



CHAMPIONING HUMAN RIGHTS, CULTIVATING HEALTHY RELATIONS

THE CONTINUING LEGACY OF THE LA COUNTY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

The Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations (LACCHR) has a unique and essential role as a champion of human rights across the County. Human rights are foundational, inalienable, indivisible freedoms, protections, and benefits to which all individuals and groups are entitled as human beings. They are based on the equal, intrinsic dignity and value of every person. LACCHR's crucial work is rooted in foundational human rights principles. And it operates as a key communications link with local, state, national, and international groups and agencies that monitor and advance these rights.

THE EARLY YEARS

LACCHR has been a cornerstone in promoting human rights and fostering healthy intergroup relations since its formation. Initially created by the LA County Board of Supervisors (the Supervisors) in January 1944 as the Joint Committee for Interracial Progress (the Committee), the group was formed in response to what has come to be called the “Zoot Suit Riots”.¹ It was in June 1943 that escalating interracial and interethnic tensions and repeated clashes erupted into violence in the streets of downtown Los Angeles. Hundreds of sailors, soldiers, marines, and others caravaned into downtown and attacked local Brown and Black young men. The assaults finally ended when military command confined their members to their barracks after 4 days during which local police either stood silently by or actually participated in the prejudice-powered hostility. In the immediate aftermath, the LA City Council banned zoot suits, and local papers justified the violent violations of rights as acceptable vigilante justice to quell an alleged, unsubstantiated immigrant crime wave.²

State and County government leaders were far less biased in their analysis and response.³ This included the Supervisors' creation of the Committee to which they assigned responsibility for identifying and eliminating the causes of interracial tensions that erupted as human rights violations in downtown streets the previous summer. Two years later, the Supervisors realized the rights that needed support and the relations that needed strengthening included other intergroup challenges in addition to interracial conflict. So, they renamed the group the Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations.⁴ In 1958, the Supervisors, to provide essential structure and additional resources needed to fulfill human rights that fuel human relations, elevated the Committee into the Commission on Human Relations.⁵

¹ *A 25 Year History: a time for thought...a time for action*. Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 1969.

² History.com Editors. “Zoot Suit Riots.” September 27, 2017. <https://www.history.com/articles/zoot-suit-riots>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 1969.

⁵ Ibid.





LEGAL MANDATE

The establishing ordinance for the Commission identifies “injustices... resulting from prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination” as the impetus for creating LACCHR and tasked it with the responsibility to “eliminate such prejudice and...thereby promote public health, welfare, and security” by providing “practices to achieve better human relations” and assisting “persons and groups...in promoting good will and better relations among all people.”⁶ These aims are supported by California state law which mandates that when local jurisdictions establish Human Relations Commissions they must “foster mutual respect and understanding among all people...make... studies in...any field of human relationship in the community...inquire into incidents of tension and conflict...[and] conduct and recommend...educational programs.”⁷ Eliminating injustice and prejudice, and promoting public security, good will, and better relations among all people, are the very same objectives of internationally recognized human rights. These outcomes are rooted in mutual respect, universal dignity, and nondiscrimination.

HUMAN RIGHTS ALIGNMENT

Four years after the Committee was formed, international bodies began to formally recognize the reality that enabling healthy relations requires ensuring human rights. In May 1948 the Ninth International Conference of American States approved the foundational “American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man”.⁸ The Preamble of this declaration affirms that mutually beneficial relationships are reasonable to expect when we acknowledge that all people are “equal, in dignity and in rights”.⁹ The Preamble of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (the Universal Declaration), approved just seven months later by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948, agrees, recognizing that injustices such as prejudice and discrimination deny “the inherent dignity and...equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” and declares these rights to be the “foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world”.¹⁰ The Universal Declaration calls for “every individual and every organ of society...to promote respect for these rights...and by progressive measures...to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of the Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.”¹¹ These principles demonstrate the alignment of LA County’s values and intention expressed in the establishment of LACCHR with international human rights

