

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

City and County of San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN RIGHTS DIVISION

Draft Meeting Minutes

September 8, 5:00 PM

ROSTER OF COMMISSIONERS

Karen Clopton, Chairperson

Joseph Sweiss, Vice-Chairperson

Vanessa R. Aquino, Commissioner

Hala Hijazi, Commissioner

Mark Kelleher, Commissioner

Jason Pellegrini, Commissioner

Leah Pimentel, Commissioner

Irene Yee Riley, Commissioner

Ann Champion Shaw, Commissioner

Michael Sweet, Commissioner

Sheryl Evans Davis, EdD
Executive Director

For more information, contact the Commission Secretary at 415-252-2500
Agenda and other information are available on the HRC website: www.sfgov.org/sfhumanrights

Meeting was called to order at 5:03pm.

Ramaytush Ohlone Land Acknowledgement – Commissioner Vanessa Aquino.

1. 2:38 CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL OF COMMISSIONERS

Present: Vanessa R. Aquino, Karen Clopton, Ann Champion Shaw, Hala Hijazi, Leah Pimentel, Irene Yee Riley, Michael Sweet, Joseph Sweiss.

Absent: Mark Kelleher, Jason Pellegrini

Meeting was called to order with 8 Commissioners present.

2. 3:04 FINDINGS TO ALLOW TELECONFERENCED MEETINGS UNDER CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 54953(e) (Action Item)

The Commission will discuss and possibly adopt a Resolution setting forth findings necessary to authorize the Commission to hold meetings remotely under the modified Brown Act provisions in Assembly Bill 361.

Presentation: Cathy Mulkey Meyer, San Francisco Human Rights Commission

Public Comment

Motion to allow teleconferenced meetings under California government code section 54953(e). 1st Vice Chair Joseph Sweiss , 2nd Commissioner Reverend Ann Champion Shaw.

Motion carried by acclamation: Vanessa R. Aquino, Ann Champion Shaw, Karen Clopton, Hala Hijazi, Leah Pimentel, Irene Yee Riley, Michael Sweet, Joseph Sweiss

Absent: Mark Kelleher, Jason Pellegrini

3. 5:55 GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT (Discussion Item)

Members of the public may address the Commission on matters that are within the Commission's jurisdiction and are not on today's agenda.

There was no general public comment

4. 6:58 ADOPTION OF THE AUGUST 11, 2022 MEETING MINUTES (Action Item)

Review and anticipated adoption of minutes from the Commission's August 11, 2022 meeting minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment on this item.

COMMISSION COMMENT

There was no commissioner comment on this item.

Motion to accept the August 11, 2022 minutes as submitted. 1st Commissioner Leah Pimentel, 2nd Commissioner Irene Yee Riley.

Motion carried by acclimation: Vanessa R. Aquino, Ann Champion Shaw, Karen Clopton, Hala Hijazi, Jason Pellegrini, Leah Pimentel, Irene Yee Riley, Michael Sweet, Joseph Sweiss

Absent: Mark Kelleher

5. 8:55 EDUCATION EQUITY UPDATE *(Discussion Item)*

Presentation on a variety of Education Equity initiatives supported and led by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission.

Presentation: Sheryl Evans Davis, EdD, Executive Director, Human Rights Commission

Jessica Campos, Office of Racial Equity

De'Anthony Jones, My Brother and Sister's Keeper, Opportunities For All

Hatim Mansori, Middle School and High School Programs

Stephanie Garcia, Dream Keeper Initiative

Cathy Mulkey Meyer, Equity Studies Task Force, Close Juvenile Hall Working Group

Executive Director Sheryl Evans Davis led a presentation about various initiatives including: Dream Keeper Initiative Brighter Futures, My Brother's and Sister's Keeper, Opportunities for All, Middle School Programs, SFUSD Equity Studies Task Force, Everybody Reads program, partnerships with the San Francisco Public Library.

PUBLIC COMMENT There was no public comment on this item.

