



The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Anniversary Update on Commission Activities Related to September 11

September 2002

The various reactions and responses to the events of September 11, 2001, have raised a number of civil rights issues. Violence, threats, and discrimination against Muslims, Arab Americans, and others perceived to be from these communities were the immediate issues arising from the attacks. The anthrax contaminations renewed concerns about disparities in our health care delivery systems and the subsequent adverse impact on communities of color and low-income people. Additionally, legislative responses to the war on terrorism, as well as other actions and proposals, have raised questions about their impact on civil rights and civil liberties.

As the watchdog agency charged to monitor the enforcement of federal civil rights laws, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has given a high priority to addressing civil rights concerns that have been raised as result of the September 11 attacks. In the past year, the Commission has been at the forefront of highlighting civil rights issues stemming from the attacks, as well as developing various programs and services facilitating the identification and analysis of a broad range of substantive issues affected by post-September 11 civil rights concerns.

Within days of the attacks, the Commission established and publicized a unique complaint hot line to solicit and catalogue discrimination complaints, helping to identify affected communities and discrimination and hate crime patterns. In the month following the attacks, the Commission held a briefing on U.S. immigration policies in the aftermath of the terrorist activities. The Commission continued to focus attention on post-September 11 civil rights issues throughout the year by holding a briefing on bioterrorism and health care disparities in March 2002 and facilitating a briefing presentation on civil rights issues facing the Muslim and Arab American communities in July 2002.

The Commission also asked its State Advisory Committees (SACs) to organize efforts at promoting tolerance and investigating local civil rights conditions affected by September 11. Those committees responded with forums, briefings, and meetings with local community groups and leaders, which were held throughout the year and spread over 20 states and territories throughout the country. Both the Commission briefings and SAC initiatives provided important opportunities for experts, community leaders and advocates, and affected populations to present civil rights problems to their government

and participate in the process of analyzing the issues and formulating recommended remedies. The Commission's efforts to analyze the potential civil rights problems posed by the war on terrorism over the past year led it to adopt a motion recommending that an Office of Rights and Liberties be established in the proposed Department of Homeland Security. A timeline of the Commission's activities follows.

Timeline of Commission and SAC Activities on Post-September 11 Civil Rights Issues	
September 11, 2001	World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., are attacked. Hijacked airplane crashes in Pennsylvania.
September 14, 2001	The Commission establishes a complaint hot line.
September 20, 2001	Oregon SAC holds planning meeting on post-September 11 civil rights issues with Hillsboro Police Department.
September 28, 2001	Florida SAC is briefed by local citizens of Arab ancestry on civil rights issues facing the Tampa metropolitan area and the nation.
October 12, 2001	Commission holds briefing on immigration policies post-September 11.
November 4, 2001	Ohio SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local educational institutions and community groups.
November 7, 2001	Arizona SAC chair and Commission's Western regional director meet with Arizona state attorney general to discuss much-publicized murder of Sikh merchant.
November 15, 2001	Alabama SAC holds a briefing on hate crimes and incidents in the wake of September 11 with federal and local civil rights agencies, law enforcement departments, and community-based organizations.
November 27, 2001	The Commission's Office of Civil Rights Evaluation meets with the Department of Transportation and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to conduct further investigation into the agencies' data processing systems and their effectiveness at tracking and resolving discrimination complaints and detention cases.
November 31, 2001	New Mexico SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups.
February 12, 2002	Minnesota SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups.
March 8, 2002	Commission holds a briefing on bioterrorism and health care disparities.
March 26, 2002	Florida SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local government agencies, educational

