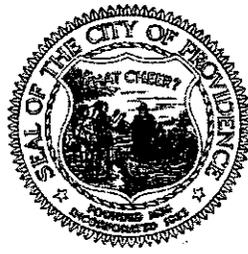


PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION



"BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS" **Community Relations Breakfast Report**

April 15, 2008

Melba Depeña
Executive Director

David N. Cicilline
Mayor



PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

April 15, 2008

Dear Community Leader:

Last year we engaged in a process to rebuild the Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC) through community support and today we are happy to submit the report from our recent community breakfast convened by PHRC. This breakfast was the second of two held since we reconstituted in 2006.

As you review the report you will find that there was a wide range of recommendations proposed during the breakfast including the need for greater enforcement powers, forging greater partnerships, more visibility for PHRC, better media relations, cultural competency, questions on the difference between the RI Commission for Human Rights and PHRC, immigration issues and more.

The Breakfast was instrumental in prioritizing the major issues to enable PHRC to begin the implementation period. There was general consensus that PHRC needs to concentrate its immediate attention in two areas: to clarify PHRC mission and to further engage in community building.

We are thankful that so many key leaders took time out of their busy schedules to participate in this important phase of the Commission. If you have any questions about this report or the implementation period please feel free to contact us at 401-351-0475.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Melba Depeña".

Melba Depeña
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Wendy Becker".

Wendy Becker
Chair, Outreach & Education

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

INTRODUCTION

The Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC) has a two pronged mission:
1) To investigate and rule on complaints of alleged discrimination; and
2) To promote understanding among the City's diverse populations.

On March 26, 2008, approximately 35 community leaders met for a Community Breakfast with Providence Human Relations Commission staff, facilitated by Commissioner Wendy Becker.

The purpose of the Breakfast was to ascertain thoughts and opinions on the direction of the Commission as it pertains to the second mission of the Commission: strengthening relations and promoting understanding among and between diverse populations. This breakfast was the second one held for community leaders, following one which focused on the investigative authority of the Commission to handle complaints of discrimination.

Community leaders were asked to answer questions in three small groups, and report their discussion to the larger group. The three questions consisted of the following:

- **What do you identify as strengths of the community as it pertains to community relations?**

- **What you identify as community challenges?**

- **How do you feel the Providence Human Relations Commission can best help?**

The following is a compilation of the small groups' answers to the three questions. These answers were communicated verbally and written on large paper posted throughout the room. This list does not necessarily reflect consensus of the participants; instead it represents the collective thoughts of the three groups who brainstormed, discussed, and presented their thoughts to the larger group.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

- Long standing city agencies and organizations that do good work, collaborate with one another, are often multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, know the communities, and have good quality staff
- Diversity and pride in racial and ethnic identity—52 different countries represented in Providence
- Acceptance and appreciation of culture and customs
- Political representation is becoming more reflective of the community
- The community is ready to change. Willingness and interest in moving forward. City is small in size, making change more possible.
- People power: students and student organizations, universities and colleges, families, business owners, churches and faith based agencies, community leaders
- Resiliency: People's ability to manage in spite of limited resources and multiple obstacles, including lack of access to power structure
- Affordable housing – service providers
- Strong advocacy groups

COMMUNITY CONCERNS/CHALLENGES

- Additional collaboration needed among diverse groups and organizations as some efforts and services can seem disjointed and/or overlapping
- Competition for resources between and among community groups
- Intolerance by some
- Unity can be a challenge with much diversity
- Tension in the neighborhoods related to race and ethnicity
- Even though increasing, there is limited representation of communities and interests
- Language barriers and difficulty in communication leads to isolation for some
- Disparity in education: Low academic achievement despite good intentions/plans.
- Youth dropping out and being pushed out of schools at alarming rates
- Some segments of our communities are throw-aways
- Incarceration rates are too high
- Affordable housing
- Foreclosures – certain neighborhood targeted
- Youth concerns: violence, lack of opportunity, teen pregnancy, early addictions
- Availability of guns/drugs
- Family difficulties and financial struggle
- Health care cuts
- Immigration issues: current legislation, fear and distrust
- Racial profiling
- No consensus on terminology; need definition of discrimination and hate crime
- Lack of clarity about the history and role of the PHRC and its differences and similarities to the RI Commission for Human Rights (RICHR)
- Fear of retaliation when filing complaints