Hope Williamsburg: Treasure Island, I am a mother of a nine year old and a seven year old. And so often they go into the classrooms and they're the only Black "things" in the classroom. Having access to library books, and access to resources has truly made a difference during the COVID 19 lock down. Her daughter told the teacher that she loved reading books that are brown books, books that look like me. This experience has changed her daughter's passion for learning. She also highlighted the importance of the staff reaching to partner with and looking outside the box to involve parents like her, who want to be involved in school leadership to change the pipeline to prison system.

Nate Ford: Applauded HRC commitment to education in whole, especially during the pandemic. Nate has worked with some of the roughest kids and it was difficult at first. As they worked together through the pandemic, kids were getting up ready to learn, excited about reading. He created charts, so kids could measure their progress, how many pages they read a daily and

were rewarded for their work. Nate thanked HRC for everything and the department work has been a blessing to kids in all communities.

COMMISSIONER COMMENT

Commissioner Reverend Champion Shaw commended Dr. Davis and the rest of the staff for their presentations. Impressed with the thoroughness and detail, and commitment to education equity moving forward. She asked how have the programs impacted participants middle and high schools, what HRC staff has heard feedback from the youth themselves. She wanted to know about how the youth are encouraged to make their next step toward college and universities, acknowledging Morehouse, a Historical Black College/University.

Commissioner Aquino applauded Director Davis and the team for their hard work. Commissioner Aquino is an avid reader, and noted how exciting it is to know youth are enjoying reading. She asked the age limits for young people participating in the My Brother's and Sister's Keeper programs and if the program will continue.

Commissioner Riley: I also want to know that well, first of all, thank you very much for the presentation, all of your hard work, Director Davis and your team. How do we reach out to recruit this use? Do we work with nonprofit organizations? Or do we reach out directly to different families?

6. **55:28 “CAN WE LIVE” ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES** (*Discussion Item*)
Introducing the shared work between the San Francisco Human Rights Division and “Can We Live” program.

Arieann Harrison, Executive Director and Founder, Marie Harrison Community Foundation
Public Comment

Arieann Harrison shared her work advocating for soil remediation and that the federal government fulfill their promise to clean up the Bayview Hunters Point super fund site. That the City and County of San Francisco commit to building housing, schools and infrastructure in clean, uncontaminated, and environmentally safe areas. Ms. Harrison shared that uranium and plutonium is in her blood chemistry tests, from her life long exposure to

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tanya Landau: Tanya works with the Marie Harrison foundation and urged the commission to understand her greatest fear is for her granddaughter. They live on the top of the cliffs, which is known as ground zero because when the wind blows, the contaminated shipyard soil blows up to her house. Her blood chemistry results aren't as contaminated as other people, she would like to track community member's health and focus on conducting health screenings on people who have already had cancer and respiratory issues. Compare infant and maternal mortality in the Bayview Hunters Point to the rest of the city. The pollution and contamination in the Bayview also impacts San Francisco, the broader Bay Area, and eventually the world.

Cleanup is very, very important, especially impacts from sea level rise, earthquakes and the possibility of tsunamis. Hunters Point is the second largest Superfund site. Commissioners need to take in everything presented and understand this contamination impacts everyone.

COMMISSIONER COMMENT

Commissioner Reverend Ann Champion Shaw thanked Arieann for their work in their mother's legacy, to elevate environmental justice, which isn't profiled as much as it should be. Rev. Shaw said the commission is available to support their work.

7. 1:12:50 EID AL-FITR AND EID AL-ADHA ACKNOWLEDGEMENT *(Discussion Item)*

This is time for community to discuss acknowledgement of the Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha cultural celebration and significance.

Public Comment

PUBLIC COMMENT

Hatim Mansori is a Moroccan immigrant who grew up in a Muslim household. From a perspective of youth civic engagement, this is a success story. A group of students from Wallenberg High School were inspired by other cities that officially recognize Muslim cultural holidays. San Francisco has a legacy of being very progressive very inclusive. Students were inspired by Lunar New Year, another cultural holiday has been officially recognized. San Francisco is a city where different communities live, people living in this city should come together and learn how to honor and respect other groups of people and cultures. People from different perspectives could choose to view this ruling as unfair, because their group might not be represented in the same way. Or they could view this as, the Muslim community has opened the door for their communities to also advocate for an official recognition of their culture. This could open many doors for people from different cultures to prosper.

