



Civil Rights Department

Commission on the State of Hate

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Minutes

Commission on the State of Hate Meeting February 25, 2026, 9:00 am

Commissioners Present

Chair Brian Levin
Vice Chair Andrea Beth Damsky
Commissioner Cynthia Choi
Commissioner Russell Roybal
Commissioner Erroll Southers

Civil Rights Department (CRD) Staff Present

Julia Parish, Deputy Director
Alec Watts, Assistant Deputy Director
Rebecca Goodsell, Research Data Specialist
Kevin Thomas, Research Data Specialist
David Kalkstein, Research Data Specialist
Adrian Bacong, Research Data Specialist
Zelene Molina, Staff Services Manager
Kendra Tenacea, Senior Attorney Mediator
Gregory Mann, Senior Attorney Mediator
Shilpa Ram, Assistant General Counsel

Others Present

An estimated 33 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 reviewed the meeting's agenda and announced that item III would be removed, and item V would not be discussed in this meeting. Chair Levin outlined the procedure for public comment. No questions or comments were raised by commissioners or the public.

II. Informational Presentation: "Policy, Programs, and Systems to Reduce Hate in Schools: Leveraging Existing School Safety Frameworks to Address Specific Forms of Hate Across California" *Ron Avi Astor, Ph.D., Professor, Social Welfare and Education, Luskin School of Public Affairs, School of Education and Information Studies, UCLA*

Chair Levin introduced Dr. Ron Avi Astor, Professor at UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs who has conducted school safety research for over 40 years. Dr. Astor's presentation titled "Policy, Programs, and Systems to Reduce Hate in Schools: Leveraging Existing School Safety Frameworks to Address Specific Forms of Hate Across California," highlighted two recently published studies that focus on the effects of school climate.

Summary of Presentation

- There is limited research in K-12 schools around specific kinds of bias and there is a need to conduct more research. However, current funding for school-safety research provides opportunities to examine whether improving school safety can reduce various forms of violence.
- The studies explored the influence of bias on suicidal ideation, sadness, and hopelessness among students. They also explored school climate and substance use among K-12 students in California.
- Dr. Astor emphasized the importance of integrating interventions into the culture of the school.
- Dr. Astor and the Holocaust Museum in Los Angeles are piloting an instrument to address various forms of bias. This instrument could be helpful for schools and the state and can contribute to the development of school-level dashboards, policy briefs, and a validated K-12 anti-bias toolkit tailored to specific districts and regions.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Southers asked Dr. Astor when he anticipates the first report of the anti-bias instrument to be available and what he thinks the results may be.
 - Dr. Astor responded that they are currently working with teachers and principals to get data right away and so that it is useful for schools. However, they are waiting to get about 2,000 teachers so that the data is reliable. The report will be available sometime in midsummer to the beginning of fall.
- Commissioner Southers asked if the schools will be categorized, such as unified schools, and independent schools.
 - Dr. Astor responded that the schools would remain anonymous. Only the school itself and the museum will know if they are part of this.
- Commissioner Choi asked what Dr. Astor's experience has been with receptivity of this by educators.
 - Dr. Astor responded that it's a difficult mindset for educators, but they have been working with teachers to integrate these interventions within their classrooms. This brings about awareness for teachers on how to structure their classes, so they are more equitable and address any stereotypes.
- Vice Chair Damsky thanked Dr. Astor and commented on the importance of looking at how hate and bias impacts students' behavior towards each other, and self-harm.
 - Dr. Astor stated that they have been looking at self-harm for about 20 years and very few schools are using this information. He provided some statistics and shared that when bias is addressed in schools, academic performance increases significantly.

Public Comment on Presentation

- There was one emailed public comment. The attendee was interested in obtaining a copy of Dr.

Astor's presentation.

**III. Informational Presentation: "Hope After Hate: Resilience in the Aftermath of Gun Violence"
Tina Meins, Senior Program Manager, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund**

- This agenda item was removed

IV. Approval of the Minutes

A. November 19, 2025, Community Forum

No Commissioner discussion or public comments on this item.

Action by the Commission

Motion: Commissioner Roybal moved to approve the minutes, Vice Chair Damsky seconded.

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

Nays: 0

B. December 5, 2025, Commission Meeting

No Commissioner discussion or public comments on this item.