	institutions, and community groups in Miami.
April 11 2002	Wisconsin SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local educational institutions and community groups.
April 23, 2002	Utah SAC holds a planning meeting on post-September 11 civil rights issues in conjunction with the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Utah Department of Public Safety.
April 24, 2002	Washington SAC holds a planning meeting on post-September 11 civil rights issues in conjunction with state and local government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups.
April 24, 2002	Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia SACs begin a two-day inter-SAC community forum on civil rights concerns in the greater Washington, D.C., area in the aftermath of September 11.
May 15, 2002	Colorado SAC holds a planning meeting on post-September 11 civil rights issues in conjunction with the Department of Justice and the Colorado Civil Rights Division.
May 15, 2002	California SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups in San Diego.
May 16, 2002	Alaska SAC holds a planning meeting on post-September 11 civil rights issues in conjunction with state and local government agencies, tribal institutions, and community groups.
May 20, 2002	Indiana SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups.
May 23, 2002	North Dakota SAC holds a community forum on civil rights issues facing Muslims and Arab Americans in North Dakota.
June 17, 2002	Illinois SAC begins a two-day community forum on civil rights issues facing Arab Americans in the metropolitan Chicago area.
June 27, 2002	Michigan SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups.
July 19, 2002	Midwestern Regional Office organizes presentations and briefings for the Commission in Detroit by SACs and community leaders on civil rights issues facing the Muslim and Arab American communities.
July 19, 2002	Commission votes to endorse the idea of the creation of an Office of Rights and Liberties within the proposed Department of Homeland Security.
July 25, 2002	California SAC conducts a briefing on post-September 11 civil rights issues with local government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups in San Francisco.
August 1, 2002	Commission forwards letter to Congress recommending creation of an Office of Rights and Liberties within the proposed Department of Homeland Security.

Throughout the year	Commission chair appears in public service announcements urging tolerance and on an episode of <i>America's Most Wanted</i> discussing hate crimes against Arab Americans. Commissioners variously take part in public service announcement and media discussion opportunities to urge tolerance and adherence to civil rights principles.
Throughout the year	Posting Commission and SAC reports and other information on post-September 11 civil rights issues to the Commission's Web site.

Telephone Complaint Hot line

The Commission was one of the first federal agencies to respond to the civil rights challenges posed by the attacks of September 11 and has been involved in addressing those challenges from the very beginning. Immediately following September 11, the Commission began receiving telephone calls from people alleging civil rights violations and discrimination against Muslims, Arab Americans, and others perceived to be from these communities. The Commission was very concerned with these reports and believed that establishing a complaint hot line could significantly help people being unfairly targeted. The Commission also believed that it was important to raise public awareness of these disturbing complaints. Accordingly, on September 14, 2001, the Commission publicized its special dedicated complaint hot line and received an overwhelming response. To date, the Commission has responded to approximately 597 September 11-related telephone complaints and approximately 50 written complaints. The hot line has been an important tool in gauging the frequency, nature, and geographical distribution of real and perceived discrimination and hate crime attacks. Approximately 258 complaints were referred to federal agencies. The majority of the referrals were made to the Department of Justice and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Most complaints involved employment discrimination, harassment by neighbors and the general public, harassment in school, harassment by police and immigration officers, airline discrimination, and property damage.

Publicizing Post-September 11 Civil Rights Information

In this past year, the Commission also created a dedicated Web site link to both Commission and SAC documents on post-September 11 civil rights issues relating to Muslims and Arab Americans. The link appears on the home page of the Commission's Web site (www.usccr.gov) as "Tolerance, Civil Rights & Justice in Wake of September 11 Tragedies." To date, the following publications have been posted to the site:

- Civil Rights Issues Facing Arab Americans in Michigan (5/01, State Advisory Committee Report)
- Statement of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (9/12/01, News Release)
- Commission on Civil Rights Announces Complaint Line to Protect Rights of Arab, Islamic Communities; Urges Tolerance in the Face of Tragedy (9/14/01, News Release)

- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Receives Overwhelming Response to Complaint Line (9/18/01, News Release)
- Commission on Civil Rights Launches Second Complaint Hot line to Accommodate Great Response; Charges of vandalism to personal property and harassment by neighbors, employers dominate calls (9/19/01, News Release)
- Briefing on Boundaries of Justice: Immigration Policies Post-September 11 (10/12/01)
- Briefing on Civil Rights Issues Facing Muslims and Arab Americans in Ohio Post-September 11 (11/14/01, State Advisory Committee)
- Briefing on Bioterrorism and Health Care Disparities (3/8/02)
- Additional Information on Filing a Complaint
- 100 Questions and Answers about Arab Americans—a journalist’s guide put together by the *Detroit Free Press* listing basic facts about the Arab American community.

In addition, the Commission chair has appeared in nationally distributed public service announcements that urged tolerance, including an appearance on an episode of *America’s Most Wanted* to discuss hate crimes against Arab Americans. Scores of broadcast and print media appearances by the chair and other commissioners also reiterated the importance of protecting the civil rights of Muslims and Arab Americans.

