

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

PRESS RELEASE

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Wisconsin State Advisory Committee to Hold Forum on Somali Immigrants

CHICAGO, IL – The Wisconsin State Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights will conduct a community forum on September 16 on civil rights issues confronting Somali immigrants in Western Wisconsin. Although the Twin Cities of Minnesota have been a destination point for many Somali immigrants in the past decades, many members of these communities have begun following jobs to smaller cities and towns in the Midwest, including Barron, WI. The Committee is interested in hearing from some of these Somali immigrants who have moved away from the larger urban center as well as from municipal leaders about the challenges this migration has created for all parties. In addition, the forum will provide a record for future cities and towns to access when confronted with similar changes to their demographics. The meeting will be held at the Ramada Convention Center, 205 S. Barstow Street, Eau Claire, WI 54701 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. CT and is open to the public. An agenda is attached. Among those who are scheduled on the agenda are U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Chairman Martin R. Castro; Representative Roger Rivard; Barron Mayor David Vruwink, Iowa State Professor Abdi Kusow, University of Minnesota Professor Cawo Abdi, and three Somali residents of Barron, WI.

The U. S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan federal agency that conducts research and advises the President and Congress on civil rights issues. Its members, appointed by the President and Congress, are Chairman Castro, Vice Chair Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Roberta Achtenberg, Todd Gaziano, Gail Heriot, Peter N. Kirsanow, David Kladney, and Michael Yaki.

Congress has directed the Commission to establish state advisory committees (SACs) in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and their members serve without compensation. The members of the Wisconsin State Advisory Committee are Chair Adel Mekraz and members Naheed Bleecker, Jeffrey Cooper, Anneliese Dickman, Maria Gamez, Rebecca Grassl-Bradley, W. Lee Hansen, Dan Kelly, Demond Means, Frederic Mohs, Arthur Pontynen, Dawn Shelton-Williams, and William Tisdale. The SACs' reports to the Commission are wholly independent, and are not subject to Commission approval, fact-checking or policy changes.

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AGENDA

The Somali Community in Barron, Wisconsin and the American Dream

Friday, September 16, 2011

Introductions

10:00 a.m. to 10:05 a.m.

Adel Mekraz, Chairman, Wisconsin Advisory Committee

Welcome

10:05 a.m. to 10:10 a.m.

Martin R. Castro, Chairman, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Expert Panel: History of Somali Immigration to Wisconsin and Challenges Facing Somali Communities

10:10 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Prof. Abdi Kusow, Iowa State University

Prof. Cawo Abdi, University of Minnesota

Dr. Saeed Fahia, Executive Director, Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota

The story behind the Somali community in Barron, Wisconsin to be presented by a members of the Somali community

11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Osman Mosse

Nasra Xashi

Mohamed Dirie

Responses to Somali migration: Barron Officials

11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Hon. David Vruwink, Mayor

Hon. Roger Rivard, Wisconsin State Representative

Monti Hallberg, Barron Area School District Administrator

Robert Missling, Barron County Economic Development Corp. President

Q & A and discussion with Presenters

12:15 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Open Session

1:00 to 1:10 p.m.

Adjournment

1:10 p.m.