Action by the Commission

Motion: Vice Chair Damsky moved to approve the minutes, Commissioner Southers seconded.

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

Nays: 0

V. Discussion Regarding Youth Involvement with the Commission

This agenda item was removed as it will be discussed in a future meeting.

VI. Chair and Subcommittee Updates

- Chair Levin noted that he would provide his report after the subcommittee reports.
- Chair Levin also introduced two new CRD staff who are supporting the work of the Commission.

B. Vice Chair Andrea Beth Damsky

- Vice Chair Damsky recognized that February is Black History Month, Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month, and Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month.
- Vice Chair Damsky also acknowledged other important dates in February such as World Hijab Day, Rosa Parks' birthday, the anniversary of the appointment of the first openly gay United States federal judge, Joseph Gale, National Black HIV and AIDS Awareness Day, Shine a Light on Slavery Day, the commemoration of the anniversary of the Parkland shooting, and John Lewis's birthday. She also noted the passing of Reverend Jesse Jackson.

- Vice Chair Damsky provided remarks about the communities the Commission has heard from and the work she would like the Commission to elevate. She also shared that she would not be seeking a reappointment to the Commission once her term is up.
- C. Subcommittee on Patterns, Trends, and Prevention
- Commissioner Choi acknowledged the year of the Fire Horse, which only happens once every sixty years. The last time we had a year of the Fire Horse was in 1966. The year of the Fire Horse is marked by intensity, boldness, and rapid change. Historically, a period of political and social upheaval.
 - She also shared that the Williams Institute released a report in December 2025 titled “Inclusion of Gender Identity and Expression in California and Federal Hate Crime Laws.”
 - The committee is compiling quantitative and qualitative data for patterns, trends and prevention. This will be included in the next annual report.
- D. Subcommittee on Resources, Support, and Response
- Commissioner Southers expressed gratitude toward Vice Chair Damsky for her leadership on the Recommendations for Law Enforcement Subcommittee and the work on the Peace Officer Standards and Training video.
 - Commissioner Southers noted that CRD staff coordinated a meeting with Dr. Daniel Koehler, a subject matter expert and author on de-radicalization.
 - The committee has also discussed providing resources and assistance to the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES). CRD will present to Cal OES staff in March to highlight anti-hate resources and support.
 - Commissioners Southers shared with the Commission that he was contacted by the organization, Life After Hate. The organization is looking for partners who would be interested in screening their film “Healing from Hate.”
- E. Subcommittee on Community Forums
- Commissioner Roybal shared that the committee has been working with staff to plan for the forums for this year.
 - The committee has reviewed data, community input, and past forums to better understand where there are gaps and opportunities. Commissioner Roybal shared with the Commission potential topics and regions to visit this year and welcomed feedback.
- A. Chair Levin
- Chair Levin made remarks about white nationalist images and rhetoric that is being spearheaded by federal agencies and federal leadership.
 - Chair Levin also reflected on Reverend Jesse Jackson’s legacy and celebrated the resilience and contributions of African Americans.
 - He also acknowledged Lunar New Year and Tet, and embraced the promise of new beginnings, prosperity, and the strength of cultural density. Chair Levin also recognized the Day of Remembrance for the Japanese imprisonment of families during World War II, Ramadan, and Purim.
 - Chair Levin commented on the need to continue building coalitions that are diverse and that seek to protect the most vulnerable communities.

Commission Discussion

- Vice Chair Damsky thanked Chair Levin for his passion for this work. She also commented on the Community Forums subcommittee report and is in support of hosting a forum in Imperial County and offered to connect the committee to her contacts in the area.
- Commissioner Choi also thanked Commissioner Roybal for the subcommittee report and suggested that the subcommittee focus on the intersectionality of communities in the different regions and learn about practices that are working. She also appreciated the idea of integrating locally elected officials to learn more about coalitions and the infrastructure in the regions. She also wanted clarification on the topic of law enforcement.
 - Commissioner Roybal clarified that the committee has discussed highlighting counties in the state where there is underreporting or no reporting of hate incidents and to elevate some of the policy recommendations. He also noted that we could amplify areas in the state where we see reporting is occurring.
- Chair Levin also suggested that the committee consider locations of the forums as members of the public may be fearful of attending due to the political climate.
 - Commissioner Roybal stated that those conversations are taking place since it is challenging to guarantee people's safety in this moment especially if there are forums focused on specific communities.

