



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION

San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission
Full Commission Meeting and Special Hearing on
Quality of Life for Immigrants from Emerging and Small Communities in San Francisco
Monday, September 14, 2015
5:30 p.m. PST
City Hall, Room 416
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, San Francisco, CA 94102

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 5:45 pm by Chair Kennelly.

Present: Chair Kennelly, Vice Chair Gaime, Commissioners, Enssani, Fuentes, Kong, Maldonado, Moses, Paz, Price

Not Present: Commissioners Bernabeu and Moses (excused)

Staff: Adrienne Pon, Executive Director (Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs); Jamie Richardson, Communications Specialist; Kraig Cook, Program Manager; Melissa Chan Office Manager

2. Action Item: Approval of previous minutes

- a. Approval of May 11, 2015 Full Commission Meeting and Special Hearing Minutes
- b. Approval of June 8, 2015 Full Commission Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Paz motioned to approve both May 11, 2015 Full Commission Meeting and Special Hearing Minutes and June 8, 2015 Full Commission Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Fuentes seconded the motion. The motion to approve both sets of minutes was passed without opposition.

3. Special Testimony:

Special testimony was given in regards to the quality of life for immigrants in emerging and small communities in San Francisco. Members of the public were encouraged to discuss the hearing's topic in reference to the following areas: Housing and Affordability; Economy and Education; Healthcare; Civic Engagement.

Alberto Perez Rendon provided testimony on behalf of Asociacion Mayab, a non-profit organization based in San Francisco serving Maya immigrant families in the Bay Area with social services and emergency support, promotes Yucatec Maya cultural values, and serves as a bridge for communication between the Maya community and local authorities, consulates, and the Mexican and Yucatecan governments. Perez Rendon explained that while there are legal services available to the estimated 15,000 Maya in San Francisco, the members of the community speak over 26 languages and come from various cultures that Asociacion Mayab assists. Many recent arrivals are unaccompanied minors that need special assistance adjusting to life here, having come from very traditional and more isolated communities. Asociacion Mayab has a variety of programs for culture and language preservation which is a priority for the community, but like other immigrant communities, housing, employment, healthcare, education, et cetera, are serious issues for Yucatec Maya in San Francisco.

Lara Kiswani offered testimony on behalf of The Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) on the issues and experiences of the Arab community in San Francisco. Overall, the Arab community faces similar



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challenges like other immigrant communities and people of color face in the U.S. There are a growing number of asylum seekers and refugees coming in particular from Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Palestine. Asylum seekers face particular struggles in housing compared to refugees, who usually receive decent services in resettlement. Many recent arrivals struggle with the lack of cultural competencies, language barriers, and racial discrimination. The Arab immigrant community is extremely diverse in their circumstances, and face difficulties—whether highly educated or not—in finding secure employment.

Fariba Nejat of the Iranian Federated Women’s Club testified on the topic of civic engagement and the immigrant community. Nejat explained that the Iranian community is diverse and has a lot of culture to contribute, but is very much impacted by negative media portrayals. The Iranian community would benefit greatly from increased interaction between local communities and immigrant communities in order to increase understanding and break down cultural barriers.

Setu Petaia testified on behalf of the Samoan Community Development Center. The Samoan community, despite being small, is facing struggles as an emerging community in the San Francisco Bay Area, especially in regards to affordable housing and unemployment. About 90 percent of the community lives in low-income housing, and culturally, even though the cost of living is high in this city, it is still important that families in this community live together or near each other. Community is the greatest life insurance policy, according to Petaia.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Old Business

- Annual Citizenship Day, Resolution and Events
Director Pon reminded the Commission that Citizenship Day would be observed on September 17th and if the Commission would like to write a 2015 letter or resolution for the Board of Supervisors that recommends they recognize Citizenship Week and support the efforts to get as many Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) on their pathway to citizenship, this should be done as soon as possible. Commissioners confirmed that this can be done through the Chair and Vice Chair. Staff will draft the language.
- Legislative Updates
Director Pon this deferred this item to next meeting.
- General Comments about the IRC Hearings and Annual Report
Commissioner Maldonado commented on the testimony heard in this meeting, and how small and emerging immigrant communities are often neglected. It is important that the important issues and testimonies heard by the Commission this year be reflected in the annual report. Commissioner Enssani agreed and commented that although the IRC is hearing important testimony, many people are still afraid to speak. Director Pon commented that the Commission has made it possible to document the concerns and place these on the public record through the hearings. Including this in the annual report will ensure that underrepresented voices and communities are heard.

6. New Business

- Commissioner Fuentes invited everyone to attend the upcoming SF Pathways to Citizenship Free Naturalization Workshop and Fee Waiver Assistance on 9:00 am on September 26 at 1 S. Van Ness. Chair Kennelly encouraged commissioners to volunteer as well!



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- Commissioner Enssani made a follow up question in regards to the June of letter of resolution for Senator Graham regarding his statements about the Iranian community. Director Pon and Chair Kennelly stated that this item would be calendared for the upcoming Executive Committee meeting.

Chair Kennelly thanked members of the public who testified for their honesty and courage to speak for their communities, and encouraged them to bring others in their respective communities to future Commission hearings.

7. Adjournment

The hearing was adjourned by the Chair at 7:00 pm.

Minutes prepared by Jamie Richardson, reviewed and edited by Adrienne Pon.