

The Washington State Human Rights Commission

Presents:

“A public forum on Farm Workers Housing”

Wednesday, April 17, 2013 6-9PM

Southeast Community Center, Martin Luther King Jr. Room

1211 South 7th Street

Yakima, WA 98901

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners: Steve Hunt, Chair; Clarence Henderson, Commissioner; Charlene Strong, Commissioner; Shawn Murinko, Commissioner.

Absent: Deborah Lee, Commissioner.

Staff: Sharon Ortiz, Executive Director; Cheryl Strobert, Asst. Director; Juanita Soto, Specialist; Stacia Hollar, AAG; Rashelle Davis, Policy Analyst with Governor Office.

Guests: Marty Miller, Office of Rural Development & Farm Worker Housing; Ricardo Rodriguez, One America; Reverend Juliet Hemphill, NAACP; Omar Verduzco, EEOC.

OPENING AND WELCOME

Chair Hunt called the meeting to order at 6:06PM.

Chair Hunt recognized Omar Verduzco with the EEOC, stationed in Yakima Valley; Marty Miller with the office of Rural Development & Farm Worker Housing; Rev. Juliet Hemphill with the NAACP; Ricardo Rodriguez with One America.

Chair Hunt provided introduction of the Commissioners and WSHRC Staff, Charlene Strong, Shawn Murinko, Clarence Henderson, Sharon Ortiz, Cheryl Strobert and Juanita Soto.

Director Ortiz provided an overview of the WSHRC, through a power point presentation.

Question from Audience: If you are found to have been discriminated against, what happens?

Director Ortiz explained the process following a finding of reasonable cause.

SPEAKERS

Marty Miller, Executive Director, Office of Rural Development and Farm Worker Housing: Thanked the Commission for being here; introduced Nancy, also works for the office of rural development and farm worker housing; provided overview about their office's responsibilities: housing development services, community programs and develops farm worker housing throughout WA state. He shared that farming business in WA in 2011, totaled \$9.2 billion and that there is a huge need for workers for spring,

summer and fall, but there is inadequate housing for the workers. For example, a woman and her children were living in a walk in freezer because of the lack of housing. The housing challenges include limited funding sources, suitable land and community opposition (NIMBY). Strategies are needed to minimize nimbyism, for example, educating elected officials and holding voluntary community meetings.

Ricardo Rodriguez, One America (formerly Hate Free Zone): One America works on all issues dealing with civil rights; since Sept. 2001 worked on voting rights and immigration reform; objective for all to be equal and improve quality of life for everyone; a country that has poor people is a poor country; if people are educated, it makes a strong country; strong Yakima, WA and USA; provided website, www.weareoneamerica.org.

Reverend Juliet Hemphill, President, NAACP: Was installed as President on Monday night; deals with education and job issues; organization has existed for 100 yrs in the U.S. and in Yakima for 60 years. Current issues include gay young people being bullied and very few people of color working in the construction industry. NAACP board meetings are held the 2nd Monday of every month; Member meetings are held the 3rd Monday of every month. All are welcome to be members.

Break at 7PM to 7:15PM

PUBLIC COMMENT

Raymond S. Lara: Lived in Yakima Valley 4-5 yrs, his trade is construction; they don't want Hispanics here in construction; discrimination is alive and well in Yakima Valley, can't back down, stand up.

Howard Gorrell: Transitioned to Yakima from Maryland; also worked in Bennington VT; noted that there are a lot of empty building in Yakima- why not use existing buildings for housing, save money, there is also a need to help deaf clients, very impressed by unemployment office but state law requires that you must apply for 3 jobs per week; not enough jobs available to do that.

Nick Marquez: There is a lot of rental capacity; construction bids drop out of the system so nothing happens; how can you effectively apply at a business for a job when the business is anonymous; this is a restrictive barrier, can't go directly to the employer; how do you follow through on an application; unemployment office has list of jobs, doesn't help; would like to research the company before applying.

Audience member states that he has been living in the valley for over 25 yrs, yet hasn't seen progress; re: African American males in prison and the juvenile system; is it racism; the system is designed to put African American males behind bars and keep them there; in school system, same thing occurs; there is a need for multicultural training; money is spent on everything else and programs are dropped.

Commissioner Strong states she and other Commissioners are willing to help educate children about bullying.

Audience member shares that the education system puts a stop to kids telling kids not to bully, etc.

Audience member states that 2 high schools are being built in the community, but the kids of color do not see their people helping build the schools.

Audience member states that there are 26 Evans Fruit sex harassment cases but none of the plaintiffs has won a case yet; dozens of other companies have similar sexual harassment and improper treatment issues.

Another audience member states that he does not know what happened but must follow the law.

Audience member states that the women were involved in farm working outside in the field; each was taken one at a time into the office; this is how these things happen; owner said they will pay whatever to defend the cases, but I won't give it to Mexicans.

Commissioner Henderson states do not give up, there will be another case and you are the change we need to see in the world.

Audience member states that there will be a meeting at Martin Luther King Jr. / YWCA on April 26th @ 6pm, workshop, Stand Against Racism.

Another audience member states remember it took 20 years to get a street named in Yakima, don't give up.

Audience member: Some women showed up for the trial, but there are more who didn't show up because their families were threatened; I came to this country, it looks like country that doesn't care.

Audience member: What can the Commission do to help ex felons?

Audience member: Injury in 2008, worked for WA; went to Dr. / LNI; shocked at state law; fire employee's without notice.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion or public comment, the meeting adjourned at 8:45PM.
Respectfully submitted,

Laura Skinner
Commission Clerk