Public Comment

- Five members of the public provided public comments on the partners listed on the CA vs Hate website and commented on the importance of supporting victims of anti-Jewish hate in California.

VII. Discussion and Election of Chair

- Alec Watts provided an overview of the responsibilities of the Chair and the nomination process. Chair Levin expressed interest in being Chair for another year. Chair Levin provided a brief statement.
- Alec Watts conducted a roll call vote.

Action by the Commission

- Nomination: Commissioner Southers nominated Chair Levin, and Vice Chair Damsky seconded the nomination
- Ayes: 4 (Vice Chair Damsky, Commissioner Choi, Commissioner Roybal, Commissioner Southers)
- Nays: 0
- Abstentions: 1 (Chair Levin)

There was no public comment on this item.

VIII. Discussion and Election of Vice Chair

- Alec Watts provided an overview of the responsibilities of the Vice Chair and the nomination process. Commissioner Choi expressed interest in being Vice Chair. Commissioner Choi provided a brief statement.
- Alec Watts conducted a roll call vote.

Action by the Commission

- Nomination: Commissioner Roybal nominated Commissioner Choi and Commissioner Southers seconded the nomination
- Ayes: 4 (Chair Levin, Vice Chair Damsky, Commissioner Roybal, Commissioner Southers)
- Nays: 0
- Abstentions: 1 (Commissioner Choi)

There was no public comment on this item.

IX. Discussion of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- Chair Levin made remarks and expressed concern over the use of antiquated or inapplicable laws targeting certain communities in this country. He also expressed concerns over freedom of speech and the fair application of the upcoming elections.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Roybal stated that he would bring this back the Community Forums subcommittee to discuss. Particularly gathering data on people who are being targeted by the federal government here in the state.
- Commissioner Choi shared that Stop API Hate is looking at deportation data to gather information on who is being deported and where to. Looking at this data provides a better understanding of who is being disproportionately impacted. Commissioner Choi encouraged the Commission to explore this publicly available data.

There was no public comment on this item.

X. Discussion of Adding Homeless to Hate Crime Laws

- Chair Levin discussed that people experiencing homelessness are being targeted and are victims of bias-motivated incidents. Chair Levin also highlighted that there is some advocacy occurring from members of the public to add this community to hate crime and vulnerable victims laws in the state.

Commission Discussion

- Vice Chair Damsky thanked Chair Levin for highlighting this issue and suggested that people who are unhoused should be included in this population.

Public Comment

- One member of the public provided remarks about the reporting mechanisms of hate incidents and crimes.

XI. Discussion of Requirements for Hate Crime Training Video

- Chair Levin asked the Commission to provide input on the implementation of the Hate Crime Training video.

Commission Discussion

- Vice Chair Damsky expressed disappointment with how the video is being implemented by departments and how the training data is being tracked and reported. She suggested that the Commission explore whether any records are available from the Attorney General’s office, given that it has been a year since that data was supposed to begin being reported. Vice Chair Damsky also suggested that the Commission look into how robust these trainings are, the frequency of trainings, and if they are meeting the need.

There was no public comment on this item.

XII. Commission Member Announcements

- Commissioner Choi announced that the Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory (RIPA) released their annual report and would like the Commission to request a brief presentation. She also announced that Stop API Hate released a report on anti-Pacific Islander hate and the surge in South Asian hate and would be able to share information in a future Commission meeting.

There was no public comment on this item.

XIII. Future Agenda Items

- Chair Damsky commented that she would like to see the inclusion of youth involvement in the Commissions as a topic on the next agenda.
- Chair Levin also commented that he would like to include homeless, civil rights and civil liberties, as agenda items. He will also work on inviting survivors and victims of hate incidents to future meetings.

There was no public comment on this item.

XIV. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

The Commission may not discuss or act on any matter raised during the public comment section that is not included on this agenda, except whether to decide to place the matter on the agenda of a future meeting.

- There were two emailed public comments. One of the comments was from a member of the Yolo County Gun Violence Prevention Collaborative and she asked if a representative from the Commission would like to be included in updates from the collaborative.
- The second public comment came from the same member of the public who spoke on item X of the agenda. Their email comment also included a newspaper article.

XV. Adjournment of the Meeting

- Meeting was adjourned at 11:52 AM.