

KANSAS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION HELD MEETING KCK

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A local commissioner of the Kansas Human Rights Commission invited the group to his hometown in Kansas City, Kansas for the group's monthly meeting. Tony Villegas, a labor commissioner with the commission said that though the group had met in small towns across the state, they met for the first time recently at the Hilton Garden Inn in Mid-June.

"Its important for us to bring these people here, this commission here, to at least have a meeting so that they can look around and know that this community is behind them," Villegas said.

Villegas added that each of the seven commissioners involved with the organization focused on a different area, but that the central mission of the group is still the same- to end discrimination.

Villegas began his work with the Kansas Human Rights Commission two years ago, as a labor commissioner, and said that the experience of working with the group was fulfilling. "I've always been active in the community, and this really helps me to learn more about discrimination," he said. "I am really proud to be on it because I'm the only Hispanic on the board."

Kansas Human Rights Commission chair Errol Williams agreed, and said that there is still work to be done to eliminate discrimination in Kansas. "I don't think we've totally eliminated racism, but I think we're starting to erode vestiges that are still related to it," Williams said. "The need for an agency like this to continue to exist is very clear, and we're very committed to serving the various communities."

William Minner, executive director of the Kansas-based commission said that the group's mission was "to eliminate discrimination and segregation in Kansas, and to work towards the improvement of the lives of all Kansans, and to bring about more opportunities and a good way of life for citizens in Kansas."

Part of ensuring the way of life, and quality for all Kansans includes tackling a new area for the group-racial profiling.

Minner said that the group's coverage of racial-profiling issues is still new. "It's not really caught on yet, but as we begin to have more publications and publicity on this, we expect to get more complaints," said Minner. "But we do, have complaints pending in this area and it is a problem which the legislature recognizes, and that's why we have a law now that prohibits this kind of activity."

The Human Rights Commission began to focus on racial profiling in July 2005, after Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius signed Senate Bill 77 into effect. The law made

racial and other types of discriminatory profiling illegal in the state of Kansas. The bill also created a 15-person task force on racial profiling. The governor chooses the member of this task force that included a member of the Kansas Human Rights Commission.

“If the commissioners can make a finding in this issue, or if the commission believes that the finding is correct, the administrative is required to meet with the law enforcement entity and discuss what the commissioner found, and ways to avoid these kinds of situations in the future,” he said. “However, the person who was the subject of racial profiling does have additional avenues.”

The Kansas Human Rights Commission has offices in Wichita, Dodge City and Independence with its main offices located in Topeka. Individuals who feel that they have been discriminated against can find out more information on the organization’s Web site <http://www.khrc.net>.

If an individual has any question as to whether or not they have been involved in an incident of racial profiling, Minner suggested that they call the Kansas Human Rights Commission. There, trained professionals are available to talk and discuss options with the individual, as well as to help the reporting individual to file a complaint.

“I think we as minority people have a pretty sensitive antenna. It doesn’t sound right, it seems a little out of character, and I think we should follow our sensitivity,” Minner said.