

ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION



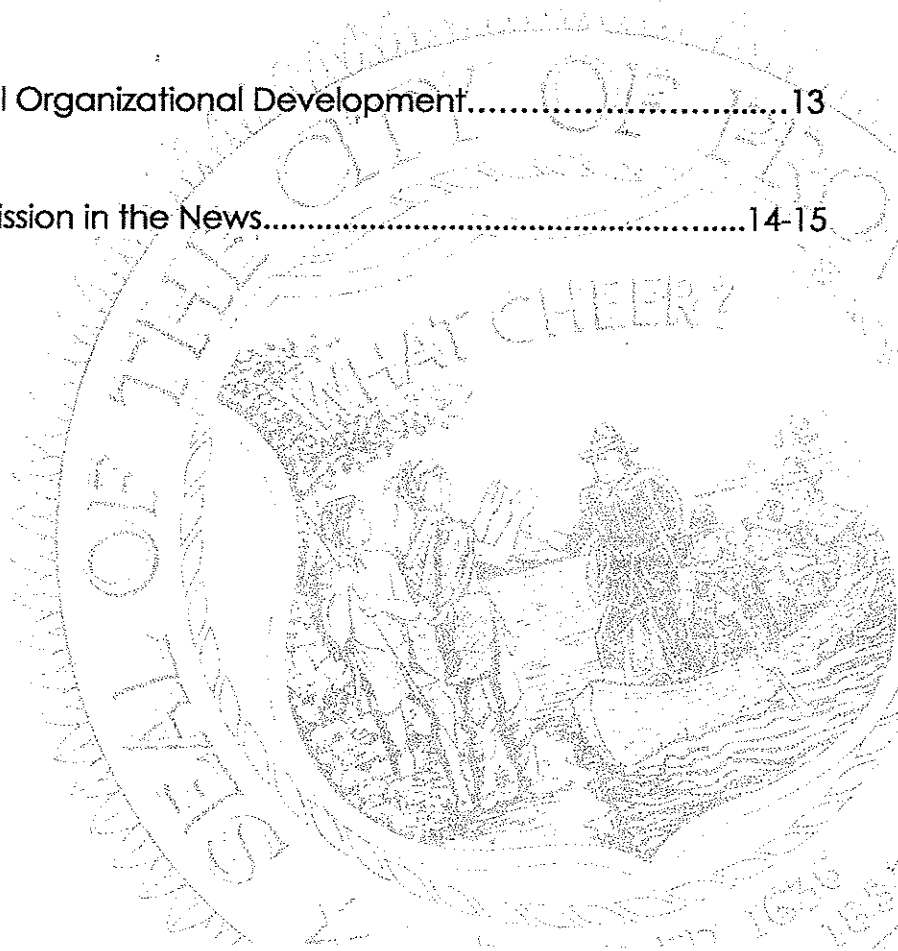
Mayor David N. Cicilline

IN CITY COUNCIL
SEP 18 2008

READ
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.
John M. Harte CLERK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

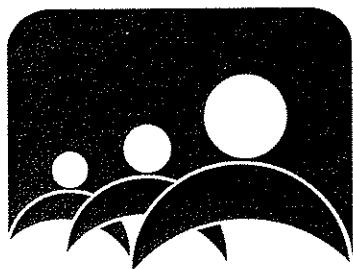
| | |
|--|-------|
| Message from the Chairperson and Executive Director..... | 5 |
| Commissioners & Staff..... | 6 |
| Introduction..... | 7 |
| Adjudication of Complaints of Discrimination..... | 8 |
| FY 2007 Statistics..... | 9 |
| Selected Case Examples..... | 10 |
| Outreach and Education..... | 11-12 |
| Internal Organizational Development..... | 13 |
| Commission in the News..... | 14-15 |



PHRC

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Committed to
justice,
equality
and respect.



PHRC

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

**MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON
& EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The Honorable David N. Cicilline

The Honorable Members of the Providence City Council:

We respectfully submit the Annual Report for the Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC) for FY 2007-2008, pursuant to Section 16-64 (K) of the Anti-Discrimination Ordinance.

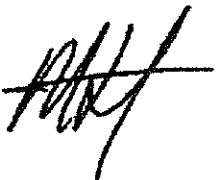
The City of Providence has become one of the most diverse cities in the United States, and this has drawn attention to the role the PHRC plays in the city of Providence. The PHRC began a transformational and restructuring process to develop a new direction of the Commission. We strongly believe that community voices needed to be part of this process, thus we brought together community leaders to ask for their input.

