



## CITY OF PROVIDENCE

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

TO: Providence City Council Members

FROM: Andi Wheeler, Executive Director of the Providence Human Relations Commission

DATE: February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

SUBJECT: Providence Human Relations Commission 2020 Annual Report

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In accordance with Article XI §1103(b)(7) of the Providence Home Rule Charter of 1980, transmitted here is a copy of the annual report submitted by the Executive Director of the Human Relations Commission. A copy is being sent to Mayor Elorza and to the City Clerk for official communication on behalf of the City Council.

IN CITY COUNCIL

MAR 4 2021

READ  
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT  
THIS SAME BE RECEIVED

*Shaw-Edwards* CLERK



**City of Providence**

**Providence Human Relations Commission**

**2020 Annual Report**



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Hon. Jorge O. Elorza  
Mayor

Andi Wheeler  
Executive Director

**Executive Committee**

Patricia LaSalle  
Chair

Chace Baptista  
Vice-Chair

Kelia Bravo  
Secretary

**Commissioners**

Cesar Teo

Kai Lo Muscio

Ray Two Hawks Watson

Celeste Terry Lo

Maria Monteiro

Joe Lazzerini

LaJuan Allen

Stephen Vadnais

**Providence Human Relations  
Commission**

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City of Providence Human Relations Commission

**Letter to Mayor and City Council**

February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Mayor Elorza and Honorable Members of the Providence City Council,

Pursuant to City Charter art. XI §1103(b)(4), please find attached the Providence Human Relations Commission's 2020 Annual Report.

Impaneled in 1963, the Providence Human Relations Commission works primarily to build community, expanding and protecting residents' rights to fair housing, education, employment, credit, and public accommodations, free from discrimination.

In 2020, the Commission took bold steps to reform government processes and promote an inclusive and accountable city government in collaboration with the community. After starting the year in a state of transition with a new Executive Director, COVID-19's impact on already marginalized communities could be acutely felt, making the Commission's work more relevant than ever. Coupled with a Black Lives Matter re-awakening, the Commission continues to look for new opportunities to reimagine the way rights are understood and protected by the City of Providence.

At a time when human rights are being challenged, stripped, and manipulated at new levels, the ability for diverse communities to thrive should be an imperative of local governments. The Commission looks forward to continuing this promise to our communities, finding opportunities for growth in government processes, expanding outreach to the most vulnerable, and presenting an inclusive vision of a greater Providence.

Thank you Mayor Elorza, Council President Matos, and members of the City Council for your ongoing commitment to the people of Providence. We look forward to continuing to work with you to work and expand human rights and relations while centering the community in our work.

Patricia LaSalle  
Chair, PHRC

Andi Wheeler  
Executive Director,  
PHRC

## Year in Review

2020 was a year of great change, both for the Providence Human Relations Commission and the City of Providence. The new Executive Director was brought on just over a month prior to the City of Providence entering a different level of operating due to COVID-19. Major operational changes had to occur and additional challenges were presented when demonstrations and protests erupted in Providence after the murder of George Floyd. During 2020 there was also a delay in the FY21 budget that made additional programming difficult. In each of these circumstances, the PHRC rose to the challenge in 2020, finding creative ways to meet the moment.

## Continuity of Language Access Work

The previous Executive Director Sol Taubin had released a Language Access Toolkit to assist city staff in making better translation and interpretation decisions. The continuation of this work included updating this toolkit to include edits related to operating remotely amidst COVID-19. The toolkit will once again be updated in 2021 as the situation changes and develops.

## COVID-19 Response

On March 16th, 2020, the City entered uncharted territory with the introduction of remote operations during the COVID-19 crises.

Among the concerns raised by PHRC Commissioners was support for the most vulnerable, including people with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness.

The Executive Director worked with local disability advocates to create, alongside the ADA Coordinator for Providence, information regarding how to make local deliveries more accessible to everyone. They also informed the Mayor's Intergovernmental Affairs Director of concerns heard state by state about triage protocols negatively impacting people with disabilities so the concerns could be brought up to the Governor's office.

In regards to people experiencing homelessness, the Executive Director worked with Mayor's Policy Department to fund over \$4,000 worth of orders for Personal Protective Equipment and sanitizing supplies to the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, which in turn distributed these supplies to those who needed it.

Towards the end of the fiscal year, the PHRC also got creative in dispersing funds that would have gone unused due to the new operating procedures. The PHRC made the collective decision to spend down funds towards the community, as opposed to ordering business cards or brochures.

Some Commissioners also referred community organizations to the department for those funds. They included Higher Ground International and local American Indian Tribes. All in all, thousands of dollars worth of PPE, culturally appropriate food, and other services were provided for by the PHRC. They are listed below.

- Rhode Island Pride's COVID-19 Emergency Food Drive Sponsorship \$1200
- Mashapaug Nahaganset Tribe Emergency COVID-19 Supplies \$1,343.77



- Higher Ground International Culturally Appropriate Food \$928.33
- Refugee Dream Center Culturally Appropriate Food \$499.47
- Hasbro Children's Hospital Rapid Response Food Delivery \$484.55
- Muslim Community Center of Rhode Island Food, adaptive technology \$1500

## Anti-Racism Committee

In June, after the murder of George Floyd, Commissioners met to discuss the response the PHRC should have in Providence. Out of those discussions, the Anti-Racism Committee was formed. The Anti-Racism Committee had several hours long strategy discussions to discuss the areas of focus and the upcoming public education and advocacy response to racism in Providence. They determined government accountability, policy reform, and community health were going to be their main areas of focus. To the end of government accountability, the Anti-Racism Committee released several statements during periods of strife in the City of Providence, urging accountability and transparency. The next steps for the Committee are developing a policy platform in collaboration with the Policy Committee, and cultivating a racial healing series, bringing in local and national speakers.

## Key Collaborations

The PHRC also had several key collaborations that made some of the previously mentioned efforts possible- including with the Muslim American Community Liaison Monsurat Ottun and the Healthy Communities Office.

The PHRC also teamed up with the African American Advisory Group's Policy Advisory Subgroup to put on a series of community meetings related to the Law Enforcement Officer's Bill Of Rights (LEOBOR), Student Resource Officers (SROs), and the Police Department's Use of Force Policy. These events were well attended, hearing from dozens of community members and groups on each topic. The PHRC's involvement also made sure that Spanish translation was available for the events.

When the Mayor directed \$40,000 to direct relief for members of the undocumented community, the Executive Director made the connection to community group AMOR's relief effort.

In addition to reaching out to over 60 community organizations and advocates when COVID-19 first struck Providence, the Executive Director also met one on one with several community members related to budget advocacy. After youth brought forward the idea of a budget advocacy directory, the department went to work creating it. This budget advocacy directory was instrumental in sharing with community groups and members how to advocate on their budget priorities in an effective and meaningful way. To supplement this, the PHRC held two community meetings with advocates to discuss the changes in the budget process due to COVID-19.

## Celebrating the Community

In keeping with tradition, the PHRC also held the 17th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, which was widely covered in Options Magazine.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance occurred virtually this year in collaboration with the Mayor's LGBTQIA+ Liaison and various community groups, including Project Weber/RENEW. This year's flag raising event, with dozens of attendees improved upon past years by centering on the community.

## Looking Ahead

Several items are in the queue for creation in order to streamline internal processes, including a new onboarding materials packet, changes to the bylaws, and continued outreach for new members. In addition, a Request for Proposal is in the works for help in developing a three to five year strategic plan to elevate the work of the PHRC further.