



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION

**San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission
Full Commission Meeting
IRC Annual Strategic Planning Retreat
1145 Market Street, Suite #100 | San Francisco, CA 94103
January 12, 2026 at 5:00 pm PST**

Overview: Members of the Commission will attend this meeting in person. Members of the public are invited to observe the meeting in-person or remotely using Webex or by calling the phone number and entering the access code above. Everyone attending the meeting in person is encouraged to wear a mask throughout the meeting. Each member of the public attending in person may address the Commission for up to two minutes. Public speakers using consecutive interpretation assistance will be allowed to speak for twice the amount of time.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Souza called the meeting to order at 5:23 p.m.

Present: Chair Souza, Vice Chair Chaudhary, Commissioners Abdou, Aljiran, Fara (arrived at 5:30 p.m.), How (left at 8:55 p.m.), Ng, Obregon, Padilla (arrived at 5:30 p.m.), Paz (left at 9:33 p.m.), Ruiz (left at 5:53 p.m.), Traore.

Not present: Commissioners Kennelly (excused), Ratanapakdee (excused), Wang (excused).

OCEIA staff present: Director Rivas, Clerk Shore, Operations and Grants Administrator Chan.

2. Ramaytush Ohlone Land Acknowledgment

We, the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission, acknowledge that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As the indigenous stewards of this land and in accordance with their traditions, the Ramaytush Ohlone have never ceded, lost nor forgotten their responsibilities as the caretakers of this place, as well as for all peoples who reside in their traditional territory. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.

Chair Souza read the land acknowledgment statement.

3. General Public Comment

This item is to allow members of the public to address the Commission on matters that are within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission and that do not appear on today's agenda.

Chair Souza invited members of the public to make public comment. Interpretation for today's meeting is available in Ukrainian and Spanish.

1. David Bogachyk, executive director of the Ukrainian Services and Cultural Center – Refugee Integration Services Program, discussed challenges helping his clients, who are mainly Ukrainian humanitarian parolees and TPS holders.

2. A Ukrainian interpreter read the rest of David's comment, noting that many clients were denied benefits based on immigration status. Parolees without TPS were ineligible for Free City College, and those with pending work authorization couldn't access career training. With the end of Jewish Family and Children's Services' Ukrainian program, free legal aid for Ukrainians in San Francisco is no longer available.

3. Hanna, a Ukrainian community member and co-founder of the Ukrainian Refugee Community of San Francisco, spoke through an interpreter about stress caused by immigration status changes and denied work authorization. She urged the City to restore free immigration legal services previously provided by Jewish Family and Children's Services.

4. Alona, from Kyiv, shared her family's struggles applying for immigration benefits and noted that Jewish Family and Children's Services no longer offers legal services for Ukrainians.

5. Rich Whipple, former OCEIA deputy director, urged the IRC to lead the City's response with a bold statement affirming immigrant rights. He noted other cities have boosted funding and mayors have condemned Renee Nicole Good's murder. He also referenced his departure from OCEIA after 16 years of service.

6. The next speaker read the second part of Rich Whipple's comment, noting that despite a union contract requiring 30 days' notice, his email and computer access were revoked immediately. He raised concerns about retaliation, a culture of fear, and investigatory notices sent to staff aware of the dismissal.

7. The next speaker read the third part of Rich Whipple's comment, highlighting his advocacy for equity, opposition to OCEIA budget cuts, and leadership in earning San Francisco a 5-star "Welcoming City" certification. He said City leadership instructed him not to publicize this achievement and noted he was told he was "too close to the community."

8. The next speaker read the fourth part of Rich Whipple's comment, noting OCEIA's loss of the

Community Ambassadors Program, staff positions, and reduced grant funding for youth, immigrant engagement, Irish immigrants, and language access—while the IRC stayed silent. He urged the IRC to push the City on immigrant rights by asking bold questions, centering community needs, and demanding more, rather than seeking permission.

9. The next speaker read the final part of Rich Whipple's comment, thanking those who supported for him, and thanking the Commission for uplifting immigrant communities.

10. Allison Miranda, a DreamSF Fellow working with Acción Latina, described Rich Whipple's support for fellows and the impact of his departure on the program.

11. The next speaker expressed anger over Rich Whipple's dismissal and urged Commissioners to reflect on their reactions to public comment during the December meeting.

12. The next speaker called for an explanation from the OCEIA Director, criticized the email response sent by Chair Souza, and called on Commissioners to take action.

13. Luis Calixto, a former DreamSF fellow, expressed support for Rich Whipple, raised concerns about the lack of communication surrounding his departure, and referenced media coverage by the Bay Area Reporter.

14. The next speaker, a former colleague of Rich Whipple's who spoke in her personal capacity, criticized the dehumanizing manner of his dismissal and the Commission's dismissive response to public commenters at its December meeting. She stressed that the request was not to intervene in hiring decisions, but to urge the Commission to lead, challenge unjust actions, and show courage rather than remain silent in the face of harm.

15. Diana Silva urged Commissioners to reflect on accountability regarding Rich Whipple's departure, expressed frustration at having to repeatedly explain the issue, and called for action to ensure accountability and prevent future occurrences.

