

An Open Letter to Mr. Stan Muhammad:

A life in public service comes with a willingness to listen to the concerns of local residents and engage in conversations which create greater understanding among diverse community groups. We appreciate you asking to meet with us to apologize in person for the homophobic slur you spoke from the podium at the recent Community Prayer & Call to Action. Contrition is the first step toward acknowledging the injury your words inflicted on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender individuals and their families across Antelope Valley.

At The OUTreach Center board meeting Monday evening, you submitted to our examination willingly and openly and made no excuses. You admitted ignorance of the LGBT community and culture. The community representatives who were present heard your pledge to educate yourself, your family, and your religious and political communities on issues which affect the LGBT community and their allies.

We applaud you for being the first public official in the Antelope Valley to admit your need for cultural competence, ask forgiveness, and request information about the effect homophobia has on LGBT people and their families here in our community and around the nation. Locally, our community members have experienced hate crime graffiti, discrimination in classrooms and hiring, physical abuse and bullying, dehumanization at the hands of select religious leaders, and continued demagoguery by some political leaders. As African-American feminist writer Audre Lorde has said, "There is no hierarchy of oppression." You acknowledged the social justice issues shared by many in this valley.

Our public officials must recognize the value of every resident, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. We will not stand silently in the face of continued ignorance from those who wish to lead in this community. However, we also realize that to improve the lives of marginalized community members the institutional forces which perpetuate discrimination must change.

Therefore, we call upon the Cities of Lancaster and Palmdale to require training in cultural competence and diversity issues for appointed commissioners as well as elected officials. No one can deny the broad range of cultures residing in the Antelope Valley. Our public officials are expected to serve all residents. Going forward, the actions and statements of our community leaders should reflect both the common interests and unique needs of all community groups.

Respectfully,

Sanie Andres
Board President
The OUTreach Center

Sue P. Dell
Chair, City of Lancaster
Human Relations Tapestry Commission