



Christine Roundtree
Executive Director

Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
Mayor

Providence Human Relations Commission
Building Pride in Providence

May 31, 2002

Michael Clement
Providence City Clerk
City Hall
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Mr. Clement:

Provided herein please find twenty copies of the annual report for the Providence Human Relations Commission for the year 2001.

Please let me know if there are any questions or concerns.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Christine Roundtree

Christine Roundtree
Executive Director

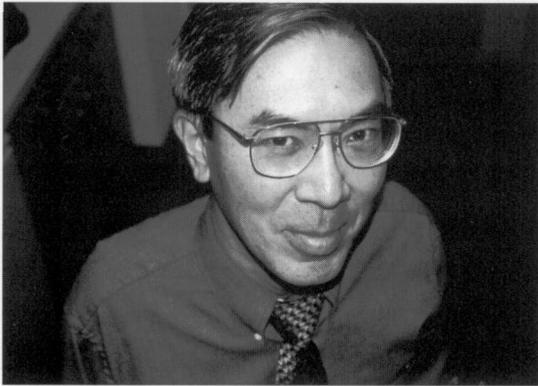
cc: Bishop Robert Farrow
Chairperson, PHRC

Ms. Patricia McLaughlin
Director of Administration

Ms. Rita Murphy
Administrative Coordinator
Providence City Council

IN CITY COUNCIL
JUN 5 2002
READ
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED
THE SAME BE REFERRED

Michael K. Clement



2001

Providence Human
Relations Commission

ANNUAL REPORT



Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
Mayor

Bishop Robert E. Farrow
Chairperson

Christine Roundtree
Executive Director

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.”
-- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Justice is not a concept that most of us think about on a daily basis; we're too busy living our lives. However, when discrimination or inequality arises, it's comforting to know there is someone there to take up the fight of the oppressed.

That's what the Providence Human Relations Commission is all about, ensuring that all Providence residents are afforded equal opportunity and equal treatment.

For people who are mistreated because of their race, color, religion, age, gender, or disability, justice is not merely a noble concept. It is something to be strived for, a means by which their humanity, dignity, and pride can be restored.

Thankfully, there are others who have taken up this cause. This report is a testimony to all those individuals, organizations, and agencies who have made equality and justice their business. Our work is not done but thanks to you, and with the efforts of all of us, Providence is a better place to live.



*From the
Chairperson*

*I*t is said that no man is an island. This is especially true for those of us who strive to better the lives of others. At times, however, it feels like a lonely battle when we take on the foes of justice: ignorance, racism, and hatred.

But we are truly not alone in this battle. There are many great individuals and institutions lined up on the side of the righteous. This is why we will succeed in our mission of making Rhode Island a place where people can live without fear of discrimination.

That is not to say there will not be setbacks. These obstacles merely confirm how we need each other and must remain ever vigilant.

It is my privilege to bring to you the 2001 Annual Report of the Providence Human Relations Commission. In this report, we celebrate our many partners in the community. They join us every day in giving those without hope a reason to believe.

Thank you for joining us in this ongoing struggle. With God's blessing and our continued diligence, it is a fight we will win.

God bless you,

Bishop Robert E. Farrow

From the
Executive
Director



To the Honorable Vincent A. Cianci, Jr., Mayor of the City of Providence, and to the Honorable Members of the Providence City Council:

It is with pride that we respectfully submit the 2001 Annual Report of the Providence Human Relations Commission for your review. We are especially proud of our accomplishments during the past year. Our partnerships and collaborations with outside agencies and community groups allowed for enhanced effectiveness on a number of issues relevant to equity and access in the City and the State.

We, at the Commission, look forward to meeting the challenges ahead with dedication and commitment of purpose.

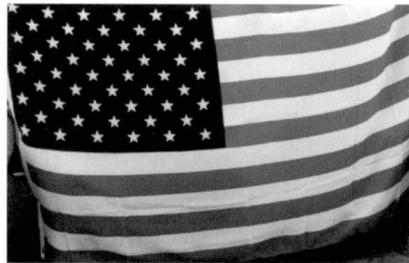
Sincerely,

Christine Roundtree

Christine Roundtree

The year 2001 was a trying one, with tragedies that were global in scale shaking many to the point where a feeling of helplessness set in. At the Providence Human Relations Commission, the events of last year were a call to action, a reminder that hatred can devastate a country, and even the whole world.

In some, the feeling of helplessness was replaced by overwhelming anger, a desire to strike out at someone. People with different skin color, religion, and beliefs became convenient targets. But like the miracle of spring, opposition to these destructive ways arose, bringing with it new hope. This report celebrates our partners, progress, and the promise of the future for Providence and all its people.



