Davis

Each panelist offered opening remarks:

- Debra Suh: The YWCA's mission is to eliminate racism and empower women. They provide crisis intervention and youth prevention programs that build healthy relationships, empathy, and leadership skills to stop hate.
- Emily Romero Rodriguez: CHIRLA works to de-normalize hate within the immigrant community. They conduct direct outreach at locations where community members gather, such as swap meets and bus stops, empowering new-arrival families to navigate systems, including the K-12 school system.
- Alisa Osunfunke Orduna: Discussed the link between hate and homelessness, noting that structural violence erodes protective factors for children. She also shared statistics, including that 19% of all U.S. children experiencing homelessness are in California, and 40% of homeless youth in LA County identify as LGBTQ.
- Kevin Gee: Discussed his research on how school climates impact bullying, focusing on AAPI youth who saw a major increase in hate post-pandemic. Key insights from his recent study with youth:
    - Hate and racism are now normalized behaviors, worsened by social media.
    - Students seek trusted adult advocates but are skeptical that adults will take action.
    - Systemic hate requires systemic solutions.
    - There is an "implementation gap" in that policies fail without resources for teachers, counselors, and parents.

Summary of Panel Discussion:

- Shift to Restorative Approaches: Schools should move away from punitive measures and instead adopt holistic, prevention-based strategies that involve all staff members and utilize "counterspeech" to actively interrupt hate.
- Focus on Resource Equity & Stability: Effective policy should prioritize housing stability for students and fully resource existing anti-bias grants non-competitively, ensuring under-funded districts are able to access grant funding.
- Building Genuine Trust: To encourage reporting, staff must acknowledge and address hierarchical identity-based power dynamics and build deep trust with students, particularly those from immigrant families who may fear engaging with authority figures.
- Sustainable Partnerships: Partnerships between schools and the broader community wherein they are situated must be adaptable and long-term, organized around shared visions rather than being temporary or transactional.
- Holistic Tools for Belonging: Utilize the following to promote a stronger sense of belonging among students on campus:
    - Expressive arts courses and coursework

- Curricula related to effective interpersonal dialogue
- Visual inclusion campaigns to validate the varying lived experiences of students and destigmatize mental health

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Roybal asked how the dismantling of the federal Department of Education impacts California.
  - Dr. Gee responded that federal data collection on hate has been compromised. A key survey on K-1 students' experiences with hate was canceled. He urged California to use its state and local resources to fund its own data collection.
- Vice Chair Damsky asked how resources can be leveraged quickly when federal policy itself is promoting hate.
  - Dr. Orduna called for resistance through mutual aid and informal partnerships; Ms. Romero Rodriguez noted that CHIRLA's rapid response to immigration raids was spearheaded by a youth volunteer, and they strive to be flexible; Dr. Gee stated that schools are slow, bureaucratic institutions, so the best contact for rapid change may be through school superintendents.
- Commissioner Choi asked how the California Department of Education (CDE) can play a stronger role.
  - Dr. Gee suggested tying anti-hate work directly to the metrics schools already prioritize: academic achievement and chronic absenteeism; Ms. Romero Rodriguez confirmed this link, stating that student absenteeism is high because students are afraid of hate incidents and fear of immigration enforcement near schools; Dr. Gee noted that State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond, has a public goal to cut chronic absenteeism by 50%, which provides a strategic opportunity to show that addressing hate is required to meet that goal.
- Commissioner Salcedo asked what advocacy is needed to hold elected officials accountable for investing in hate eradication.
  - Ms. Suh advocated for investing in parenting education at critical junctures (e.g., when children are starting kindergarten or middle school); Ms. Romero Rodriguez defined advocacy as engaging communities in civic life, informing community members of the voting records of public officials, and holding officials accountable after the election.
- Chair Levin asked how to address toxic masculinity.
  - Ms. Suh stated this work must include other men. She shared that her son started a rape prevention program, and his advocacy as a basketball captain in the locker room was more effective than any adult's.
- Chair Levin asked Dr. Orduna to detail the violence faced by the unhoused community.
  - Dr. Orduna described the violence as systemic and physical and noted that "othering" of this community is linked to a failed mental health system, where the number one way to access crisis care is through law enforcement.
- Commissioner Southers made the following remarks:
  - Normalization of Hate: Validated that under-reporting stems from a perceived lack of consequences for perpetrators of hate. Drawing on his experience being bused in the 1960s, he noted that hate in schools has normalized, and the social climate has regressed significantly in the last 6–18 months.
  - Weaponization of Free Speech: Argued that free speech is being "weaponized" to permit hate speech. He emphasized that while non-threatening vilification may be legally protected, all incidents should still be reported.
  - Leadership & Accountability: Framed hate as a "leadership issue." He cited Chicago Mayor Johnson's correction of the term "illegal aliens" as an example of the need to call out hate immediately and questioned the current consequences for reported

