

Providence Human Relations Commission

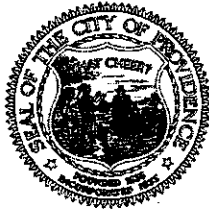
Community Breakfast: The Immigration Conversation

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400 Westminster Street 4th Floor
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: 401-351-0475
Fax: 401-273-0576
E-mail: info@providenceri.com

Melba Depeña
Executive Director

David N. Cicilline
Mayor



PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

January 7, 2009

Dear Community Leaders:

Happy New Year!

We respectfully submit this brief report about the Immigration Conversation Breakfast which was coordinated by the Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC). The intent of the breakfast was to begin a dialogue about immigration and to explore the ways in which we can work together on this and other issues.

The PHRC collected written responses to the questions posted during the discussion. We are happy to disseminate the information and recommendations that were addressed during this event.

If you have any questions about this report, please do not hesitate 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".

Commissioner Wendy Becker
Outreach and Education Committee

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Community Breakfast The Immigration Conversation

The Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC) held its third Community Breakfast entitled The Immigration Conversation: Causes, Benefits, Challenges and Impact. The Breakfast was held October 22, 2008, at the Providence School Department with more than 60 community leaders in attendance. The purpose of the Breakfast was to stimulate conversation, ideas, and opinions from the community about immigration, a topic that is widely discussed but not always fully understood.

I) Keynote Speaker

Dr. Pablo Rodriguez is the CEO of Women's Care Inc, Associate Chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Women and Infants Hospital, Medical Director of Planned Parenthood of Rhode Island, and Clinical Associate Professor at Brown University Medical School. He is a well-known community leader and an active participant in civic and charitable organizations both locally and nationally. He is the host of radio and television programs on WELH 88.1 FM, Latino Public Radio: the breakfast was also recorded for this radio station.

II) Moderator

Commissioner Wendy Becker, PhD is the chair of the Outreach and Education Subcommittee for the PHRC. She is also a seasoned social worker and a professor of social work at Rhode Island College. She is the former Executive Director of Youth Pride, a member of the Governor's Justice Commission, VOCA Review Committee, as well as the Equity Action Advisory Committee.

III) The Presentation

Dr. Rodriguez presented information about the myths and realities of immigration in the United States. Among other powerful points he made, he debunked the notion of a Latino invasion by comparing Latino immigration patterns to other immigrant groups in our history. He also addressed the often-repeated beliefs about the high cost of illegal immigration by citing research showing that when all costs are considered, illegal households actually create a net fiscal benefit to the country.

Upon completion of the presentation, there was a period for comments and questions directed at Dr. Rodriguez. Feedback included a request to broaden the presentation to include other immigrant groups, such as African immigrants. Another highlight was the comment about the shared Spanish language of the Latino immigrants giving rise to increased fear and stigmatization. Many others who spoke with appreciative comments of Dr. Rodriguez' work and related it to their own efforts with immigrant communities.

IV) The Discussion

After the presentation, Commissioner Becker asked the audience to answer the three questions. Below you will find the questions and some of the actual answers provided in writing to the PHRC.

1. What are your responses to Dr. Rodriguez's presentation? (Area of learning, point of disagreement, surprising fact, open comment).

- Allows me to be articulate in this discussion. Kind of knew generalities-but no facts to back it up.
- History and economic data 1900-1958.
- Dr. Rodriguez's presentation was skewed to present Latinos as victims. As a physician you need to discuss abstinence, self responsibility for these young families.
- Loved the current economic impact data.

2. How do you feel racism plays a role (or doesn't) in the current immigration debates?

- Key role. Limits on immigration typically imposed on only those countries (other than Ireland) whose populations are not "white." US came to agreement about imposing limits on immigration to help Ireland-so it's different.
- It does! How can we get people and the media to stop listening to groups like FAIR and RILE and hear the real story?
- Europeans (white people) are putting Latinos against African Americans; there is an underlying resentment/disclaiming between the two groups that has been caused by Caucasians.
- If whites were the "illegal" immigrants today, we wouldn't even be having the conversation!

3. What role should the Providence Human Relations Commission have in the current discussions over immigration?

- A leadership one and a large voice in providing facts to the general public, so rather than simply being ignorant we can make intelligent decisions.

- Educating the city-administration and public about the effects of the Governor's Executive Order on racial profiling and discrimination (and educate the public on the data provided by Dr. Rodriguez). Taking complaints of discrimination based on immigration status.
- The staff needs to reflect all persons of immigration not just Latinos/Hispanics are the focus. We need to include persons from the Asian and African community. The issues of concerns should include these other communities.
- Help students graduate from high school, to get into, and finish college.
- It's great to have people in power trying to make change, but one person cannot do it alone, we need people with the same vision, I also think that immigrants should have a voice. A session that would include them. Let them speak. We can do the research but talk to families that are being affected now.
- Look closer at RI Economic Development Corporation, they are conspicuously absent from the discussion of economics, immigration, and race.

V) Recommendations to PHRC

- Serve as a leadership voice on Discrimination, Civil Rights and provide facts to the public on how discrimination severely limits economic and social opportunities available to Americans, especially immigrants.
- Work to provide a better understanding about immigrants and their contributions.
- Host public workshops to educate/update communities on immigration issues and changes.
- Educate the public about the effects of the Governor's Executive Order on racial profiling and discrimination as it relates to immigration.
- Work on issues of immigration with all populations, especially African and Asian communities, not just Latinos.
- Provide workshops to Providence Schools to educate teachers and students about discrimination and immigration issues.

VI) What other civil rights and community relations issues would you like to feature in future Community Breakfasts?

- Youth focused-how to talk to kids (school aged) about some of these issues.
- Discrimination in health care and access to health care. More economics-contributions of Latino, African Americans, etc.
- Economics, loss of population in the state of persons of African decent who are of the middle class. In a nutshell educated persons of minority background are leaving the RI Community because of economic disparity, lack of jobs, disproportionate representation of people of color in professional jobs.
- Gay and lesbian civil rights and how it fits into a discussion of human rights. Can we talk about sexual orientation within civil rights groups?
- The diverse communities in Providence, how to understand their needs.
- Education, growth within the communities with graduation (high school) students. There are a lot of high school students that really don't understand college and are afraid to ask. I was one of them. Let's encourage [young people] to be in empowering positions.
- Non-profits in RI--doing more harm than good? Do they further "the cause" of maintaining the status quo?

Next Steps:

The Staff and Commissioners at the PHRC will be planning future workshops and breakfasts with your interests in mind. If you have any further comments or suggestions for our programs, we would love to hear from you. Please call the staff at the PHRC and discuss your ideas with us.