



## Civil Rights Department

### Commission on the State of Hate

651 Bannon Street, Suite 200 | Sacramento | CA | 95811  
 800-884-1684 (voice) | 800-700-2320 (TTY) | California's Relay Service at 711  
[www.calcivilrights.ca.gov](http://www.calcivilrights.ca.gov) | [CSH@calcivilrights.ca.gov](mailto:CSH@calcivilrights.ca.gov)

#### Minutes

### Commission on the State of Hate Meeting December 5, 2025, 9:00 am

#### Commissioners Present

Chair Brian Levin  
 Vice Chair Damsky  
 Commissioner Regina Cuellar  
 Commissioner Russell Roybal  
 Commissioner Erroll Southers

#### Civil Rights Department (CRD) Staff Present

Alec Watts, Assistant Deputy Director  
 Rebecca Goodsell, Research Data Specialist  
 Kevin Thomas, Research Data Specialist

#### Others Present

An estimated 20 members of the public attended virtually.

#### **I. Welcome**

- A. Call to Order
- B. Establishment of a Quorum
- C. Review of the Agenda

Chair Levin welcomed attendees to the meeting and explained the closed captioning process. After confirming a quorum through roll call, Chair Levin informed participants that the meeting agenda was available on the Commission's website and outlined the procedure for public comment. No questions or comments were raised by commissioners or the public.

#### **II. Informational Presentation: "20 Years of Hate" Donald Whitehead Jr., Executive Director, National Coalition for the Homeless**

Chair Levin introduced Mr. Donald Whitehead Jr., Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, who brings expertise in homelessness, substance abuse, and racial equity. Mr. Whitehead delivered a presentation titled "20 Years of Hate," which highlighted the escalating violence and hate directed at unhoused Americans. Mr. Whitehead discussed the recent report in which the National Coalition examined the prevalence of violence against people experiencing homelessness.

BRIAN LEVIN	ANDREA BETH DAMSKY	CYNTHIA CHOI	REGINA CUELLAR	RUSSELL ROYBAL	BAMBY SALCEDO	ERROLL SOUTHERS
CHAIR	VICE CHAIR	COMMISSIONER	COMMISSIONER	COMMISSIONER	COMMISSIONER	COMMISSIONER



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#### Summary of Presentation

- Violence and deaths among the unhoused population in the U.S. are systematically undercounted. Current official statistics cite over 770,000 people experiencing homelessness, but this is widely considered an underestimation.
- The lack of adequate policies and resources has led unhoused individuals to cycle in and out of shelters and jails
- Negative rhetoric and public opinion have contributed to increased violence, alongside a 61% rise in housing costs over a decade, pushing more people into homelessness.
- The creation of new laws that make it illegal to be homeless has made the problem worse, leading to more people living without homes and more violence against them.
- There is a growing trend of repeat offenders and more violent acts involving law enforcement.
- The number of fatal attacks on the unhoused has also grown, and nearly every state has documented at least some violence against this population.
- Advocates are calling for better federal data collection on victimization, the reversal of criminalization ordinances, and the recognition of housing as a human right.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development now asks cities to report on criminalization practices, but advocates remain concerned about ongoing hate and inadequate protections.
- The report concludes that urgent policy changes are needed to better protect the unhoused and address the growing violence they face.

#### Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Southers asked about shelter safety, including who establishes safety standards and who is responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance.
  - Mr. Whitehead explained that focus groups revealed people often stay outside due to insufficient shelter capacity and the lack of oversight of shelter conditions.
  - Efforts over the past two years have focused on creating national standards and accountability mechanisms
  - He also noted a significant reduction in funding for permanent supportive housing, which is a proven solution.
- Commissioner Roybal asked if California or any particular cities, counties or other California state agencies are implementing effective solutions for people experiencing homelessness.
  - Mr. Whitehead noted that several communities are advancing effective solutions that address the structural causes of homelessness, with prevention as a key strategy. Examples include San Jose's early identification efforts and Stockton's Guaranteed Income program, which has helped 90% of participants avoid homelessness.

