



Civil Rights Department

Commission on the State of Hate

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Minutes

Commission on the State of Hate Meeting April 22, 2026, 9:00 am PT

Commissioners Present

- Chair Brian Levin
- Vice Chair Cynthia Choi
- Commissioner Regina Cuellar
- Commissioner Andrea Beth Damsky
- Commissioner Russell Roybal
- Commissioner Bamby Salcedo
- Commissioner Ehsan Zaffar

Civil Rights Department Staff

- Kevin Kish, Director
- Julia Parish, Deputy Director
- Rishi Khalsa, Deputy Director of Communications
- Alec Watts, Assistant Deputy Director
- Rebecca Goodsell, Research Data Specialist
- Adrian Bacong, Research Data Specialist
- Zelene Molina, Staff Services Manager
- Shilpa Ram, Assistant General Counsel

Others Present

An estimated 8 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 outlined the procedure for public comment.

There were no public comments on this agenda item.

II. **Informational Presentation: "Healing in the Aftermath of Hate: Sikh Temple of Oak Creek, Wisconsin"**

Pardeep Singh Kaleka, Clinical Director at Mental Health America – Wisconsin

Chair Levin welcomed and introduced Pardeep Singh Kaleka, who spoke about his experience and work

in the anti-hate space after the tragic event in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

Summary of Presentation

- Mr. Kaleka shared his experience of losing his father because of hate violence. Seven people lost their lives in the shooting of a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin, and the person who committed the shooting was affiliated with a neo-Nazi group.
- Mr. Kaleka discussed that hate crimes against the Sikh community have increased over the past decade and Sikhs don't feel like they can report hate crimes due to either shame or not knowing how to do so.
- The presentation emphasized the history in vilifying people of color, equating whiteness to good, and how this shows up in American society.
- Mr. Kaleka also shared that his healing has been grounded in empathy and compassion. He has collaborated and worked alongside individuals who are or were affiliated with white supremacist ideologies.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Roybal asked Mr. Kaleka what his thoughts were on working in diverse faith coalitions given the rise of white Christian nationalism's attempts to embed Christianity into public discourse and policy (e.g., displaying the Ten Commandments in public schools).
 - Mr. Kaleka emphasized the importance of the shared connection of diverse faiths despite the divisions through his experience with interfaith partnerships. He stated that for Christian nationalists, there is a different perception of Christ and Christianity that is showing up in political rhetoric and seemed counterintuitive to his understanding.
- Commissioner Zaffar asked what needs to change so that public institutions can better recognize targeted violence early.
 - Mr. Kaleka's response was to learn about the subject (of preventing hate and hate related violence early) and its complexity. He also discussed the whole-of-society approach which gives opportunity for collaboration of multiple voices/perspectives to address complex issues such as political narratives and policy issues.
- Commissioner Damsky asked how to integrate compassion and humility into large scale conversations related to hate.
 - Mr. Kaleka's response was to have more conversations, listen to each other, and learn about each other's pain.
- Commissioner Salcedo asked what types of resources and support are needed to live in a hate-free environment.
 - Mr. Kaleka responded that there is a need for investment in mental health supports, basic needs, and community resources. He also commented on the need for safety in places of worship.
- Vice Chair Choi asked what justice and accountability looks like for the communities he works with.
 - Mr. Kaleka responded that this looks like engaging in the process of forgiveness and using it as a form of reclaiming power. As a country, this would look like everyone doing their part in noticing and neutralizing power imbalances.

Public Comment on Presentation

- One member of the public provided comment related to the topic of the presentation.

III. Approval of the Minutes: February 25, 2026, Commission meeting

No Commissioner comments or public comments on this item.

Action by the Commission

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

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

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 2 (Commissioner Salcedo and Commissioner Zaffar)

IV. Discussion Regarding Youth Involvement with the Commission

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Salcedo opened this discussion and welcomed thoughts on ways to get youth involved with the Commission.
- Commissioner Roybal agreed that there should be more youth voice in the Commission's work but to be mindful of tokenism. He recommended that the Community Forum subcommittee explore this and bring back recommendations to the Commission for further discussion.
- Commissioner Damsky also supports this and values intergenerational relationships. She also suggested having more than one youth involved.
- Commissioner Zaffar is in support of this and sees having youth involved as a strategy of early prevention.
- Vice Chair Choi, Commissioner Cuellar, and Commissioner Salcedo had questions related to the structure of the Commission and how youth could be involved. Chair Levin stated that due to Commission's statute, there are limitations on the number of Commissioners but there could be other ways to include youth.
- Vice Chair Choi recommended that the Community Forums subcommittee further discuss and explore meaningful youth involvement in the Commission.

