



May 18, 2020

**Via E-Mail**

San Diego County Board of Supervisors  
1600 Pacific Highway  
San Diego, California 92101  
cc: publiccomment@sdcounty.ca.gov

**Re: Proposed Human Relations Commission, Item #26, May 19, 2020 Meeting**

Dear Supervisors:

We are writing on behalf of the San Diego Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. The JACL was founded in 1929 and is the oldest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States. We support of the creation of the Leon L. Williams San Diego County Human Relations Commission but would like to express our concerns regarding the proposed composition. In sum, the proposed composition of the Commission does not include any designated seat for a member from the Asian/Pacific Islander (API) community, even though the API community constitutes about 12% of the County's overall population and nearly 20% of the County's North Central Region (Coastal, Del Mar, Mira Mesa, Elliott-Navajo, Kearny Mesa, Miramar, Peninsula, University). [LiveWell San Diego, 2017 *Demographic Profiles, San Diego County* (Nov. 2019).]

Human rights or human relations commissions serve an important purpose. As noted by legal and human rights experts, "There are over 150 state and local government commissions or agencies mandated by state, county or city governments to enforce human and civil rights, and/or to conduct research, training and public education and issue policy recommendations on human intergroup relations and civil and human rights. ... Thus, state and local human rights and human relations and other agencies can serve as appropriate and effective sites for local implementation of ... human rights ... obligations and norms." [Columbia Law School, *Human Rights Institute & International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies, State and Local Human Rights Agencies: Recommendations for Advancing Opportunity and Equality Through an International Human Rights Framework*, at 6 (2009).]

The promotion of human rights norms and obligations at the local level is important today as it has ever been. With the recent COVID-19 public health crisis, we are seeing harmful and irrational animus directed at Asian Americans, not just elsewhere in the nation but here in San Diego, much like the harmful and irrational animus directed at Japanese Americans during World War II. [See Michael Chen, *'Hateful' graffiti found at Allied Gardens little league field*, 10NEWS.COM (May 14, 2020); Staffwriter, *Asian Americans Report More Than 650 Racist Acts Over Last Week, New Data Says*, NBCSANDIEGO.COM (Mar. 26, 2020); Catherine Kim, *"They just see that you're Asian and you are horrible": How the pandemic is triggering racist attacks*, VOX.COM (Mar. 25, 2020).] At the same time, we also observe that others have misinterpreted and mischaracterized the history of the unlawful incarceration of Japanese American citizens during World War II in arguing against measures to combat the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Particularly under recent circumstances, it is important not only for the County to have a forum for the public to bring these issues to the County's attention and to have a constructive, open, and transparent dialogue with community stakeholders to address these issues, but also to ensure that the Commission have a diverse and representative composition that is able to see the context and perspective necessary to address today's challenges. Therefore, although we support the creation of the Commission, we ask



JAPANESE AMERICAN  
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May 18, 2020

that that the community's concerns regarding the lack of API representation on the proposed Commission be addressed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Signed on behalf of the San Diego Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League:

*Michael Kurima*  
Director and President

*Joanna Hayakawa*  
Director

*David Kodama*  
Director

*Taiga Takahashi*  
Director and Officer

*Mits Tomita*  
Director