Commission Briefings

In the past year, the Commission held two briefings dealing directly with issues arising out of the terrorist attacks. These were a briefing in October 2001 on immigration policies post-September 11 and a briefing in March 2002 on bioterrorism and health care disparities. In addition, the Midwestern Regional Office and its SACs organized for the benefit of the Commission a presentation in July 2002 on civil rights issues affecting Muslims and Arab Americans in Michigan and the Midwest region.

Briefing on Immigration Policies Post-September 11

The Commission held a briefing on October 12, 2001, on U.S. immigration policies in the aftermath of September 11. The briefing examined the civil rights implications of the terrorist attacks on the evolution of this nation’s immigration policies, practices, and laws. The briefing participants included representatives from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Department of Transportation (DOT), community organizations, and legal experts.

Themes discussed ranged from racial profiling, to bias in the immigration adjudicatory process, to discriminatory detention of legal and illegal immigrants. Racial profiling was described as an ineffective law enforcement tool. In terms of travel profiling, the Department of Transportation stated that it cautioned airlines and airport enforcement authorities not to target passengers based on their race. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) also encouraged airlines to communicate to their employees the illegality of discriminating against passengers based on race, ethnicity, or religion. On the

issue of bias in the immigration process, an attorney provided accounts of biased behavior by judges in immigration proceedings against her clients and those represented by other lawyers. The Immigration and Naturalization Service also responded to assertions of bias and discrimination in its detention processes. Representatives from the INS summarized the process. They explained that the INS provided detainees with a referral list of free or low-cost legal services compiled by the Executive Office for Immigration Review. After September 11, the INS issued a formal reminder to its employees on the agency's policy regarding the right to counsel. An INS representative affirmed that his division was investigating complaints of noncompliance with detention standards. The INS instituted a new program to provide all detainees with a "know-your-rights" presentation and supplied related pamphlets to detainees in different languages. The INS representative acknowledged that the INS failed to fulfill its congressional reporting requirements and had not issued a report on the detention of asylum seekers since 1999.

In response to the numerous issues that were raised during the briefing but not completely explored due to time constraints, the Commission's staff conducted follow-up meetings with the INS and DOT staff. Specifically, the Commission was interested in learning more about the INS' and FAA's data and reporting systems. On November 27, 2001, Commission staff interviewed the Department of Transportation and the Immigration and Naturalization Service on the organization of civil rights activities and enforcement within the agencies, the processing and resolution of complaints (of discrimination and/or improper detention) received, and the preparation of policy guidance. Through this process, staff was able to more thoroughly monitor and obtain an accurate evaluation of DOT and INS processes relating to post-September 11 civil rights issues.

Briefing on Bioterrorism and Health Care Disparities

On March 8, 2002, the Commission held a briefing on bioterrorism and health care disparities. The briefing examined numerous questions raised by recent cases of anthrax contamination regarding the nation's health care system as it relates to the prompt emergency medical treatment of hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of individuals. Of special concern to the Commission was the equitable treatment for all groups regardless of socioeconomic status, English-language proficiency, ethnicity, or race. The briefing consisted of a presentation and question-and-answer session conducted by Dr. Mohammad Akhter, executive director of the American Public Health Association.

In his presentation, Dr. Akhter stressed that the threat of a bioterrorist attack was very real, and that the government had thus far done a commendable job in trying to prepare for such an attack, but that several inherent problems within the national health care system remained to be addressed. Among the problems were:

- A lack of a social safety net and inadequate health services in poor and rural areas. This would continue to hinder the government's ability to disperse treatment and services in the event of a bioterrorist attack. The nation had to build up the capacity of its health departments and outreach to minority and other

disadvantaged populations to ensure that these populations would not suffer disproportionately in the event of an attack.

- People of color, immigrants, and the poor, being more likely to be uninsured, were less likely to seek medical attention in the event of a terrorist attack, thereby exacerbating their condition and posing a continuing health hazard to the general population.
- Lack of facilities and services exacerbating the aforementioned problems.

Presentation on Civil Rights Issues Facing the Muslim and Arab American Communities

On July 19, 2002, the Midwestern Regional SAC members organized a presentation for the Commission on Post-September 11 issues affecting Muslims and Arab Americans in Michigan and the Midwest region. The presentation took place in Detroit, Michigan, home to the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the United States and, as with all Commission and SAC events, was open to the public.

