



# Commissioner Brad Avakian

Bureau of Labor and Industries

## Press Release

For Immediate Distribution

May 11, 2009

CONTACT: Ben DuPree 503-309-1276; Kate Newhall 503-467-1665

### **Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian Appoints Oregon Council on Civil Rights**

*Council will advise Commissioner Avakian, the Bureau of Labor and Industries, and the state on matters related to education about and enforcement of civil rights in Oregon*

**PORTLAND, OR-** Recognizing a need to better address the causes and effects of unlawful discrimination in Oregon, State Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian announced today the creation of the Oregon Council on Civil Rights (OCCR). As head of the state's civil rights enforcement agency, the Commissioner appointed the Council, pursuant to his authority in ORS 659A.815, to foster increased collaboration, outreach, education and partnerships between state enforcement efforts, advocacy groups, employers and citizens.

“Working with BOLI’s Civil Rights Division, I am confident that the OCCR will be a key player in advancing civil rights in Oregon and fighting unlawful discrimination of all forms,” said Commissioner Avakian. “We have assembled a diverse team of Oregon civil rights leaders that bring decades of experience and represent a wide cross-section of Oregon communities.”

The 25 members appointed to the OCCR will work to advise the Commissioner and the state generally on all matters related to education about and enforcement of civil rights in Oregon, including: the administration of protected class provisions; making recommendations on new and existing civil rights protections and rulemaking to administer civil rights law most effectively; and fostering better enforcement, outreach and education efforts to aggressively fight unlawful discrimination in Oregon.

The OCCR and its members will work toward stronger Oregon civil rights in several ways. They will study and monitor the causes, effects and solutions of unlawful discrimination in Oregon. They will consider and propose legislative and agency-based actions and solutions. They will foster communication, goodwill, cooperation, and conciliation among groups interested in civil rights across the state. And they will advise the state at-large on policies and procedures related to civil rights.

Commissioner Avakian appointed James Mason, Diversity Education and Cultural Competency Director for Oregon’s Providence Health Systems, and Connie Ashbrook, Executive Director of the Oregon Tradeswomen, to Co-Chair the Council.

“I am honored to serve on the OCCR with these individuals who bring such a wealth of knowledge and breadth of expertise in civil rights work in Oregon,” said Connie Ashbrook. “By bringing together leaders from such diverse communities from across the state, the Commissioner has taken an important step in Oregon’s fight to end unlawful discrimination and promote equal opportunities for all Oregonians.”

*(continues)*

*The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.*

“Bringing an end to unlawful discrimination takes communication, collaboration and broad community partnerships,” said James Mason. “I look forward to working with BOLI and the OCCR to help our state advance the cause of civil rights and address the root causes of unlawful discrimination in Oregon.”

The first meeting of the OCCR will be July 16 at BOLI’s headquarters in Portland. A [comprehensive description of the OCCR](#) structure, leadership, and meeting schedule and [member biographies](#), can be found on the OCCR website at: <http://www.oregon.gov/BOLI/CRD/OCCR.shtml>

“There is nothing more important we do in public service than ensuring the individual rights of people,” said Commissioner Avakian. “A valuable part of doing that effectively is hearing first hand the struggles and successes of people living in Oregon’s diverse communities. Citizen participation is a necessary piece to addressing the causes, effects and solutions of unlawful discrimination in our state.”

The Bureau of Labor and Industries is Oregon’s chief law enforcement agency for protecting people’s civil rights in employment, housing and public accommodation. BOLI’s Civil Rights Division enforces laws that protect workers from unlawful discrimination, including retaliation when workers report safety violations, use family leave provisions or file for workers’ compensation. The division also protects those who suffer unlawful discrimination when seeking housing or using public facilities such as restaurants, theaters and stores. Each year, the division fields an average of 30,000 inquiries and investigates over 2,200 cases.

#####

*The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.*