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- PATH and PATH Ventures programs were also highlighted, which show 80–90% success in keeping people housed, as well as legal and housing interventions such as San Diego's Veterans courts and tiny homes
- Los Angeles County's adaptive reuse efforts, and initiatives in Dallas and Los Angeles focused on connecting people to housing and resources rather than criminalization.
- Commissioner Roybal asked whether law enforcement violence occurs during encampment sweeps or more broadly.
  - Mr. Whitehead clarified that incidents typically occur during sweeps, often involving individuals with behavioral health issues and prior negative experiences with law enforcement.
  - It was also noted that law enforcement is among the Coalition's strongest supporters, and in some Florida communities, officers serve in outreach roles.
- Alec Watts asked about the dissensus on policy recommendations about adding housing status to protected class statutes.
  - Mr. Whitehead responded that there would be a need to open the Civil Rights Amendment. Some challenges with these include the makeup of the Supreme Court, and identification when it comes to housing status.
- Alec Watts asked a follow-up question about challenges with identifying housing status.
  - The response was that housing status as a protected class is broad and there is a need to define homelessness, which would be complex.
- Dr. Goodsell asked about programs or interventions that are effective in responding to incidents of violence, and prevention, particularly related to public sentiment.
  - Mr. Whitehead explained that the strategy focuses on storytelling across social media and websites to shift public narratives about homelessness.
- Dr. Thomas asked if there was a type of profile for individuals who are more susceptible as either victims or survivors of this type of violence and if there are communities of unhoused individuals that may need even more help than others?
  - Mr. Whitehead responded that there is an overrepresentation of people of color, LGBTQIA+, and the elderly who experience these acts of violence.
  - The ages of victims are variable, with the youngest victim in the past 20 years being 8 months old and the oldest being 82.
  - The report is available on their website and has a detailed breakdown of demographics for perpetrators and victims.

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- Chair Levin noted that people who experience homelessness come from all backgrounds and often face higher rates of victimization, citing a 2000 California study showing greater risk than housed populations.
- Chair Levin stated that several states, including Florida and Maryland, now track or include homelessness in hate crime statutes, emphasized that violence against unhoused people is often intersectional and stereotype-driven, and reiterated that such violence is significantly underreported.

#### Public Comment on Presentation

- A member of the public shared that their organization is pursuing legislation to add homelessness and housing status as protected characteristics under hate crime laws and asked about lessons from states that have already done so. They also noted that unhoused individuals in California are increasingly reluctant to engage with law enforcement due to negative interactions and asked how the Civil Rights Act and Civil Rights Amendment relate to adding housing status as a protected class.
  - Mr. Whitehead responded that he was not aware of any states that have designated homelessness as a protected class, though several states have adopted a Bill of Rights for people experiencing homelessness, which differs from protected class status. He also clarified the distinction between the Civil Rights Amendment and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
  - Chair Levin added that just over half a dozen states include unhoused status in their statutes, though some focus primarily on data collection.

### III. Approval of the Minutes

#### A. September 19, 2025, Commission Meeting

Vice Chair Damsky proposed an amendment to the minutes to correct the spelling of Dr. Banerjee.

#### Action by the Commission

Motion: Vice Chair Damsky moved to approve the minutes with the amendment;  
 Commissioner Southers seconded.

Ayes: 5 (Chair Levin, Vice Chair Damsky, Commissioner Cuellar, Commissioner Roybal, Commissioner Southers)

Nays: 0

#### B. October 22, 2025, Commission Meeting

No public comments on this item.

#### Action by the Commission

BRIAN LEVIN CHAIR	ANDREA BETH DAMSKY VICE CHAIR	CYNTHIA CHOI COMMISSIONER	REGINA CUELLAR COMMISSIONER	RUSSELL ROYBAL COMMISSIONER	BAMBY SALCEDO COMMISSIONER	ERROLL SOUTHERS COMMISSIONER
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Motion: Commissioner Roybal moved to approve the minutes; Commissioner Cuellar seconded.

Ayes: 4 (Chair Levin, Commissioner Cuellar, Commissioner Roybal, Commissioner Southers)

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 1 (Vice Chair Damsky was not at the October 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting).

#### C. October 25, 2025, Community Forum

No public comments on this item.

##### Action by the Commission

Motion: Commissioner Cuellar moved to approve the minutes; Vice Chair Damsky seconded.

Ayes: 5 (Chair Levin, Vice Chair Damsky, Commissioner Cuellar, Commissioner Roybal, Commissioner Southers)

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 0

## IV. Chair and Subcommittee Updates

- Chair Levin announced that that agenda items IV.A. and IV.B. would be moved to the end of this agenda item.
- Vice Chair Damsky shared remarks highlighting diverse communities coming together during the holidays and discussed the misuse of power.
- She also requested that the Commission examine the politics of hate and explore strategies to counter and overcome it.