The briefing presentation was divided into three panels, two of which consisted of reports from SACs. The SAC panels reported on the results of meetings and briefings held in the Midwestern Regional states of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. All the panelists described the continuing discrimination and civil rights problems and challenges experienced by Muslim and Arab American communities in their states, but noted that in many instances, state and local officials, as well as community leaders, were making real and noticeable efforts at addressing the problems. All SAC members agreed that the fear of post-September 11 retaliation had lessened, along with acts of discrimination. However, one speaker stated that the discrimination had become much more insidious and was committed by the government in terms of bad police practices, TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System), and failure to provide due process.

The last panel, which was invited to speak by the SACs, consisted of community advocacy and professional groups. This panel detailed the acts of discrimination and retaliation that had been committed against Muslims and Arab Americans since September 11, including mention of a Yemeni man who was shot and killed in Detroit after September 11. Concerns were raised about the constitutionality, fairness, and effectiveness of TIPS. The seizure of charitable assets without what the panelists considered due process was also an issue. Panel members presented equal protection arguments against the singling out of Arab Americans in Michigan for voluntary interviewing by law enforcement and registered their skepticism and rejection of secret hearings and targeted interviews conducted by the government against Muslims and Arab Americans.

Proposed Office of Rights and Liberties in the Department of Homeland Security

At its monthly meeting, held in Detroit on July 19, 2002, the Commission also voted to endorse several recommendations addressing concerns over civil rights implications engendered by the proposed Department of Homeland Security.

The Commission passed a resolution recommending that an independent Office of Rights and Liberties be established within the department to oversee and investigate possible civil rights and civil liberties violations related to efforts to protect the country against terrorist attacks. Given the potential for civil rights abuses that could arise from the inherent tension between ensuring national security during times of crisis and safeguarding individual rights and liberties, the Commission endorsed the idea that the creation of a civil rights watchdog agency within the department would help prevent or minimize any such abuses.

The key characteristics and powers of the Office of Rights and Liberties as proposed by the Commission included:

- A congressionally confirmed agency director appointed by the President with the powers of a super-inspector general focused solely on monitoring compliance with civil liberties and civil rights norms.
- A mandate and structure drawn from the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, but staffed with career employees insulated from political pressures and concerns.
- The power to subpoena documents and interview witnesses under penalty of perjury.
- The power to audit both policymakers and career employees.
- The responsibility to receive and respond to public complaints and allegations of civil rights violations and civil liberties infringements.
- The power to investigate and bring criminal and civil lawsuits for violation of laws.
- The power to seek judicial enforcement of subpoenas independent of the Justice Department, which it would occasionally investigate.
- The power to impose civil administrative fines on individuals for violations of statutes or regulations intended to safeguard civil liberties, with such fines appealable to a federal court, in secret if necessary.
- The responsibility to submit reports to the President, Congress, the secretary for the Department of Homeland Security, and the attorney general concerning any believed violations of civil rights and liberties resulting from the policies and practices of the department.
- The responsibility to disseminate information to the public on the responsibilities and functions of the office and how to provide information and/or file a complaint.

The Commission subsequently issued a letter to Congress on August 1, 2002, recommending that it adopt and incorporate the Commission's recommendations into any legislation related to the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security.

State Advisory Committee Activities

As part of its efforts to sustain and broaden momentum on addressing the implications of the terrorist attacks of September 11 on civil rights protection, the Commission asked its State Advisory Committees (SACs) in September to convene forums on the issue of

tolerance in light of the terrorist attacks. The committees' responses to this request resulted in forums, briefings, and public meetings with local community organizations and government officials in the following 20 states (and territories): Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. The purpose of these forums, briefings, and meetings was to promote public consultation with federal, state, and local agencies and law enforcement departments, as well as with community groups and affected populations, so as to obtain a better understanding of the civil rights issues facing local communities and to receive recommendations as to how to address those concerns. The goal in many instances was simply to bring together affected groups and enforcement authorities to facilitate communication, cooperation, and action on civil rights problems affecting the former. The forums, briefings, and public meetings took place throughout the year and addressed such issues as discrimination in employment, housing, accommodations, and services, administration of justice, hate crimes, and education.

