

June 20, 2023

Dear Leon L. Williams San Diego County Human Relations Commission Commissioners,

We the undersigned as leaders in the San Diego Jewish community write today regarding agenda item 8, Discussion of Commissioner Khoury's Comments at the May 16th Human Relations Commission meeting.

The Leon L. Williams San Diego County Human Relations Commission (HRC) was established to build bridges, promote inclusivity, and honor the rich diversity of San Diego County.

Commissioner Khoury's off-agenda comments at the May 16th meeting are antithetical to the important work and mission of the HRC. Rather than speak about the importance of Arab American Heritage Month, an opportunity to further celebrate diversity in our San Diego community, Commissioner Khoury's statement negated Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, diminished the historical Jewish connection to the land, and depicted the creation of Israel as a war crime - language that goes beyond legitimate criticism of Israeli government policies.

This divisive rhetoric is perceived as antisemitic by a majority of the San Diego Jewish community, and indeed Jews around the world, for whom connection to Israel is part of their Jewish identity. These hateful comments make members of the Jewish community feel marginalized, and that a core part of their identity is under attack.

Human Relations Commissioners are entrusted with promoting mutual respect and understanding and creating an atmosphere that promotes amicable relations among all members of the San Diego community. There are real-world implications of the concepts and language commissioners use in a public setting and in their capacity as community representatives. As a reminder, this HRC was reconstituted after the brutal murder of a Jewish woman praying in her synagogue in Poway. Words matter.

We request the HRC consider the following recommendations/proposals:

1. We request an opportunity to sit down and discuss educational processes for commissioners to learn more about antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and the Jewish community. This could either be through existing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion initiatives or stand-alone educational opportunities.
2. We request clarity regarding the HRC's parliamentary procedures and assurance that future meetings will be conducted in adherence not only to the Bylaws of the Leon L. Williams San Diego County Human Relations Commission, but also to the spirit and mission on which it was founded.
3. We seek the HRC's affirmation of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors' Resolution on Antisemitism, including the provision that no individual or group within San Diego County should be a target of discrimination, derision, isolation, or violence because of their identity.

4. Given the rise in antisemitism across the country, we encourage greater outreach to and collaboration with the Jewish communal organizations, including through more robust representation on the HRC.

We can and must do better as a county and as a community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sara E. Brown, PhD, Regional Director, American Jewish Committee, San Diego

Heidi Gantwerk, CEO, Jewish Federation of San Diego County

Michael Hopkins, CEO, Jewish Family Service of San Diego

Fabienne Perlov, Regional Director, Anti-Defamation League, San Diego and Imperial County

Rabbi Yael Ridberg, President, San Diego Rabbinical Association

CC: Chair Nora Vargas

Supervisor Joel Anderson

Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer

Supervisor Jim Desmond