Collaborations

How can one agency take on all the claims of discrimination that take place in Providence? Answer: It cannot. That is why our many partners are so important to us.

Any list of agencies and organizations that the Providence Human Relations Commission worked with over the course of a year is bound to be a partial one. Although this list is not a complete one, it demonstrates the effective-

ness and necessity of a group effort in ensuring equality for all.

Among those we worked with in 2001: the National Conference for Community and Justice, Rhode Island Housing Mortgage and Finance Corporation, Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, Providence Housing Authority, Governor's Commission on Prejudice and Bias, Rhode Island

Coalition for Affirmative Action, and the Rhode Island Civil Rights Roundtable. This is a formidable list, but it only scratches the surface of our involvement.

The Providence Human Relations Commission is chartered to investigate complaints of alleged discrimination in housing,



employment, credit, education, and public accommodations. This has been our mission for almost 40 years.

We are also charged with promoting understanding among the City's diverse populations. This is a more complex task. With the continued support and diligence of our partners, we feel confident that we can meet that goal.



Outreach

The work of the Providence Human Relations Commission takes place in the hallways of businesses, large and small. It takes place in schools and apartment complexes. It involves advocacy, investigation, and action.

Whenever people in Providence are discriminated against, the Human Relations Commission is there to help. The chart on the right puts into numbers the quantity and types of complaints we are investigating. It does not, however, tell the whole story.

We believe a large number of cases of discrimination go unreported. These are only the cases that have been brought to our attention. There are assuredly hundreds, if not thousands,

of other cases that happen each year. Our hope is that in time, people who are discriminated against will learn to trust the system and avail themselves of the resources that are available.

On the back of this report is contact information for the Providence Human Relations Commission. If you or someone you know needs assistance, please contact us. We're here to serve.



Equality

Providence has a few distinct advantages over many other cities when it comes to matters of equality. When confronted with issues of injustice, the Providence Human Relations Commission knows there are many able and willing partners that can be relied upon.

One of those occasions came in the wake of September 11. Executive Director Christine Roundtree took part in a unique forum at the Providence Journal auditorium that was organized by the National Conference for Community and Justice. The November 9 event brought some of Rhode Island's most dedicated social advocates together to talk about this pressing issue. The Providence Journal headline the next day was "Leaders look to rise from hate's rubble".

It was a headline that accurately reflected the destructive power of hatred. In Providence, we are proud of the numerous organizations dedicated to issues of equality.

Another important component is the growing strength of the city's diverse populations. Providence has one of the country's fastest growing ethnic populations. In times of crisis, the message rings out from all corners of the city: whatever our differences may be, we are all neighbors.



Statistics

July 1, 2000 to June 30, 2001

Housing	
Race	412
Gender	1
Sexual Orientation	0
Age	0
Marital Status	0
Hostile Environment	0
Disability	4
Ancestral Origin	0
Familial Status	3
Hostile Environment	0
Other	0
Total:	420
Resolved:	260
Referred:	160

Employment	
Race	4
Gender	0
Sexual Orientation	2
Age	2
Marital Status	0
Hostile Environment	0
Disability	0
Ancestral Origin	0
Familial Status	0
Hostile Environment	0
Other	18
Total:	26
Resolved:	0
Referred:	26

* No employment investigator on staff.

Public Accommodations	
Race	3
Gender	3
Sexual Orientation	0
Age	0
Marital Status	0
Hostile Environment	0
Disability	3
Ancestral Origin	3
Familial Status	0
Hostile Environment	0
Other	0
Total:	12
Resolved:	1
Referred:	11

Credit	0
Education	0

Progress

It is important to recognize leaders and heroes in the human rights arena because the struggle can sometimes be a lonely one. Last year, the Providence Human Relations Commission honored four such heroes at the annual Williams/Kizirian Human Relations luncheon.



Gene L. Booth, Dr. John Bowen, Rita C. Michaelson, and Nancy Roundtree were the four Rhode Islanders honored. These individuals, in the words of Executive Director Christine Roundtree, have done "so much for so many for so long."

Those that we celebrated represent the best our state has to offer in commitment to equal rights. Erin Dwyer-Frazier, who was a senior at Classical High School last year, was also recognized for her winning essay on fighting discrimination. Her essay thoughtfully reinforced the ideals that our four honorees have spent a lifetime espousing.

Nancy Roundtree was recognized for a lifetime of advocating for the poor, disadvantaged, and elderly. Her devotion influenced her daughter -- Christine Roundtree -- who also chose a career devoted to public service. Gene L. Booth was recognized for his 20 years of service as executive director of the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights.