Several SACs, including those representing the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, North Dakota, and Virginia, held community forums, some of which spanned more than one day. For example, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia SACs held a joint two-day community forum starting on April 24, 2002, to hear the perspectives of affected community representatives, members of the public, and public officials regarding their civil rights concerns in the Washington metropolitan region. The forum was organized around five panels, two panels addressing central issues of "fears and concerns of at-risk communities" and "local government actions in response to September 11 events," preceded by three panels devoted to the three following background themes: "Understanding Islam in America in the Aftermath of September 11," "National Crisis and Civil Rights Protection," and "Implementing the U.S.A. Patriot Act of 2001: Civil Rights Impact." Panelists included representatives of federal and local governments, various religious and advocacy groups, academia, and the public.

Several panelists recommended that civil rights protections be made an integral part of an effective antiterrorism strategy, including (1) a focus by law enforcement agencies on the planning and preparation of criminal activity, rather than political or religious activity; (2) particularized suspicion by law enforcement that ideologically motivated persons are in fact planning criminal activity; (3) judicial review and control of this process; and (4) oversight and accountability of government action by Congress and internal review within the U.S. Department of Justice. The spirit of some of these recommendations is reflected in the proposed Office of Rights and Liberties within the Department of Homeland Security.

Illinois also organized a two-day community forum on June 17 and 18 regarding civil rights issues facing Arab Americans in the metropolitan Chicago area. The forum convened 12 panels of speakers, representing some 25 national, state, and local government agencies, professional associations, and community groups. At the forum, Muslim and Arab American community groups and representatives detailed the victimization of their community that occurred on September 11, as well as the hate

crimes, discrimination, and targeting by national law enforcement services and policies that followed. A sample of these incidents included:

- By September 14, 2001, at least six Middle Eastern stores on an ethnically diverse street had windows broken and were forced to close.
- A Muslim school was damaged when explosives were thrown at it from a passing car.
- An Arab-looking gas station attendant was hit with the blunt end of a machete, and police charged the assailant with a hate crime, aggravated use of a weapon, and aggravated battery.
- A Chicago taxi driver and college student was hit in the face by two men, including a Cook County corrections officer, and called a “mass murderer” after the two chased the driver down on motorcycles.
- On September 12, a small crowd of people gathered with American flags in Oak Lawn, Illinois, a southwest Chicago suburb. After radio deejays on WKQX-FM (101.1) informed listeners of the gathering, the small crowd became a mass of around 500 people, with numerous cars filling the streets. When police told people to disperse at 10 p.m., the crowd began to head toward nearby Bridgeview and the Mosque Foundation of Chicago. The Illinois State Police eventually blocked the street leading to the mosque to prevent any damage. The many Muslim and Arab residents who lived in Oak Lawn and Bridgeview were told to stay inside and were left stricken with fear.
- A building that was home to the Arab American Community Center was set ablaze on December 3, 2001, in the city’s southwest side.

There was also great concern over the government’s decision to freeze the assets and seize the property of local Chicago Islamic charities. The Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation reiterated their desire to accomplish their mandate in a manner that did not infringe upon the civil rights of any race, religion, or people of a particular national origin. Almost all community leaders praised the federal agencies for the efforts to listen and make themselves available.

North Dakota also sponsored a community forum on May 23, 2002. Attending this forum were various federal, state, and local Fargo agencies and groups. The Fargo community has a large minority population and is a relocation center for refugees and immigrants entering the United States. Bosnian, Kurdish, Sudanese, Somali, Iranians, Haitians, Vietnamese, and Cubans account for more than 5,000 members of that community. In addition, a significant number of these individuals are Muslim.

City officials, local agency representatives, community organization representatives, and residents all agreed that there had been proactive efforts by the mayor and police chief of Fargo after the September 11 attacks to prevent discrimination, including outreach to the numerous immigrant communities. Presenters at the forum recommended that the city and the various organizations participating in the forum work toward improving human relations in Fargo and to continue to be proactive in their efforts.

Other states, as well, have held briefings or meetings on the issues of tolerance and civil rights violations related to September 11. On November 31, 2001, the New Mexico SAC convened a briefing for this purpose. Participants in the briefing included the Albuquerque Human Rights Commission, the New Mexico Human Rights Coalition, the Indian Students Association, the University of New Mexico, and the Afghan Community of New Mexico. The SAC was advised by the Albuquerque Human Rights Commission that there have been allegations of harassment against Muslims, Middle Easterners, Indians—most have been verbal threats/intimidation rather than physical violence (specifically citing leaflets in newspapers in Gallup calling for expulsion of Muslims, and an egg-throwing incident in Santa Fe). Although few formal complaints have been filed, all have been taken seriously. A joint statement on racial/ethnic profiling and hate crimes was issued by the city of Albuquerque Human Rights Board and the New Mexico Human Rights Coalition. The Albuquerque Human Rights Commission reported that the school district broadcasted educational programming on its television outlet and noted that the university has also been proactive.