There were no public comments on this item.

V. Chair and Subcommittee Updates

- Chair Levin welcomed the Commissioner Ehsan Zaffar to the Commission.

A. Vice Chair Cynthia Choi

- Vice Chair Choi expressed pride in the work the Commission is doing and the need for investments in programs that support communities, strong civil rights enforcement, and understanding how communities heal.
- She encouraged the Commission to work towards long-term solutions to ensure community safety.

B. Subcommittee on Patterns, Trends, and Prevention

- Chair Levin stated that this subcommittee’s report is the National Data Update, agenda item VI.

C. Subcommittee on Resources, Support, and Response

- Commissioner Salcedo shared that the Commission and CRD staff collaborated with the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and led a presentation for Cal OES staff on anti-hate resources.
- The committee worked with the Possibility Lab from UC Berkeley to conduct research on hate crime sentencing enhancements and have been discussing changes to leave laws and additional supports to help victims of hate.

D. Subcommittee on Community Forums

- Commissioner Cuellar shared that the subcommittee has been planning for this year’s forums.
- Commissioner Cuellar gave a brief update on the May 11th forum which will take place in San Francisco and provided updates on topics and potential dates for future forums.

E. Chair Brian Levin

- Chair Levin provided remarks on April holidays and celebrations.
- Chair Levin also expressed concern about the current violence and rhetoric across the political spectrum and the criminalization of advocacy.

Commission Discussion

- Vice Chair Choi asked about the dates for the community forums and Commissioner Cuellar responded that once dates are confirmed they will be shared with the Commission.
- Commissioner Zaffar shared that Arizona State University has a space in downtown Los Angeles that can be used for public events.
- Commissioner Damsky shared thoughts on hosting a community forum addressing anti-Semitism. Commissioner Roybal responded that the committee has been discussing this.
- Commissioner Roybal also shared remarks on the targeting of advocacy organizations by the federal government.

There were no public comments on this item.

VI. National Data Update

- Chair Levin presented preliminary FBI hate crime data and shared that final numbers may be available in the summer. He also provided data on trends in hate crimes over time, such as the finding that, since 2015, there has been an increase of 88% in reported hate crimes. He shared there is a diversification of attacks, which are becoming more violent.

- Chair Levin highlighted the role advocacy groups play in supporting communities encountering hate as some may be fearful and encounter obstacles in reporting hate violence.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Zaffar asked if the anti-Arab category in the hate crime data vanished from 2015 to 2025 and posed a question on whether media coverage or policies are correlated to drops in anti-hate crimes.
 - Chair Levin responded that the anti-Arab hate reports were included in the “all other” category since there were 350 reports. Chair Levin responded to the second question stating that there was a decline in anti-Jewish hate when there was a deescalation in the Gaza war.
- Commissioner Damsky asked if the data presented included California’s data in accordance with data collection required by AB 449 or if this was prior to having data related to AB 449. She also asked if geopolitics (e.g., wars in Venezuela, Iran) are influencing hate violence against other communities.
 - Chair Levin responded to the first question stating that the State submits data monthly to the FBI but that there may be inconsistencies due to reporting of local police departments. Chair Levin responded to the second question stating that there has been an increase in anti-Muslim hate in some jurisdictions.
- Commissioner Choi asked how reports get coded when victims have multiple identities and when there is an incident with multiple people involved.
 - Chair Levin responded that they are called multiple bias incidents. However, majority of police departments will report it as a single bias incident.

There were no public comments on this item.

VII. Discussion of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Chair Levin announced that this agenda item would take place after item VIII – Commission Member Announcements.

- Chair Levin shared remarks on government power, accountability, and public acts of violence.
- He also made remarks about 1) Dr. Rumeysa Ozturk, a Tufts University graduate student who was detained and had her visa revoked after writing an opinion article supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement of international support in Israel; 2) indictment of the Southern Poverty Law Center; and 3) the obligation to protect free speech and association.

There were no Commission discussion and no public comments on this item.

VIII. Commission Member Announcements

- Commissioner Salcedo announced that the Translatin@ Coalition had the groundbreaking ceremony for their new space on Friday, April 17, 2026.
- Commissioner Damsky attended the American Jewish Committee's, Standing Together Against Antisemitism Community Summit in San Diego on April 19, 2026.
- Commissioner Zaffar provided remarks on joining the Commission.

No public comment on this item.

IX. Future Agenda Items

There were no Commission discussion and no public comments on this item.

X. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

There were no Commission discussion nor public comments on this item.

XI. Adjournment of the Meeting

- Meeting was adjourned at 12:07pm.