Rita C. Michaelson, served for 14 years on the state Commission for Human Rights, spent 20 years as a labor arbitrator, and co-founded the Providence Community Mediation Center. Dr. John Bowen, President of the Providence campus of Johnson & Wales University, was honored for his partnership with the commission in providing meals for Camp Phoenix youngsters.

Education

Teaching the young people of Rhode Island the lesson of equality has developed into an important piece of the mission of the Providence Human Relations Commission.

Since 1991, one of the ways we do this is through Camp Phoenix: A Partnership of Hope Summer Camp. Funding for the camp comes from a variety of sources. The partnership of the Commission, the Mayor's Council on Drug and Alcohol Abuse, and Nickerson Community Center recognizes the importance of this program.

Camp Phoenix engages youth from the Providence School System who are making the transition from elementary to middle school. A total of 69 youngsters attended this week-long, overnight summer camp.

Components of the program are focused around "Life Skills", including substance abuse and violence prevention. The ultimate goal of the camp was to start a dialogue with these youngsters that will hopefully better equip them for life's challenges.

The youngsters interviewed after attending Camp Phoenix reported that they had a very positive experience. More than 90 percent of the participants said they had learned new skills in dealing with alcohol and drugs and 93 percent said they would recommend the camp to a friend. In addition, the campers took part in fun, athletic activities and interesting art projects including photography, painting and design.



"We know that our work doesn't end when the children leave the camp," said Christopher Nocera, chairman of the Camp Phoenix board. "It is a starting point where youngsters can start to think about issues that concern their families, schools, and communities. On top of that, Camp Phoenix is a fun and rewarding experience."

The past year



Common ground

Below the surface, how truly different are people? Is there one race that cares more about the schools in Rhode Island? Do the followers of one religion feel more strongly than another about acceptance? Is promotion of understanding the stated mission of just one select group?

Of course, the answer to all these questions is no. When it comes to unity among people, there are some built-in obstacles: fear, ignorance, intolerance, and history.

Can those elements be overcome to make our city, state, country and world a better place to live? At the Providence Human Relations Commission, we believe the answer is "yes."

Years of experience have taught us that this is a difficult battle, which will be won one person at a time. It is indeed a challenging mission.

There must be enforcement of existing laws and continued vigilance by our elected officials. True victory will only be won, however, in one place: the hearts and minds of our fellow human beings.

As was stated earlier, Providence is especially well-positioned to take a leadership role in this quest. Our city could be a model for the rest of the country. The Providence Human Relations Commission is proud to be just one of the many groups committed to equality for Rhode Island and all its people.

Partnerships

Over the course of the year, the Providence Human Relations Commission meets and partners with dozens of organizations. Included among those organizations and events are the following:

- "Driving While Black" Coalition
- Mayor's Advisory Commission for People with Disabilities
- VSA Arts Rhode Island
- American Association of Museums
- Leadership Rhode Island
- Camp Phoenix
- Camp Cronin
- Rhode Island Coalition for Affirmative Action
- Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission
- Saving Sight Rhode Island
- Dorcas Place Literacy Center
- Rhode Island Civil Rights Roundtable
- Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration
- Rhode Island Public Transit Authority Federal Ascertainment Survey
- Johnson & Wales University President's Multicultural Advisory Council
- Rhode Island Historical Society & Heritage Harbor Museum Linkage
- DARE
- State House testimony on racial profiling and seat belt issue
- Providence Police/community relations seminar
- Rhode Island Statewide Historic Preservation Conference
- National Conference for Community and Justice
- Verizon/State Economic Development Luncheon
- Sexual Assault & Trauma Resource Center
- Providence Community Mediation Center
- Providence Preservation Society
- Providence Head Start
- Stop & Shop "Jobs for Teens" program
- Providence Department of Recreation

The words discrimination and racism tend to evoke images of the civil rights movement and Jim Crow laws in most northerners' minds. Rhode Island is considered one of the most liberal and egalitarian states in the country. However, even in Rhode Island, discrimination is a problem.

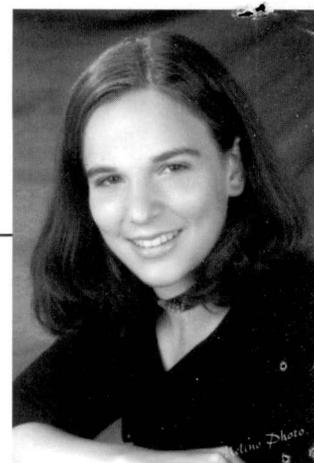
It exists just below the surface of the culture, and in that way, it is even more difficult to eradicate. Discrimination is a line that separates along racial and social lines. Upper middle class suburban people consider the urban neighborhoods -- and by extension, the minority neighborhoods -- to be scary, dangerous places to be avoided at all costs. In return, the urban populace often considers the suburbs to be close-minded, backwards, and elitist.