The Michigan SAC also held a briefing on civil rights issues facing the Arab American community on June 27, 2002. Participants included the U.S. Attorney's Office, Dearborn Public Schools, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Arab American News, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, and the Arab American and Chaldean Council. According to the presenters at the briefing, cooperation between the Muslim and Arab American communities and the authorities is strong despite disagreements on policies. The U.S. attorney has an open-door policy and meets with the communities weekly. Further, hate crimes against men of Middle Eastern descent were prosecuted after September 11. Despite the cooperation between local and national government and the Muslim and Arab American communities, presenters from the communities were disturbed by U.S. Department of Justice policies, which they believe infringed upon their civil rights and put them "under the scope of suspicion" by other Americans. For example, the interviews of young Arab American men are seen in the community as accomplishing nothing in the fight against terrorism and much in encouraging the neighbors of Arab Americans to view them suspiciously. Community leaders suggested that Arab Americans need to be hired into decision-making positions in the government. They called for more Muslim and Arab American FBI agents, police officers, and educators. Presenters did not see an either/or situation between national security and civil liberties.

The Alabama SAC also held a briefing on November 15, 2001, on the issues of housing and employment discrimination, racial profiling, economic discrimination, and the need for state human rights legislation. The Committee invited representatives from the Muslim and Arab communities in Alabama. Representatives from the Birmingham Islamic Society and the Black Muslims of Huntsville reported problems such as hate e-mail, incidents of spitting and yelling, and hostile radio talk show hosts calling for boycotts of Middle Eastern restaurants. But the representatives indicated that the police had done an excellent job in providing support and making them feel secure during the days after September 11. The EEOC representative reported that since September 11 the agency had established special procedures to monitor discrimination in the workplace

against persons of Middle Eastern descent. The briefing ended with recommendations that political and community leaders must speak out strongly against racial profiling and intolerance and that the Alabama legislature should establish a state agency to address human relations and discrimination issues.

Likewise, the California SAC has held two briefings and is planning two more. The first was held on May 15, 2002, in San Diego, and the second on July 25, 2002, in San Francisco. Further briefings are planned for Sacramento and Los Angeles. Participants in both briefings included local government agencies, professional and community organizations, and individual complainants. The theme from the briefings has been that local political and community leaders have been helpful in implementing changes in the system to secure the safety and rights of individuals, although problems persist with respect to discriminatory treatment of people of Arab descent. One recommendation was that enforcement agencies respond in a timely fashion to requests made by private attorneys representing individuals of Middle Eastern descent.

The Florida SAC, too, has been briefed twice by Muslim and Arab American speakers, as well as by government and community organizations. An informal briefing occurred in Tampa on September 28, 2001, and another, more formal one took place in Miami on March 26, 2002. Attending the latter briefing were the Florida Commission on Human Relations, the Dade County Commission on Human Relations, the American Muslim Association of North America, the American League for Justice and Peace, the March for Justice, and the 5-Pillar Foundation, Inc. Local community leaders expressed general concern for potential civil rights violations and discrimination against segments of the population. The presenters reiterated that staunch enforcement of civil rights laws and regulations was needed.

Ten other states—Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin—also organized briefings and/or meetings to address the issues of tolerance and safeguarding of civil rights in the aftermath of September 11, resulting in similar themes, findings, and recommendations as those detailed above.

Conclusion

Within the past year, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has engaged in extensive and broad efforts at shining its spotlight on and addressing potential and actual civil rights trouble spots that have emerged in the wake of the devastating attacks of September 11. From establishing a civil rights hot line within days of the attacks, to staging briefings on a wide range of civil rights issues affected by the attacks, to directing its State Advisory Committees to take a proactive role in bringing community and government leaders together to tackle important civil rights issues, the Commission has shown its commitment to and effectiveness in its role as the nation's civil rights watchdog. Especially, in these times of crisis, the Commission has proven that it remains on the forefront of protecting and nurturing the continuing vitality of civil rights in this country.