December 10, 2015

Estelle Fennel, Chairperson
Board of Supervisors
County of Humboldt
825 5th Street, Room 111
Eureka, CA 95501

Kathy Hayes, Clerk of the Board

The Humboldt County Human Rights Commission has authorized its Chair to provide an addendum to the 2014-2015 Annual Report. This addendum adds information to that already provided by previous Chair Keith Taylor. I have attached the addendum for your convenience.

We trust that you will circulate this addendum for the benefit of all County Supervisors.

On behalf of Chair, Nezzie Wade
HRC Secretary, Jim Glover
It was brought to the attention of the Commission that a number of significant Commission decisions and actions were not addressed in the final Annual Report submitted September 28, 2015. These will be recorded as they occurred in the calendar year.

The Humboldt County Human Rights Commission has a responsibility and an obligation to advise and recommend actions we believe the Board of Supervisors should take for the good of our citizens. To that end, we submitted to you four recommendations that we expect the Board to act upon. In September and October 2014 the ad hoc Homeles Advisory Committee submitted its summary and recommendations to the Commission, including the reports on the Cost of Homelessness for Agencies Surveyed by the Ad Hoc Homeless Advisory Committee in Spring and Summer 2014, including Law Enforcement, Medical Agencies, and some Service Providers.

Based on this body of work, the Commission forwarded its recommendations to the BOS which included:

. . . that the BOS act to declare a shelter crisis and also work with housing advocates and planners to move us in the direction of getting people safe, warm, and dry first through implementing strategies that allow for legal sleep and will help the unsheltered get healthy and safe as soon as possible. This can only save costs to all entities mentioned above. Providing housing alternatives that are affordable, according to reports from the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, will be three times less expensive.

. . . that the Board of Supervisors encourage all county and city departments of law enforcement and medical agencies, as well the private hospitals, to make it a priority to gather service data related to unsheltered/homeless and include it in the HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) for the county. Lack of data impedes our ability to understand this population, its needs and impacts, and results in the use of inaccurate and spurious data, such as that found in the CHIP survey of 2014.

. . . that the BOS initiate County participation in a reliable study of the homeless population and work with the Western Regional Advocacy Project or California Center for Rural Policy and/or Humboldt State University Social Work, Criminal Justice and/or Sociology Departments in undertaking such a study. The commission will also recommend appropriate contacts and resources for this recommendation.

. . . that the BOS follow the recommendations of the Grand Jury with respect to their report on Homeless Veterans including the following:
R1. The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors should designate in the Housing Element of the General Plan Update that certain areas be identified where sanctuaries and or camp grounds can be established.

R2. The Board of Supervisors should encourage Department of Health and Human Services to obtain funding, jointly with other community agencies, through HUD and other sources to build "micro housing villages" and sanctuaries for homeless veterans.

R3. The Board of Supervisors should encourage the Humboldt County Health and Human Services Department to expand alcohol and substance abuse treatment to include more local detoxification services.

R4. The Board of Supervisors should explore ways to reduce barriers to accessing services.

The Commission in consultation with County Counsel amended our bylaws in October 2014; these changes included recommendations that language used in the bylaws better reflect that used in the county code, and when a question arises not specified in the bylaws refer to the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order.

In September, the Commission voted to co-sponsor a Community Forum bringing Andrew Heben to Humboldt to share his ideas on tiny house villages and other affordable alternatives for housing the homeless. In November, the commission received a letter from Charles Bean expressing his extreme disappointment for the HRC agreeing to co-sponsor a public forum in a non-ADA compliant facility. A special meeting was called in which Commissioner Bean requested a presentation to the Commission by Cindy Calderon Tri-County Independent Living Staff person. It was also the 25th Anniversary of ADA, and Commissioner Bean expressed concerns about the lack of ADA compliant situations and reasonable access in Humboldt County. As result of this special meeting in November, the Commission withdrew its co-sponsorship due to the facility chosen for the event (Eureka Woman's Club) not being ADA compliant. In addition, Cindy Calderon shared info with the commission on issues related to ADA compliance and the law. The discussion that followed included the fact that the door to our meeting room is not ADA compliant. We found this to be true in many other instances in county or public facilities as well as private ones.

Per Commissioner Bean's request, Cindy Calderon from Tri-County Independent Living, and Mr. Fulks and Mr. Mattson from the County's Department of Public Works presented to the Commission, at our regular meeting in December, an overview of the progress and challenges of implementing ADA compliance on county facilities. They offered up examples of facilities and projects that have been affected by ADA and a list of county facilities that were (in their opinion) not compliant. Calderon pointed out that of 200 counties nationwide, sued by the D.O.J. IN 2008, all were now in compliance except five, one of which is the County of Humboldt.
Commissioner Bean crafted a My Word commentary for the Times Standard in support of creating more awareness of the need for ADA compliance in our county. And the Human Rights Commission (HRC) wrote a letter to the BOS stating that we encouraged and supported the Board of Supervisors to fund the county Public Works Department $250,000 over and above its yearly approved budget in order to address some of these inequities.

Also in September 2014, the Commission accepted the placement of Social Work Intern Francesca McDonald from HSU with the Commission for the duration of fall term. Commissioner Carol Larson volunteered to mentor and evaluate the intern’s performance.