HOW THE PHRC SHOULD HELP

- Reach out to the community with public forums designed for their input
- Reach out to youth
- Continue to bring people together more frequently than with quarterly meetings such as the breakfasts—to develop a stronger and more visible network
- Report on outcomes
- Serve as a mediator to help groups and communities “iron out” differences and develop better relationships
- Work with faith-based groups
- Develop a strategic action plan with a vision
- Improve the ways in which the PHRC communicates its role, mission and vision
- Partner and build a relationship with the RICHR
- Work on Immigration issues
- Seek best practices in other cities, states, and nations. What can we learn from others?
- Investigate our own history. What can we learn from our past successes?
- Build relationships with employers
- Prioritize: What’s most critical now
- Identify groups that have the resources and capacity to address issues
- Tie it all together – Chamber of Commerce
- Use the media as tool
- Enlist the EEOC to assist
- Establish subcommittees to review ordinance

Following the presentation by the three groups, the participants were asked to help the PHRC prioritize its goals related to building community relations. The priorities deemed important by the participants seemed clear. There was general consensus that in order to be effective, the PHRC needs to focus its immediate attention in two ways: 1) continued community outreach and engagement including regular meetings with community leaders and ongoing forum with community members; and 2) improved role and mission definition of the PRHC, including defining the ordinance, explaining its authority, and stating its relationship to the RICHR.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

The PHRC values the community input we received and strongly agrees with the priorities we believe were outlined at the Community Breakfast. Although we had begun work in the identified areas, we understand that our efforts have just begun and have not reached all segments of our community. We are committed to immediate follow through with the above two recommendations, and will be working to develop a strategic plan to move forward and prioritize the other important ideas communicated to us.

1. Community Outreach and Engagement

There was general agreement that the PHRC should continue the process of reaching out to community leaders and community members. Participants believed it was important to engage a wide range of constituency groups including formal and information organizations, adults and youth, diverse racial and ethnic groups, law enforcement, unions, business leaders, and others who make up the diversity of the City. The group suggested the process of this engagement could be done through continued leadership meetings, outreach at community based organizations, schools, and religious institutions, and ongoing trainings in the community on identified topics of interest.

Action Plan

This will be accomplished through the PHRC Outreach and Education Committee. This subcommittee along with the investigator and the executive director will develop an outreach plan to incorporate the above-mentioned recommendations. Included in the outreach plan will be ongoing community engagement.

2. Improved Role and Mission Definition of the PHRC

There was also general agreement that the PHRC needed to continue its work of defining its role, function, mission, and vision for the community. Many people expressed their frustration in not knowing enough about the PHRC's mandate, the ordinance itself, and how the PHRC was operationalizing its goals. Of particular importance in role definition, was the PHRC's role and mission in relation to that of the RICHR. The group felt clarification was needed and should be distributed in written form and discussed at community meetings.

Action Plan

The Governance Committee will take the lead to further clarify the ordinance and PHRC role and mission as recommended at the breakfast. This committee is charged with the responsibility of establishing bylaws and reviewing the ordinance. This committee will report back through community meetings commencing within three months.

1) PHRC will launch a campaign advertising its mission in the major city newspapers:

- Providence American
- Providence en Español
- Latino Expreso
- Options
- Tiempo Social
- Cape Verdean Newspaper-CVN

2) Coordinate monthly community presentations held in different areas of the city of Providence to disseminate the mission, vision and goal of the Commission. Written information about the Commission will be distributed at these meetings.

3) Executive Director will coordinate one-on-one meetings with stakeholders such as major community-based and faith-based organizations to share our plan and discuss potential partnerships.