incidents.
    - Trauma and Data: Stressed the importance of gathering reliable data while also focusing on offering victims of hate activity resources to help them heal from related trauma.
    - Youth Representation: Strongly supported adding a youth commissioner. He reasoned that effective safety solutions require direct input from students, noting they must be engaged where they are.
- Commissioner Roybal made the following remarks:
    - Philanthropic Advocacy: Speaking from his professional background in philanthropy, Commissioner Roybal shared that he wrote an op-ed for the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* inspired by CHIRLA's demonstrations at the Roybal Federal Building.
    - Commendation of CHIRLA: He commended CHIRLA for its resilience, noting that the organization has not backed away from its mission even in challenging times.
    - Funding Recommendations: He argued that philanthropic organizations should fund organizing, protests, and bail funds, emphasizing that the law does not restrict them from supporting these activities.
- Vice Chair Damsky asked if there are any existing programs where students and parents learn social and emotional intelligence (SEI) together.
    - Dr. Gee's mentioned PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) as a common school framework for SEI. He suggested that schools should utilize "critical junctures," such as the transition from Transitional Kindergarten to Kindergarten, to engage parents in this learning rather than treating orientation as purely transactional. He also noted that schools often fail to support linguistically and culturally diverse parents, wrongly assuming their lack of participation means they do not care.
- Vice Chair Damsky asked if the increasing diagnosis of ADD and ADHD might be a reflection of the current social pressures.
    - While noting the panel members are not clinicians, Ms. Romero Rodriguez observed that parents often seek diagnoses specifically to access special education support and resources for their children. She also noted the potential impact of social media and content consumption on attention spans.
    - Dr. Gee added that this issue highlights the need to focus on the hate and discrimination faced by students with disabilities. He emphasized that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has never been fully funded and that hate is often intersectional, targeting students based on a confluence of identities, including disability, race, and LGBTQ+ status.
- Commissioner Salcedo made the following remarks:
    - She noted that the discussion had focused primarily on K-12 education but emphasized that human development continues until age 25. She also raised the issue of hate in higher education, referencing a recent murder and the rhetoric being disseminated on college campuses. She highlighted the specific political targeting of trans, gender-expansive, and intersex people.
    - She returned to her questions related to advocacy asking the panel what specific advocacy is needed to hold elected officials accountable for investing in the eradication of hate.
        - Ms. Romero Rodriguez emphasized the need to track voting records and hold representatives accountable while they are in office, citing a recent example where CHIRLA encouraged constituents to call representatives who voted for a harmful bill and demand explanations. She also highlighted CHIRLA's work training members to share their stories with officials and hosting naturalization clinics (in partnership with Asian Americans Advancing Justice) to help residents become voters.

