

Testimony:

House of Representatives Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
March 19, 2015

Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, Representatives Derickson, Kunze, and Patterson, my name is Arzella Melnyk. I am here today to ask that the Ohio Commission on Hispanic Latino Affairs be defunded.

I have attended numerous OCHLA meetings. I have sat in this building and listened to testimony, opposing legislation that would protect Ohioans from the ill effects of illegal immigration given by OCHLA. I have witnessed OCHLA's support on a resolution in Oberlin, and OCHLA's opposition on a resolution in Wadsworth, both resolutions dealing with illegal immigration.

This Commission passed Resolution Number 2010-02 on March 26, 2010,

Last two paragraphs of the Resolution:

Whereas The dialogue regarding such measures has been usurped by hate groups and extremist/nativist groups seeking to perpetuate an anti-immigrant sentiment that translates into an anti-Latino sentiment; and be it further

Resolved That:

The Ohio Latino Affairs Commission opposes federal, state or local legislation or policy that authorizes local law enforcement to enforce immigration law in Ohio.

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On December 1, 2009 a letter was sent to the Geauga County Sheriff, the Ashtabula County Sheriff and the Lake County Sheriff. This is the last paragraph of the letter,

We cannot begin to express how upsetting it is to hear and read that our local law enforcement is participating at this "forum", regardless of what role you are playing. Law enforcement must have the trust of all persons within the community. Police resources should be devoted to furthering positive and constructive relationships between Ohio residents and the police. By participating in forums hosted by organizations like FAIR and GRT of Ohio, your offices are sending the wrong message to the Latino and other immigrant communities, who suffer the hate and misinformation these groups promote and perpetuate. We strongly encourage each of you to reconsider your decision to attend this event.

A dozen signatures, and one was an OCHLA Commissioner. I am the coordinator for Grassroots Rally Team of Ohio. I found the letter offensive, that a state commission funded with tax dollars was allowed to spew hateful and hurtful rhetoric because they thought it wrong that communities came together to talk with their sheriffs.

A disturbing blog was posted on September 30, 2010. This blog was about Senator Voinovich, and how a group had been trying to meet with him about immigration reform.

This is from what was posted on the blog:

"One day sitting in our office, my co-worker and I pondered on how we could meet with the Senator. Then the idea came...why don't we give him an award? Maybe instead of us going to him, we can get him to come to us.

Personally, I am not a big fan of "giving an award" ritual and process but I agreed on the plan. We pitched the idea to a few organizations, and the Ohio Latino Commission thought it would be a wonderful idea. They agreed to put together an event to honor the good Senator.

Personally, I didn't think the Senator would attend but the Ohio Latino Commission made it happen. On Monday September 27, 2010 a small group of statewide Latinos and immigration reform organizers gathered to recognize Senator Voinovich and have a conversation with him".

This was extremely disrespectful on OCHLA's part, to scheme with an immigration group and lure a Senator with an award, so this group could have their meeting with him.

These examples all have one thing in common, illegal immigration. This is not how Ohio tax dollars should be spent. This commission has spent too much time working on illegal immigration, where is the accountability?

OCHLA was established in 1977. In Ms. Cavanaugh's testimony before this committee on February 19, 2015 she stated " Additionally, through social media and our website, we maintain a robust information hub with a directory of more than 200 Latino serving organizations", I'm sure all these organizations did not exist in 1977. But now, with all these organizations OCHLA has become a nonessential commission. Tax dollars should not be used to continue funding their work on illegal immigration, it is a misuse of tax dollars. The money could actually be used in other ways. Just an example, my school district's funding was cut along with numerous other school districts. The over \$400,000.00 budgeted for OCHLA should be put to better use.

I received an email on Monday from Attorney General DeWine's office. I made a records request concerning OCHLA's expenses. I received my first request and additionally requested OCHLA's 2014 itemized expense report, in the private sector that how it is referred to. Basically, a breakdown of how the money was spent. In the response from Attorney General DeWine's office I was informed that my request was ambiguous and overboard. And that OCHLA does not possess a record that is an itemized expense report. I have not addressed this with the Attorney General's office as of yet. However, I can't imagine that over \$400,000.00 of taxpayers money can be spent without any records. I do not feel my request was overboard, as an Ohio taxpayer I feel I have the right to know how my tax dollars are being spent.

I am asking that while you are making the difficult decisions on this budget, to consider defunding OCHLA and put that money someplace in the budget that would better benefit Ohioans. Thank You

Respectfully,
Azella Melnyk
Coordinator
Grassroots Rally Team of Ohio