



To: California Racial Equity Commission

From: Racial Equity Commission, California Commission on Asian & Pacific Islander American Affairs (CAPIAA), and Commission on the State of Hate

Re: Joint Listening Session in Fresno

Date: December 18, 2024



Figure 1 From Left to Right: CAPIAA's Executive Director Alam, State of Hate Commissioners Cuellar and Feiler, and Racial Equity Commission Commissioner Matthews, and Racial Equity Commission Executive Director Estes

On December 4, 2024 the Racial Equity Commission in partnership with the California Commission on Asian & Pacific Islander American Affairs ([CAPIAA](#)) and [Commission on the State of Hate](#) visited Fresno, CA to host a joint listening session centered on the needs and experiences of newcomer populations served by Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries (FIRM).

In attendance¹ were Executive Director of the Commission Dr. Estes, Commissioner Traco Matthews, CAPIAA's Executive Director Khydeeja Alam, State of Hate Commissioners Regina Cuellar and Cece Feiler. Community partners included the Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries ([FIRM](#)) for hosting and the James Irvine Foundation for supporting FIRM.

The purpose of the Commissions partnering to visit Fresno was to listen to and engage with community and learn about their lived experiences of community members, especially newcomers as it relates to

¹ In attendance was also Assembly Member Dr. Arambula



inequities. Before the listening session began Commissioners and staff received a tour of FIRM property



Figure 2 Commissioner Matthews at the Spanish and Mixteco Community Table

and adjacent housing community to learn more about FIRM and their role in providing resources and translation services to refugees and other newcomers. The FIRM serves several populations including but not limited to Arabic, Armenian, Hmong, Cambodian, Indigenous populations from Mexico and Central America.

Community Building Exercise

The Commissioners sat at different tables listening to community members from different cultural backgrounds share their stories and respond to discussion questions. The

tables were organized with the following communities Spanish and Mixteco speaking (indigenous language from Oaxaca, Mexico), Hmong, Dari, Punjabi, and Cambodian. In attendance was also Assembly Member Dr. Arambula. The attendees were asked a set of questions from different Commissions before returning to a larger circle to share out. One of the questions asked by the Commissioner Matthews to his first table with Spanish and Mixteco speakers was, **“what parts of your community make you happy and what do you like about where you live?”** An attendee response described the feeling of safety, and the importance of treating everyone fairly and the same, so when this happens there can be more joy and happiness. Another response defined happiness as “being free and living here.” Another question that was presented was, **“are there aspects of where you live you would like to see get better and what parts of your community are you proud of?”** This question sparked a number of responses including the need for more language services. Such as when people are receiving medical, social and other services they are unable to get the support they need because of the language difference and lack of respect towards non-English speakers. A number of these responses included incidences of discrimination and the notion of people including their cases being passed along because services do not want to help them. The last question from the Commissioner Matthews was, **“are there aspects of where you live you would like to see get better and what parts of your community are you proud of?”** An attendee described how sometimes they have people who go off to develop their own foundations which can help connect their community to language support so they can get the help they need. Dr. Estes asked, **“what comes to mind when you think of joy/happy and what do you like about where you live?”** at her discussion table with Cambodian community members. One of the attendees raised up how welcoming FIRM is and how the FIRM welcomes everyone not just



Cambodians. Another attendee stated how the FIRM provides language support so they can fill out forms and translate letters from services like their doctor. However, more responses described challenges due to costs of living, limited income, and concern about their safety as members of the Asian diaspora.

Once the smaller discussion groups finished, it was time to return to the meeting and listen to remarks from the Commissions. The themes that emerged from the community-based discussions all overlapped with one another. For the Punjabi table many of them had been persecuted and urged others to remember what they had experienced post 9/11 from being targeted for their cultural garments to experiences of being attacked and targeting young people. The Cambodian, Hmong, and Punjabi tables had common themes such as the cost of living including utilities and rent. In addition, for the Spanish, Mixteco, and other community tables the common problem of language access was a huge issue that impacts their daily lives from school, work, to health care, social services, and more. The Dari table also experienced similar challenges to other groups such as employment discrimination, housing costs, education, and lack of language services.



Figure 3 Commissioner Cuellar at the Hmong Community Table

Considerations for the Commission

The listening session in Fresno was informative for all the Commissions present. The Racial Equity Commission will take the lessons shared from all the communities present to inform the Racial Equity Framework and best practices to further support these communities and others in the state of California. The Racial Equity Commission learned about the bold and powerful presence of the Mixteco, Spanish, Hmong, Dhari, Punjabi,

Cambodian, and Lao people in Fresno and their commitment supporting inner community. The stories shared from the Fresno listening session will be considered to inform the Racial Equity Commission and their continued work on developing structural racial equity and pathways of community engagement.

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