        - Dr. Orduna focused on the importance of controlling the narrative to compete with divisive algorithms on social media. She advocated for uplifting local and alternative media and organizing "teach-ins" to show communities that it is okay to resist and question officials. She also noted that advocacy also involves "wrapping our arms around" elected officials who share the community's values but are facing death threats and violence, and reiterated the need for restorative practices, grounded in indigenous worldviews, to move away from defensiveness and toward community accountability.
- Chair Levin condemned recent statements from political figures, stating that while he is not usually political, these issues must be addressed head-on.
- Chair Levin asked how local communities can fortify their responses against political "headwinds," specifically regarding allyship, using teachable moments, and addressing toxic masculinity, which he linked to hate crimes in schools. He also suggested the use of social surveys to better capture student experiences.
    - Ms. Romero Rodriguez defined allyship as proactively asking partners "Do you need anything?" and being willing to make requests in return, such as asking for anti-Blackness training for staff. She noted an unexpected shift in hate trends: rather than public incidents, CHIRLA is seeing a rise in neighbor-to-neighbor violence. She emphasized the need for resources to help victims relocate or learn de-escalation techniques for dealing with hostile neighbors or HOAs.
    - Dr. Gee highlighted the lack of male role models, particularly men of color, in the teaching profession (especially elementary) and the need to change this to combat stereotypes. He noted that existing tools like the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) are retrospective and limited. He advocated for "micro-surveys" to capture real-time data on hate incidents, similar to how schools track attendance period-by-period. He also warned that online reporting systems are often a "black box" where data is collected but not transparently acted upon.
- Addressing Dr. Orduna, Chair Levin noted that only seven states protect unhoused people and cited reports of violence committed by people against the unhoused. He asked her to discuss the level of violence faced by unhoused constituents, including LGBTQ+ youth and the disabled.
    - Dr. Orduna described the violence against the unhoused as systemic, exacerbated by the Supreme Court's Grants Pass ruling, which criminalizes homelessness. She noted she has received letters that scapegoat vulnerable populations, such as those who are unhoused. Additionally, she discussed issues with the reliance on police for mental health crises, noting that officers often admit they are not social workers, which leads to inadequate or lethal responses.

<u>Public Comment</u>

- One member of the public suggested that the state government find ways to creatively fund programs to address hate, such as CRS, the Community Conflict Resolution Unit, and county and city commissions. They also referenced a local evaluation showing a drop in bias-related harassment in Los Angeles Unified School District (LUSD) schools that implemented programs such as No Name Calling Week. They also encouraged continued support for the Western Justice Center and the use of arts in schools.
- A written comment, summarized by staff, described an incident where an African-American honor student was the target of a violent threat from a non-person of color male student known for hypersexual and predatory behavior. The school, administrators, and advocates recognized the student as a victim and provided support; however, the student was forced to participate in the program under threat of arrest, while the aggressor faced minimal consequences.

- A member of the public shared that her teenage daughters are highly aware of the current sociopolitical climate. They advocated for reducing dependence on cell phones and screens to increase human interaction, supporting the district's new cell phone policy to address cyberbullying. They also emphasized the need to create safe spaces and ensure children feel safe attending school.
- A member of the public stated that institutional racism is a known, persistent issue and must be addressed specifically.
- A member of the public stressed the necessity of tackling anti-Blackness, arguing it permeates current experiences due to the nation's failure to institutionally address its history. They stated that research shows that making spaces more inclusive for Black students benefits all in that space.
- A member of the public asked what steps are being taken to educate students on subtle forms of discrimination, such as microaggressions and adultification bias. They shared a personal example of a teacher calling her a "little hustler" and questioned what preventative strategies are in place to protect students. They also observed that while youth voices are uplifted, young people are often excluded from forums like this. They suggested making forums more attractive, accessible, and inviting to youth, and requested funding for transportation to allow students to attend.
- A member of the public stressed the importance of disseminating the message about the detrimental effects of the adultification bias and offered a free training to interested parties via the Pasadena NAACP website.
- A member of the public shared details of the Western Justice Center's five-year whole-district restorative practice capacity building effort in Pasadena Unified School District. They provided an example of a restorative dialogue used to address a hate incident involving a transgender middle schooler, which resulted in the victim feeling empowered and the aggressor understanding the impact of his actions. They also highlighted the value of peer education and peer mediation frameworks.
- A member of the public shared the scale of Western Justice Center's work and cited research conducted with Cal Poly Pomona that found that building trust and belonging, and empowering youth, resulted in chronic absenteeism dropping from 30% to 6%, suspensions dropping 60%, and academic performance increasing 10%. They urged the Commission to help ensure the California Department of Education engages with those doing work in schools regarding evidence-based models, stressing the need to "build a sustainable fishing village" rather than offering short-term assistance.
- A member of the public shared a personal account of how her daughter's negative experience with adultification bias led to her becoming an advocate, organizing, and ultimately contributing to the current panel discussion. They encouraged parents and students to "speak truth to power" and ensure the experiences and voices of Black women are regarded as credible.

III. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

No public comment on items not on the agenda**.**

Vice Chair Damsky moved to place the question of how to include youth members on the commission on a future meeting agenda. The motion was seconded by Chair Levin.

IV. Adjournment of the Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 pm.