This type of discrimination rarely reveals itself with overtly violent action, but rather in thoughts, opinions, and unconscious reactions. Battling this type of discrimination can be a very formidable proposition.

The most effective way to fight discrimination is in the home, but it is impossible to reach into homes and force families to change. However, it is very important to reach children at a young age. For this reason, anti-discrimination programs must start at the elementary school level. It must be an all-encompassing program; teachers can no longer afford to make occasional nods towards diversity training. It must be an integral part of the curriculum.

How I would fight discrimination...

by Erin Dwyer-Frazier



At its most basic, discrimination is caused by ignorance. If the ignorance can be erased, then the discrimination will slowly disappear as well. However, this will not be a quick or easy process. It may take years to see real results, but the results will come. In order to fight ignorance, one must provide knowledge. This is where the schools come in.

At times in Rhode Island, one might think that desegregation never happened. Most suburban schools have very few children of minority descent, while schools in Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls are heavily minority.

Since it is impossible to force families to move out of or into cities, schools must find a way to bridge the gap between the urban and suburban areas. A "sister school" program would be very effective at bringing these students closer together. If the schools committed fully to the program, it could be very successful. Individual classes at each school could be partnered together, and individual students could be paired to be "pen pals" via computer. The teachers could coordinate activities together: field trips, regular visits

to the other school, class projects or even classroom activities.

This close collaboration would allow the students in each classroom to get to know each other better. After elementary school, this type of collaboration would likely not be possible, but anti-discrimination measures should not end. There are many means of exposing students to students of different social or ethnic background: leadership programs, sports, or even a less time-intensive version of the "sister school" program. Any attempts to defeat discrimination must stem from an effort to educate, not punish.

Discrimination is like a festering wound just below the skin; even if it cannot be seen, it is still painful. Discrimination must also be cured like this wound: medicine cannot be simply applied to the skin's surfaces, but instead must get under the skin somehow.

One must get under the skin of a culture to cause real improvement. A nice comfortable solution is not possible, in the same way a surface medicine will not cure the internal wound. All too often, diversity training is done as a fun, one-day activity that never provokes any thought or concern in the audience. This will never work. In the end, discrimination can only be fought by bringing people out of their comfort zone and then teaching them.

Erin-Dwyer Frazier won the \$1,000 Williamson/Kizirian scholarship award last year as a senior at Classical High School. She is a student at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

Words can be a powerful weapon or a healing force. Some of the most inspirational words came from the late Ernest "Dutch" Morial -- the first black mayor of New Orleans - in 1988. Here are some of his words that continue to inspire us to this day:

"Freedom must be won over and over again. For those women shut off from a full life by tradition and practice, we need to make a recommitment to economic justice. For those denied freedom and dignity by systems and authorities, we need to make a recommitment to nonviolent change.

"For those hungry and homeless, we need to make a recommitment to promoting physical and mental health. We need to make a recommitment to justice. We need a recommitment to extending democracy to all, but most importantly, for all those who suffer and are disaffected.

"We need a recommitment to action... to legal action, to community-based action, to political action, to individual action. Action breaks down barriers. Action gives meaning and hope and promise to those touched by it. Action unites people man-to-man, woman-to-woman, community-to-community. Action destroys apathy.

"As long as economic justice continues to be a promise unfulfilled for any American, we have work to do. As long as there are systemic flaws in American political, economic or social institutions, which keep any group elevated at the expense of another's subjugation, we have work to do. As long as anti-Semitic violence and racial hate groups continue to resurge and threaten the very democratic system we seek to maintain, we have work to do.

"So we celebrate not a culmination of work, but a continuous commitment to fair play, a continued commitment to achieve the goals of dignity, equality and justice. And to that end, we must say in unison, 'We're tired, but we're not finished. We have work to do.' And any challenge to our cause cannot survive because we have good news for all of our people. We are going much, much farther than where we have come now."

Established in 1963, the Providence Human Relations Commission investigates complaints of alleged discrimination in housing, employment, credit, education, and public accommodations, and promotes understanding among the City's diverse populations.

If you feel discriminated against because of your race, color, religion, age, gender, physical or mental disability, familial status, sexual orientation, nationality, or marital status, please contact:

Providence Human Relations Commission
151 Weybosset Street
Providence, RI 02903

(401) 421-3708 voice
(401) 751-0203 TDD
(401) 274-1070 fax

Wheelchair lift access at Eddy Street entrance.

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