



Civil Rights Department • Commission on the State of Hate

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December 8, 2023

Community Forum: 12:30 pm PT

Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego
1st Floor: Room D
5998 Alcalá Park
San Diego, CA 92110

The Commission on the State of Hate conducted its meeting and community forum at the address above and via teleconference.

Commissioners Present

Chair Russell Roybal
Vice Chair Bamby Salcedo
Commissioner Choi
Commissioner Cuellar
Commissioner Damsky
Commissioner Feiler
Commissioner Levin
Commissioner Sinnar
Commissioner Southers

Ex-Officio Members Present

Abby Browning, Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Civil Rights Department Staff Present

Kevin Kish, Director
Adam P. Romero, Deputy Director
Becky Monroe, Deputy Director
Rishi Khalsa, Deputy Director of Communications
Alec Watts, Assistant Deputy Director
Marquez Equalibria, Assistant Deputy Director
Alex Hernandez, Information Officer
Gregory Mann, Senior Attorney Mediator
Christina Teixeira, Senior Attorney Mediator
Monica Chavez, Associate Governmental Program Analyst
Rebecca Goodsell, Research Data Specialist

Others Present

An estimated 55 members of the public participated virtually.

An estimated 30 members of the public participated in-person.

I. Welcome

Commissioner Cuellar welcomed everyone to the fourth community forum, reviewed the process for translated closed captioning, and provided a land acknowledgment.

Commissioners Feiler and Cuellar introduced themselves and had the other Commissioners introduce themselves.

Chair Roybal introduced the Mayor of San Diego Todd Gloria.

Mayor Todd Gloria provided opening remarks.

Chair Roybal introduced Senate President pro Tempore, Toni Atkins.

Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins provided opening remarks.

Commissioner Cuellar introduced Provost and Interim Dean at the University of San Diego, Dr. Gail F. Baker.

Dr. Gail F. Baker provided opening remarks.

Commissioner Cuellar shared the CA vs. Hate Resource Line and reviewed the public comment process.

II. Informational Presentations on Threats and Harassment Towards Public Officials

A. Rachel Locke, Director of the Violence, Inequality and Power (VIP) Lab, Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego

Rachel Locke presented the following information:

- A year and a half ago, Locke and colleagues began a study on threats and harassment against elected officials in San Diego County by using a mixed methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and media reviews.
- According to her and Dr. Luna's research, 75% of public officials in San Diego reported experiencing threats, with women more affected than men. Threats have increased affecting both Democratic and Republican officials.
- Threats received by public officials had mental health impacts, including stress and conflicts within families.
- Many incidents go unreported, and normalization of threats is a concerning trend.
- There are bipartisan efforts needed to address the issue.

B. Carl Luna, Director of the Institute for Civil Civic Engagement, University of San Diego

Dr. Carl Luna presented the following information with respect to the research on threats and harassment toward public officials:

- Community conversations were held to gather feedback, with the goal of addressing challenges and proposing solutions.
- Recommendations for addressing this issue include increasing accountability for perpetrators, encouraging officials to document and report incidents, discussions among members of elected bodies, increased protection for local officials, potential revisions of the Brown Act, and enhanced training for elected officials to handle threats and harassment.
- More research on harassment across various public offices in additional jurisdictions is needed.

C. Peter Simi, Associate Professor of Sociology, Chapman University

Dr. Peter Simi presented the following information:

- Disclaimer that the project is funded by the Department of Homeland Security and the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center.
- The focus is on federal charges related to threats against public officials from 2013 to 2022. Public officials include elected officials, election officials, education, healthcare, law enforcement, and military.
- There was an increase in threats after 2017, with another spike in 2021-2022.
- The majority of threats have a clear political ideological component, with categories such as being anti-government and racially motivated.
- White supremacist and anti-government ideologies are common among perpetrators.

D. Darshana Patel, Trustee and President of the Poway Unified School District, Delegate to the California School Boards Association, President of the San Diego County School Board Association, and Commissioner of the California Commission on Asian & Pacific Islander American Affairs

Dr. Darshana Patel shared the following information:

- Described challenges associated with managing harassment while also complying with Brown Act requirements, public comment requirements, and the First Amendment.
- The Board has had experience with public comments involving aggression, divisive actions within boards, and threats to staff and homes.
- Called for adoption of measures like de-escalation, staff training, collaboration with law enforcement, and policy changes.
- Consequently, there is increased stress, self-censoring, and potential loss of diversity among school board members.
- Recommends including third-party organizations' support, data on harassment, and adult civics classes to improve community engagement with school boards and other public bodies.

- Chair Roybal thanked all the presenters and shared a personal story.
- Commissioner Feiler emphasized the human component of the issue.
- Commissioner Damsky inquired about potential corrective actions.
- Commissioner Sinnar asked about demographics of perpetrators and victims.
 - Dr. Carl Luna, Rachel Locke, and Dr. Darshana Patel responded to her questions.
- Commissioner Southers asked about a commissioner bootcamp.
 - Dr. Carl Luna Responded to his question.
- Commissioner Choi asked about the role of misinformation and disinformation.
 - Dr. Peter Simi and Dr. Carl Luna responded to her question.
- Vice Chair Salcedo discussed preparing recommendations for the Legislature in the next report.
- Commissioner Levin asked Dr. Peter Simi about prosecuting hate incidents.
 - Dr. Pete Simi responded.
 - Commissioner Levin asked Dr. Carl Luna and Rachel Locke how they defined threats and harassment in their research.
 - Rachel Locke responded.
 - Commissioner Levin asked about changes in threats or harassments since the pandemic.
 - Dr. Darshana Patel and Dr. Carl Luan responded.
- Commissioner Damsky suggested recommending amendments to the Brown Act for better protection of public officials.

Public Comment

- An in-person commenter raised concerns about foreign actors in online hate.
- Another in-person commentor shared their thoughts on the reasons for increased levels of hate.

III. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

One in-person commentor discussed the rise in antisemitism.

IV. Adjournment of the Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3:07 pm.