Huish: Caseworker and Community Organizer at the Arab Resource and Organizing Center in San Francisco thanked the Commission for working with Sara Ouchene in 2021 when she collected petition signatures. The community is really excited and sees this recognition as an equity issue. Black and Brown San Francisco students who do celebrate either miss school for the day, miss school work to celebrate their culture, traditions. This is a blueprint for the way other communities can engage in a process to see themselves and their traditions recognized in San Francisco. The Muslim community, like so many in San Francisco, are over policed and underfunded. They deal with systemic racism, immigration issues, anti-Muslim Trump era and Bush era, and anti Arab violence.

A group of children made short comments: Thanked the commission for recognizing the Muslim holiday and pleased to see Muslim culture and tradition recognized in school history. This recognition gives provides a sense of relief so they don't have to worry about how they are going to take time off from school to be able to spend time with their family and other members

of their community. Taking the day off will allow students to see their cousins and family from different countries.

Alida Fisher is a member of Mission High School PTSA executive board and expressed thanks to the Commission for recognizing holidays and making students feel welcome and included. Mission High has an Arabic pathway, this decision impacts their students. Mission PTSA wrote a letter of support to the school board back in April and will send that letter to the commission secretary.

Kelly Walsh is a former parent at Redding Elementary and a new parent at Willie Brown Middle School. And thanked the Commission for supporting Muslim students and the community. She has seen the impact of her son's classmates having to miss school thinks it is important to have diverse communities and cultures celebrated, not only for Muslim students but for all of SFUSD students, leading to equity.

Julie supported the recognition of the Eid holiday and thanked the Human Rights Commission for being the first institution in San Francisco respond to Sarah and Muslim youth who care passionately about the recognition and worked to get the day recognized. Julie's children attend a with Arabic language pathways and has seen some of the inequities. COVID testing was done at their school during Eid, so students who were out honoring Eid missed testing. They also have had to choose between academics and tests and celebrating with their families. Julie's Jewish family loves celebrations, and is also disheartened to see that some Jewish organizations have felt like it's important to oppose this holiday. She feels her kids have benefitted from learning about other cultural holidays, resulting her kids being excited to learn about their own culture religious backgrounds. Government observance of Muslim holidays is determined on the local level, municipalities in Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and other states that have similar observances.

Ms. Huisman is the senior government relations coordinator for the Council on American Islamic Relations and thanked the commission for support recognizing the holidays that are incredibly important to Muslims around the world, in San Francisco, and the Bay Area. Growing up he had to choose between going to school and participating in the Eid holidays, which was more difficult in high school when they had to miss tests. No student should have to choose between attaining an education and recognizing and celebrating with their families. Some have said this violates the Establishment Clause, it does not. There has a rise in hate incidences in schools across the bay area and across the country against Muslims and this recognition is an important step to push back against hate.

Sabina Wildman is a substitute teacher and has worked at the Tenderloin Community School attended by many Muslim students and a former Lowell High School student. They thanked the HRC for acknowledging the holidays. This is a critical equity issue effecting mostly Black and Brown Muslim students, it is important to support these students success. Sabina is excited her

children and future generations will be able to participate and is unsure why anyone could really be opposed to the holiday.

Liz Liebman is a San Francisco resident and member of Jewish Voice for Peace Bay Area who supports the resolution, they know there has been backlash their own Jewish community saying that this resolution is anti semitic because it Jewish holidays from being observed by SFUSD. She said arguments against the resolution are based in racism and Islamophobia because the resolution does not say other communities should be excluded. SFUSD and the Board of Education have the authority and have the opportunity to work with community and would not be seen as exclusionary. This resolution sets an champions inclusivity.

