

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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California Coastal Commission Endorses Restoring Affirmative Action

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Staff Report: <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2020/7/W6c/W6c-7-2020-report.pdf>

SAN FRANCISCO _ The Coastal Commission this week unanimously supported allowing voters the opportunity to repeal Proposition 209, the state initiative that banned affirmative action in 1996.

Commissioners on Wednesday voted to support Assembly Constitutional Amendment 5 or ACA 5, slated to go on the Nov. 3 statewide ballot. Prop. 209 prevented public state institutions from considering race, ethnicity, gender or national origin in employment, contracting, and education.

“We still see evidence of California’s history of segregation along the coast,” said Environmental Justice Commissioner Effie Turnbull-Sanders. “From segregated beaches to redlining, and using eminent domain to take private property from African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans, government policies prevented people of color from enjoying some of California’s best beaches and from owning property along the coast. As a state agency dedicated to enhancing California’s coast and ocean for present and future generations, we need to do what we can to create more opportunities and repealing Prop. 209 is a start.”

A core Commission goal has been to maximize public access for all Californians and the agency has a history of applying this in numerous cases. For instance, the Commission required the exclusive white Christian men’s only Jonathan Club in Santa Monica to open up its membership to minorities and women in the 1980s. More recently in 2016, the Commission required Mavericks organizers in Half Moon Bay to include women in their big wave surf competition.

“Supporting affirmative action aligns with the mission of this agency and the Coastal Act, which is a statute inherently grounded in the principle of equity,” said Commission Chair Steve Padilla. “If we can reverse Prop.209, we will finally put California back on the right path to bring greater racial and social equity across the state.”

In recent years, the Commission’s efforts have become more focused with the passage of AB2616, which gave the agency the explicit authority to consider environmental justice in its permitting and planning decisions, and appointed an environmental justice commissioner. The Commission adopted an environmental justice policy in 2019.

Internally, the agency worked to diversify its ranks even though Prop. 209 ended a paid minority internship program in 1996. The Commission continued to proactively recruit within the bounds of the law, increasing its staff of color from 27 percent in 2011 to 35 percent in 2019, according to the Office of Civil Rights. Repealing Prop. 209 will enable the agency to build a more diverse workforce, essential to ensuring all California voices are represented in the implementation of the Coastal Act.

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