

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

PRESS RELEASE

July 9, 2010

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Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to Convene Briefing on Bilingual Education Issues

What: Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

When: Tuesday, July 20, 2010, 9:30 a.m. EDT

Where: Lawrence Public Library
51 Lawrence Street, Public Meeting Room
Lawrence, MA 01841

Washington, DC -- The Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights will convene a briefing to hear from government officials, advocates, and the community for the purpose of gathering information on bilingual education issues in Massachusetts. Later in the day, a subcommittee of the State Advisory Committee will hear about civil rights issues in Lawrence.

Background: In November 2002, Massachusetts' voters approved a ballot initiative – English for the Children of Massachusetts – that replaced bilingual education with English immersion teaching techniques. Bilingual education involves the teaching of academic content in two languages, the native language of the student and English. It is designed to ensure that students do not fall behind while learning English. English immersion places learning the English language as the main focus and dedicates most of the school day to teaching the English language. In English immersion, students and teachers are expected to speak, read and write in English without any use of the student's native language.

There are concerns, however, that students placed in English-speaking classes do not receive the assistance or services they are entitled to under state and federal civil rights laws. According to State Advisory Committee Chair, David J. Harris, "The Committee joins other Massachusetts residents in being concerned about the educational opportunities provided to all of our students and welcomes the opportunity to hear from those with specific knowledge about the experiences of students with limited English language skills." Harris added that the committee is especially pleased to be able to convene the briefing in Lawrence, "whose history and current population

make it a fitting location for such a briefing.” Presenters will include elected officials, government representatives, advocates, and members of the community.

Congress has directed the Commission to establish advisory committees in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to study issues and forward advisory reports to the Commission on matters within the agency’s jurisdiction that reflect the views of the majority of SAC members producing the report.

The SACs’ reports to the Commission are wholly independent, and are reviewed by Commission staff only for legal and procedural compliance with Commission policies and procedures. SAC reports are not subject to Commission approval, fact-checking or policy changes.

The briefing is open to the public. For more information contact Barbara de La Viez, Eastern Regional Office, 202-376-7533, or David Harris, Chairman, Massachusetts Advisory Committee, 617-495-8075.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chair Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Todd F. Gaziano, Gail Heriot, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan D. Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, Jr., and Michael Yaki. Martin Dannenfelser is the staff director. Commission meetings are open to the media and general public. The Commission’s website is <http://www.usccr.gov>.

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