Vikram Aiyer formerly worked in the Obama White House staff. He attended public school in the East Bay and is the son of Indian immigrants. Growing up, from third grade through high schools, they celebrated the Eid holiday with Muslim neighbors and classmates, that experience enriched him, his family, and his outlook. This was a way for him to understand a different culture and gain a broader understanding of the household rituals, foods, cuisines and celebration of another religion outside their own worldview. Vikram is grateful to the commission supporting in the past and reopening conversation so stakeholder can provide more input. He supports the school district to continue to celebrate this from a secular and cultural perspective, as it is just as important to celebrate other secular holidays throughout the calendar year, including Lunar New Year, Juneteenth and the like. He asked the commission to make clear to the school board that any reexamination of this issue should be a broader conversation how to recognize more cultural moments.

Omar Rakwan (spelling) is a former Immigrant Rights Commissioner for the City and County of San Francisco, a small business owner, and a parent of two young girls. They thanked the Commission, recognizing their friend, colleague and mentor, Commissioner Hijazi on her work on this equity issue. Their experience as a Muslim growing up in America has been a feeling of being left out, this is an important way for their community to feel included. Deciding between attending school or eat and prayer was a challenge on many different levels, they worry about their daughters facing the same issue. This recognition supports Muslims, showing that they do exist, they specifically wanted to recognize Muslim immigrant communities living in San Francisco from Yemen, Egypt, and Palestine.

Elliot Hellman is an active member of their synagogue in San Francisco and the Jewish Voice for Peace. They felt recognizing the Eid holiday is about honoring the traditions of Muslim neighbors and children attending public schools, not about not recognizing any other holidays. Not about Palestine, not about Jewish faith. Opposition to this initiative stems from applying support for Palestine as a litmus test for choosing who to support and who to fight, a scarcity mindset that there's not enough joy or goodwill to go around and the possibility to respect and support Jews, Muslims and everybody else. Elliot follows the Jewish teachings to love one another as you love yourself and has enough love to support and celebrate the Eid holiday initiative without detracting from practicing their faith and traditions.

Lara Kiswani is the Executive Director of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center and sits on the Equity Advisory Council for the San Francisco Planning Department. They thanked the commission for passing the resolution supporting underrepresented and undercounted students and families living in San Francisco. Three dozen community based organizations across the city have also voiced support for Eid as a holiday in the school district, including United Educators of San Francisco. Students, families and Muslim staff have all asked for this time off for years because it impacts their daily lives. Passage of the resolution is a win for everybody, just like Juneteenth and Lunar New Year was a win for everybody. They are disheartened by the controversy, a reflection of the sad state of affairs San Francisco, indicating progress towards racial equity is being attacked by the right wing. The Human Rights Commission, Office of Racial Equity are instrumental in the city, passage of this resolution reflects commitment to the City and County of San Francisco's mandate. They called on the Board of Education to implement it within the school district.

Moina Shaig is a parent of four kids and thanked the commission for passing the resolution. Their kids were never able to have a holiday, but it was treated as an excused absences. Their kids missed tests and projects. They feel if San Francisco is an inclusive community, San Francisco would make the children feel like they belong, this will be a boost for Muslim students to know that Eid is celebrated, being part of the community. Right now they don't because there are no holiday recognitions.

Nadia Rahman thanked the commission for the resolution which informed the Board of Education to follow. They feel it is unfortunate that there is opposition and ask people to keep students centered in hearts and minds. They are Muslim and a San Francisco resident, and shared information from a CAIR survey finding more than half of California's Muslim students do not feel safe in school. They feel opposition to this recognition is being hijacked, harming the movement towards equity and making students feel less safe. They feel any backlash is driven by Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiments deeply ingrained within the political system and now into the educational system.