16. The next speaker criticized Chair Souza's email response, emphasized Whipple's years of service and impact, and objected to requiring community members to attend multiple meetings. They called for acknowledgment of Whipple's contributions, meaningful accountability, and responsive engagement.

17. Inez Jimenez of the YMCA speaker asserted that Rich Whipple deserved an in-person explanation for his dismissal, and questioned why the community was not informed about the decision.

18. Angelina Romano, a social worker with SFUSD, raised concerns about the City's culture toward refugees and immigrants, calling the silence "deafening" and citing murders of community members by ICE; warned that the culture of OCEIA and City Hall is one that dismisses outspoken voices; and urged the Commission to push back and demand louder advocacy.

Chair Souza thanked community members, affirmed the Commission's commitment to immigrant communities, and closed public comment before moving to the next agenda item. Commissioner Obregon asked about clarifying questions; Chief City Attorney Cabrera advised that discussion should occur under agenda item 5.

4. Overview of Ethics Rules, Meeting Rules and Procedures (Deputy City Attorney Ana Flores and Chief Attorney Alicia Cabrera, City Attorney's Office)
(Information)

This item allows Deputy City Attorney Ana Flores and Chief Attorney Alicia Cabrera of the City Attorney's Office to provide an overview of rules regarding ethics, conflict of interest, and political activities; meeting rules and procedures; and the role of the Commission.

Deputy City Attorney Michael Gerchow and Chief Attorney Alicia Cabrera of the City Attorney's Office reviewed ethics rules, Commission rules and procedures, and the role of the Commission, and answered questions from the Commissioners.

Chair Souza called for public comment, and there was one public comment on this item.

1. The speaker raised an ethical question about whether an employee can slander another employee's reputation.

5. Action Item: 2026 Planning Retreat – Approval of IRC Policy and Action Plan (Director Rivas)
(Information/Discussion/Action)

This item allows the Chair to introduce the discussion, the Vice Chair to present the results of the pre-retreat survey on Commissioners' top priorities for the upcoming year, and the OCEIA Director to present an overview of the work OCEIA has already done on these topic areas, and allows the OCEIA Director to facilitate a discussion among Commissioners to identify specific activities they would like to accomplish under each top priority area, along with the anticipated timeline and lead Commissioners for each activity.

Chair Souza called for public comment at the beginning of this item and there was one public comment.

1. The speaker stated that they were told by two Commissioners that their concerns would be addressed by the new year, noted that the Commission has only replied by email, and said that community members are still waiting for an explanation.

Commissioners noted difficulty hearing. Director Rivas said interpreters would be repositioned and reminded everyone to be quiet while someone is talking.

Chair Souza welcomed Commissioners to the strategic planning retreat. Director Rivas provided an overview of Commissioners' roles and responsibilities, the goals of the retreat, and the tools the Commission can use to take action. Vice Chair Chaudhary discussed the top priority areas for the year that Commissioners identified in their pre-retreat surveys: 1) local responses to protect and support immigrant communities amid federal immigration enforcement; and 2) City support for immigrant services. Commissioners also listed language access, which is already part of the IRC's work. Director Rivas led Commissioners in a discussion about the outcomes they would like to see and specific actions the Commission can accomplish.

Under local response, Commissioners discussed two action steps. First, the Commission discussed assigning Commissioners to follow up on one or more recommendations from the IRC's October resolution. Second, the Commission discussed assigning Commissioners to serve as liaisons to members of the Board of Supervisors.

Under City support for immigrant services, Commissioners discussed three action steps. First, the Commission discussed writing a letter to City leadership on immigrant community priorities. Second, Commissioners discussed hosting a hearing on immigrants' access to health care, and continuing to host special-topic presentations throughout the year of one to two speakers. Each hearing will be led by a Commissioner, who will meet with the Executive Committee in advance to plan the hearing, and will invite speakers and organize the hearing. Third, Commissioners discussed follow-up actions from the public comments received during the December and January meetings regarding the departure of OCEIA Deputy Director Rich Whipple. The Commission will write a letter to the City Administrator to share the community concerns and public comments received, and to facilitate a meeting between the City Administrator and community members.

Director Rivas summarized the proposed activities. Commissioner Abdou made a motion to approve the Commission's action plan, seconded by Vice Chair Chaudhary. Chair Souza called for public comment and there was no public comment on this item. The motion was approved. Director Rivas will bring the item to the next Executive Committee meeting to discuss follow-up actions.

6. Action Item: Annual Officer Elections (Director Rivas)

(Action)

- a. Election of Commission Chair
- b. Election of Commission Vice Chair

Chair Souza deferred this item to the next Full Commission meeting.

7. Announcements

(Information)

This item allows Director Rivas and Commissioners to provide brief announcements on IRC programs and activities.

Director Rivas made a brief announcement on the work of the Commission Streamlining Task Force. Chair Souza called for public comment and there was no public comment on this item.

8. Adjournment

Chair Souza adjourned the meeting at 9:40 p.m.