#### C. Subcommittee on Resources, Support, and Response

- Commissioner Southers stated that the subcommittee is studying hate crime offender rehabilitation programs, exploring ways to support the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, and partnering with UCLA's Williams Institute on research into hate against LGBTQIA+ communities.

#### D. Subcommittee on Community Forums

- Commissioner Cuellar provided an update on recent community forums.
- The first forum, on October 25th in Pasadena with the Women in NAACP (WIN) Pasadena Chapter, focused on preventing hate in K-12 schools. The forum included a roundtable discussion with representatives from the YWCA of Glendale and Pasadena, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the

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- Florence Elise Advancement Network (FAN), and the School of Education at UC Davis.
  - The second forum was held on November 19th in Redding, CA, and drew strong community participation, with speakers from Shasta Equal Justice, Shasta County Indian Education Consortium, and United Way's Building Bridges Initiative discussing local solutions to hate and promoting equity.
  - Commissioner Cuellar thanked forum attendees and partners and asked commissioners for input on forum topics and locations for 2026.
- B. Subcommittee on Patterns, Trends, and Prevention
- Chair Levin provided the update for this subcommittee and shared that the Patterns, Trends, and Prevention subcommittee met with the Community Forums subcommittee on October 22 to identify potential collaboration.
  - The California Health Interview Survey on Californians' experiences with hate are going to be released in a webinar on Tuesday, December 9th. This is one of the most comprehensive and in-depth types of data that's been collected, and researchers will share new policy brief related to acts of hate in California.
  - Chair Levin also shared recent data related to violence against certain communities.

#### A. Chair Brian Levin

Chair Levin thanked fellow Commissioners, CRD staff, and presenters for the community forums and for the research they are collecting and contributing to over the course of the year. He also congratulated and thanked the following partners: Norma Lopez (Orange County Commission Director), Richard Hirschhaut (American Jewish Committee), Salam Al-Marayati (Muslim Public Affairs Council), Maya Berry, and Dr. Jim Zogby (Arab American Institute). Chair Levin also issued statements on targeted hate events that happened throughout the year against different communities across the nation.

- No comments from commissioners
- No public comment

#### Commission Discussion

- Vice Chair Damsky expressed gratitude to Commissioners Cuellar and Roybal for their work with the community forums and the opportunities to have the public share their stories.
- Commissioner Roybal responded to comments and underscored how important it was to visit rural communities and how receptive these communities are to the Commission's presence. He also recognized Commissioner Cuellar and her leadership with this.

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- Commissioner Southers also recognized Commissioners Roybal and Cuellar and expressed appreciation for the positive reception the Commission has received.
- Alec Watts asked the commissioners if they had any feedback about the forums that they wanted to share as planning for 2026 has started. He also stated that the best way to gather feedback and input from the commissioners is through a publicly noticed meeting.
- Commissioner Southers recommended that forums be held on days where people would be able to attend, such as a Saturday.
- Commissioner Roybal suggested that the commissioners provide feedback for the community forums at the January Commission meeting and the subcommittee would work with CRD staff in February to plan out the year.
- Commissioner Cuellar highlighted comments that were shared by the community members at the recent forum, which included visiting Butte County (rural community).
- Vice Chair Damsky suggested that these forums take place on weekends, including Sundays. She also highlighted that weekends may work better as it gives individuals time to travel and be fully present.

#### V. Discussion of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Chair Levin expressed concern about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) targeting individuals, including U.S. citizens and people with legal status. He noted that social justice organizations seem to be targeted for dissent rather than actual threats, and in some cases are being labeled as extremists. He also raised concerns about federal agencies using social media to promote remigration, emphasized the importance of civil and community dialogue, and urged people not to live in fear.

#### VI. Commission Member Announcements

No announcements from commissioners and no public comment.

#### VII. Future Agenda Items

- Vice Chair Damsky reminded the Commission that there was a request to supplement the Commission with youth representation and would like to add this for discussion on a future agenda.
- Commissioner Roybal reminded the Commission that the Community Forum subcommittee will spend time in January talking about content and locations to host the four Community Forums in 2026. Chair Levin suggested potentially collaborating with a university.

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KEVIN KISH, DIRECTOR

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#### **Public Comment**

One member of the public suggested the Commission take action on items related to adding housing status as a protected characteristic, endorsing legislation related to hate crime training, and disability.

#### **VIII. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda**

No commissioner comments and no public comment on this item

#### **IX. Adjournment of the Meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 am.

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