COMMISSIONER COMMENT

Vice Chair Joseph Sweiss thanked all participants in public comment, acknowledging that this is part of a long series of stakeholder engagement across multiple agencies, including a robust student petition drive and many inclusive discussions. They were disappointed and appalled to learn a grassroots student led initiative was threatened by legal action, an overblown threat lacking credibility, a total mischaracterization of the purpose, intent and effect of the resolution, which is why the HRC hosted this important public discussion again. Vice Chair Sweiss is a Greek Orthodox Arab who has celebrated this major cultural event, looking forward to Eid understanding the impact of cultural celebrations and traditions across so many SWANA and Arab families worldwide. Second, Eid isn't the first holiday to be implemented, this is a continuation and inspiration of movements that preceded it. Third, he views legal arguments as

a frivolous, Islamophobic, and xenophobic attempt to belittle the Arab Swana and Muslim communities in San Francisco. New York State and Minnesota are some of the many regions that acknowledged need to recognize the holiday in both government and schools. The HRC's Office of Racial Equity and other agencies have identified the growing Arab and Muslim community as an undercounted and underrepresented population in the city, in need of more resources and support. These communities are counted as white, but that doesn't mean his community does not exist, they have made positive contributions to San Francisco. The school calendar is one of is one that evolves and reflects the changing student body, making him proud that Lunar New Year and other holidays are acknowledged and is the rationale why institutions need to do more to make sure every student feels represented and accommodated, while not compromising the quality of education. He thanked all who participate in public comment, supporting the resolution, hoping this will encourage people to continue moving this forward and thanked Commissioner Hala Hijazi for supporting this effort led by the students. Also recognized the Arab Resource Organizing Center, their Executive Director, Nadia Rahman, and the diverse stakeholder and would be sending an audio recording to the Board of Education Commissioners, hoping this moves forward in a timely fashion.

Commissioner Rev. Shaw thanked everyone who commented online and in person for the amazing experience to hear what this recognition means to children and families.

Commissioner Aquino thanked all who showed up in person and online and, as a native San Franciscan, believes it is great to celebrate Eid, to educate and share culture.

Chair Karen Clopton acknowledged the diversity of the commenters, with representatives from the Jewish Coalition for Peace, and others who identified as non Muslim. This conversation sparked everyone to think about how we live in abundance, without a scarcity mentality and are not trying to take from others. The policy is inclusionary. Islamophobia, xenophobia, anti Muslim, and anti Asian hatred is based in anti Black racism. Push back is institutionalized anti Black racism, pushing forward an agenda based in white supremacy and Eurocentrism. Chair Clopton believes in order to provide opportunities for all, our children must thrive in school, in our parks, and in our recreation, feeling safe and secure. Acknowledging the multiplicity of religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds, often entwined, and practices like Lunar New Year, and other holidays and observances allows community to have a conversation and learn about each other. Fundamentally community is about learning how to live better together in this world.

8. 1:48:49 COMMISSIONER ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY (*Discussion Item*)

Commissioners update the public on activities they have participated in and any upcoming events.

Public Comment

COMMISSIONER COMMENT

Commissioner Riley attended the campaign for solidarity meeting.

Commissioner Reverend Shaw attended the webinar with Mark Lamont Hill, Access to Freedom Dreaming Futures. The presentation focused on the importance as people of color participate in politics. The term “prisoner of hope” was used, in the context that people of color should always strive to maintain hope, keep hope, that hope and hopeful futures are the possibilities for all.

Commissioner Aquino will be attending the Third Baptist Church 107th celebration.

Chair Clopton recognized “Roots of Peace” and their 25th anniversary, for a quarter century Roots of Peace has sown the seeds of safety and prosperity in war torn communities through the life-saving “Minds to Vines” initiative. She recognized the visionary leadership of founder Heidi Kuhn who is driven unwavering devotion to building a better world. The organization has transformed perilous battlefields into bountiful farmland, empowering farmers with new opportunities, and freeing families from the senseless devastation inflicted by landmines. Roots of Peace has focused courageous efforts in Afghanistan and their work will be an inspiration to the world as we prepare to help the Ukrainian people rebuild their country after the war is won. Chair Clopton met the Croatian Consul General, who is also working with roots for peace, and has been for several decades now Croatia, to clear land mines and to plant fruit trees and vineyards and agricultural endeavors in place of these weapons of terrible maiming and destruction of children and families alike.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment on this item.

9. **1:57:08 ADJOURNMENT** Meeting adjourned at 7:02pm.

Transcription of the meeting minutes are available upon request to the Commission Secretary, cathy.mulkeymeyer@sfgov.org.