⁶ Los Angeles County Code, Title 2 Administration, Division 3 Departments and Other Administrative Bodies, Chapter 2.78. [Chapter 2.78 - COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS | Code of Ordinances | Los Angeles County, CA | Municode Library](#)

⁷ CA Government Code Title 5. Division 1. Part 1. Chapter 1. Article 10 “Human Relations.” https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=50264.&nodeTreePath=6.1.1.1.12&lawCode=GOV


⁸ Organization of American States. “American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man.” <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/mandate/Basics/american-declaration-rights-duties-of-man.pdf> (1948).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ United Nations. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english> (1948).

¹¹ Ibid.






norms. And they align LACCHR's assigned function to protect human rights as a foundation for healthy community relations with the broader, internationally recognized human rights framework.

PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the past 25 years, carrying out this function has included raising the visibility of human rights issues in LA County in multiple national and international human rights monitoring and advocacy initiatives. For example, in 2001 LACCHR led local preparation for and participation in the United Nations World Conference Against Racism. This included hosting a preparatory session for LA County and Southern California with the U.S. State Department. It also included serving as a member of the Southern California delegation to the Conference in Durban, South Africa later that year and meetings there preceding it. In 2009, LACCHR hosted and consulted with the Independent Expert on Minority Issues for the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance. In 2010, LACCHR was included as an advisory member of the U.S. Delegation to the Universal Periodic Review session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. In 2012, LACCHR participated in the proceedings of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at the UN offices in Geneva. Furthermore, LACCHR hosted an official of the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea to intern with the agency for over a year for cooperative learning on approaches and programs. And LACCHR participated in an international conference in Bellagio, Italy that featured U.S., British, Indian, and Australian government human rights officials to consult with U.S. leaders on developing its own National Human Rights Institute.

Nationally, LACCHR has actively participated in the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA), Bringing Human Rights Home Lawyers Network, and the U.S. Human Rights Network. Since 2008, the LACCHR Executive Director (LACCHR ED) has promoted coordination and cooperation on internationally recognized human rights by leading education and application of human rights among IAOHRA member state, county, and city government human rights agencies through plenary and/or breakout sessions with this focus during the organization's annual conferences. For these annual conferences, he has frequently engaged officials and leaders from all levels of government to speak on human rights challenges and achievements. Examples include representatives from the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the City of Los Angeles, as well Special Rapporteurs on human rights issues and Mexico City's Human Rights Commission President. LACCHR ED also worked regularly with the U.S. Human Rights Network when it was a leading force in linking U.S. domestic human rights nongovernmental organizations with international and UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. During the first two years of the Obama Administration, LACCHR ED served on a national task force that included White House officials and U.S. Senate leadership focused on crafting a federal bill to establish a National Human Rights Institution. LACCHR is actively engaged in a national collaboration led by The Carter Center in Atlanta and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to cultivate a human rights culture in the U.S.





One of the highlights of LACCHR engagement in promoting human rights locally is the implementation of the principles of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This was the result of an effort in collaboration with the University of California, Irvine, Law School. LACCHR brought together the heads of the County’s Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) and the County’s Commission on Women with support from staff of the County CEO. The result was a motion brought to the Supervisors by Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell and Supervisor Sheila Kuehl and unanimously approved in January 2021. The motion declared that the CEDAW principles “are fully consistent with Los Angeles County’s values and actions”¹² and called for a new County ordinance to implement them. The new ordinance was adopted in November that same year.¹³ In January 2022 WGI launched a countywide initiative to coach every department in conducting a Gender Impact Assessment to apply an intersectional gender lens when analyzing their policies, services, programs, workforce, and leadership. By using this methodology and assessing gender data, departments can pinpoint gender imbalances within their organization and the services it offers County residents. In November 2022, the Supervisors unanimously passed a motion to require all departments in the County to develop gender equity goals and track accomplishment as part of executive performance appraisal.¹⁴

