

Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson
City of Riverside
3900 Main Street
Riverside, CA 92522

Dear Honorable Mayor Lock Dawson and Esteemed Members of the Riverside City Council,

The Human Relations Commission (HRC) writes to express its deep disappointment regarding the agenda item #5 added to the September 17 City Council meeting to repeal the City's commemorative flag policy, which had allowed the Pride, Juneteenth, Disability Pride and other inclusive flags to be flown at City Hall. If repealed, this decision will mark a step backward in our collective journey toward promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community.

For many residents of Riverside, these flags symbolize hope, togetherness, and the recognition of marginalized communities that have long been underrepresented and undervalued in public life. The Pride flag, for instance, serves as an emblem of the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights, while the Juneteenth and Pan-African flags honor the resilience and perseverance of Black Americans in the face of systemic racism. Similarly, the Disability Pride Month flag shines a light on the importance of inclusivity for people with disabilities, the Women's Suffrage flag commemorates the historic fight for gender equality, and the Holocaust Remembrance flag serves as a solemn reminder of the atrocities faced by Jewish communities. These symbols remind us that Riverside aspires to be a place of belonging for everyone, regardless of their race, gender, ability, or sexual orientation. Sharing flags unites our community and residents, celebrating the vibrant diversity that enriches the City's storied history.

The intent to repeal this policy undermines the values of inclusivity and acceptance that Riverside has worked so hard to cultivate. It sends a disheartening message to those who have fought tirelessly for equality, as well as to the next generation of Riverside residents, that their identities, histories, and struggles are not worthy of recognition by their own city government. The numerous flag-raising ceremonies held over the last year have become powerful symbols of our collective commitment to honoring diversity and fostering an environment where every individual's experience is valued and celebrated. These ceremonies not only reflect our progress but also reaffirm our dedication to building a more inclusive community.

Repealing this policy would erode the progress we've made and diminish the profound impact that these flags have in uniting and uplifting our diverse population. Public comments on the city's social media pages in response to these ceremonies demonstrate that there is still significant work to be done in promoting inclusion and educating the broader public. This only underscores the need to continue flying these flags, not as a divisive act, but as a commitment to fostering understanding and acceptance.

The Human Relations Commission is particularly disappointed that this agenda item to repeal our previous recommendation was introduced without any input from the HRC on its potential impact or consideration of alternative measures to ensure these communities feel supported

within Riverside. Our 15-member commission represents a diverse group of residents with unique skills and backgrounds in creating inclusive spaces. To hastily repeal this policy without consultation or discussion is, frankly, irresponsible.

We respectfully call on the City of Riverside to act in alignment with the values of inclusivity and diversity by retaining the commemorative flag policy. At the very least, we ask that the City Council bring this issue back to the Human Relations Commission for further discussion and exploration of alternative solutions that continue to make all communities feel seen and valued within our city. The well-being of our residents and the reputation of Riverside as a beacon of inclusivity depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to continued dialogue in support of Riverside's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Sincerely,