CURRENT PROGRAMMING

LACCHR continues its legacy of supporting human rights to strengthen healthy relations by bringing people together across boundaries of diverse identities and histories to transform prejudice into acceptance, inequity into justice, and hostility into peace. The work currently is accomplished through five programming streams:


- Human Rights Monitoring and Advocacy. LACCHR staff promotes and protects human rights across Los Angeles County through advocacy, education, and strategic support. Staff provide tailored assessments, justice-advancing policy recommendations, and inclusive community engagement to address urgent and emerging challenges. Guided by international human rights standards, LACCHR helps build sustainable, rights-based practices that promote inclusive fairness and needed systemic change. By partnering with organizations, government agencies, and communities, LACCHR works to create environments where the inherent dignity and rights of all individuals are respected, protected, and fulfilled, ensuring that every person is valued, empowered, and free from discrimination.
- Hate Documentation and Data Analytics. Since 1980, LACCHR has advanced human rights by exposing and analyzing hate-based harm across Los Angeles County. LACCHR’s annual *Hate Crime Report* and *Hate Incident Report* highlight how acts of bias violate fundamental rights to dignity, equality, and security. Customized reports of hate activity are prepared and

¹² “Statement of Proceedings for the Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles,” Tuesday, January 5, 2021. Page 14, Item 9. https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/sop/1101631_010521.pdf

¹³ “Statement of Proceedings for the Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles,” Tuesday, November 16, 2021. Page 9, Item 4. https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/sop/1115926_111621.pdf

¹⁴ “Statement of Proceedings for the Regular Meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles,” Tuesday, November 15, 2022. Page 20, Item 14. https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/sop/1133658_111522.pdf





presented throughout the year in response to special requests from County and community partners. By documenting hate crimes and incidents, staff informs public understanding, supports community resilience, and equips decision-makers with data to develop policies that prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of all residents.

- **LA vs Hate.** In 2019, **LACCHR** launched LA vs Hate, which is a human rights initiative dedicated to uniting communities in the fight against hate and supporting individuals impacted by bias and discrimination. Grounded in the principles of dignity, equity, and inclusion, the initiative fosters intercommunity solidarity, empowers residents to recognize and report hate, and provides access to comprehensive victim support services. Through a robust and confidential reporting system operated by 211LA, LA vs Hate ensures that those affected receive the care and resources they need to heal. Guided by internationally recognized human rights standards, LA vs Hate works to protect fundamental freedoms, foster accountability, and cultivate a safer, more just Los Angeles County where every individual can live free from fear and discrimination.
- **Training.** **LACCHR** staff designs and facilitates transformative learning experiences that help individuals and organizations recognize the importance of cultivating a culture rooted in human rights, justice, and mutual respect. The Training Team equips participants with the tools to respond constructively to conflict, address implicit bias, and develop the skills necessary for fostering effective intercultural collaboration. Through engaging and purposeful trainings, the team empowers participants to create inclusive, equitable environments, free from discrimination that actively advance and protect human rights.
- **Transformative Justice.** **LACCHR** advances human rights by reimagining community safety in Los Angeles County that is fair, accountable, and fosters healing. Rooted in dignity and justice, the team challenges systemic racism, violence, and discrimination embedded in public safety systems by uplifting community-driven advocacy and alternative crisis response models. Central to this work is the facilitation of community dialogue and the collection of lived experience narratives, which inform participatory policy development with law enforcement and policymakers. By bridging communities with decision-makers, the team promotes inclusive, trauma-informed safety infrastructures that protect fundamental rights, reduce harm, and ensure that those most impacted help shape the policies and practices meant to serve them. Guided by human rights principles, this work transforms inequity into justice.

CONTINUING COMMITMENT

LACCHR, with its history, capacities, and relationships, is distinctively positioned and equipped to continue its well-established function of promoting respect for and observance of human rights in LA County. It is in dedication to this very mission that **LACCHR** invests personnel, information, expertise, and funding in advocacy and action to champion human rights as an indispensable foundation for cultivating healthy relationships among all individuals and communities across LA County.