The PHRC kicked off a comprehensive public awareness campaign entitled Discrimination is Illegal. The campaign was designed to inform people of their rights and provide information on how to report discrimination in the areas we investigate. The message, Discrimination is Illegal, was displayed on bus shelters, RIPTA buses, local newspapers; it was also broadcasted on local radio stations. This campaign was intended to help heighten awareness as the PHRC advances its goal of minimizing discrimination.

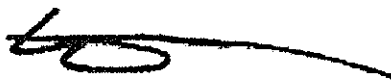
Over the past year, we continued to vigorously process complaints, enforce the city ordinance against discrimination, work diligently to strengthen the Human Relations Commission and ensure that it meets the current needs of our residents. We also developed a new outreach and education program to coordinate workshops and seminars on the regular basis.

Our major accomplishments this year can be summarize in the fact that we continue to promote social justice through advocacy, training and education and we stand ready to investigate any complaints of alleged discrimination. We are very excited and encouraged by the revival of the Providence Human Relations Commission after several months of dormancy and rebuilding. For this, we are very thankful for the cooperation, diligence and support of Mayor Cicilline and his staff.

Sincerely,



Melba Depeña
Executive Director



Thomas Whitten
Chairperson





PHRC

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Established in 1963, the Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC) investigates complaints of alleged discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, gender, physical or mental disability, familial status, sexual orientation, nationality, or marital status in the areas of housing, employment, credit, education, and public accommodations. Additionally, the PHRC promotes understanding and builds positive relationships among the City's diverse populations.

Staff

Melba Depeña
Executive Director

Janette Thomas
Investigator

Wanda Escobedo
Secretary

Olajumoke Akinrolabu, Esq.
Legal Counsel
Law Department

PHRC Commissioners

Thomas P. Whitten
Chairperson

Sister Ann Keefe
Vice Chairperson

Wendy Becker

Everett Brooks

Kenneth Brown

Marilyn Cepeda-Sanchez

Sister Angela Daniels

Mary Dean

Bishop Robert E. Farrow

Special thanks to:

Pich Chhoeun and Joan Gelch who also served during this fiscal year.



INTRODUCTION

The practice or policy of discrimination against individuals because of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, disability, age or country of ancestral origin, is a serious concern for the city of Providence. Such discrimination threatens the welfare of our citizens as it lessens their standard of living, reduces their ability to provide for their families, and undermines our ability to thrive as a diverse city. The PHRC strives to safeguard the rights of Providence residents to be free from discrimination, and works to foster a climate of respect for the many diverse communities that make our city strong.

The mission of the PHRC is twofold:

- 1) to seek, investigate, mediate and/or adjudicate complaints of discrimination filed with the Commission and promote compliance with civil rights law.
- 2) to promote, facilitate, and foster positive relationships among and between the diverse groups and communities within the city of Providence through outreach, education, training and community building activities.

This year has been an exciting year of growth and development for the PHRC, as the staff has worked diligently to fulfill its critical mission of reducing discrimination and improving community relations in the City of Providence. Following a systemic internal organizational review resulting in the development of sound organization policies and procedures, the Staff heard and adjudicated complaints of civil rights violations, and provided education and training to the community on a wide range of civil rights-related topics. Additionally, to insure our work met the needs of the communities in Providence, the PHRC met with community leaders to engage them in a discussion of the Commission and its direction for the future.

What follows in this report are specifics about the work of the Commission including its work hearing complaints, providing educational workshops, outreaching to the community, and building organizational infrastructure.



ADJUDICATION OF COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION

The Process of Filing

Any person who claims to be aggrieved by an alleged violation of the law administered by the PHRC may contact our office by phone, mail or in person. The Commission's procedures does not commence until a formal application has been completed and signed in person.

Intake Form (blue form): The intake form is completed by the Administrative Assistant when inquiries are done by telephone. This form is submitted to the Investigator who then calls the inquirer for further details. The assigned investigator schedules an appointment with the person making the inquiry to get more in depth information about the alleged act of discrimination and to draft the complaint.

During this process the investigator must determined if the complaint falls within the law administered by the Commission, thus the following requirements must be met:

1. The complaint must be filed within 180 days of the occurrence.
2. The incident must have occurred within the city of Providence.

If statue of limitation and jurisdiction is established, the inquirer is asked to fill out a **"Petition Seeking the Filing of a Complaint" Form (white form)**. This must be done in person to establish the identity of the complainant. If the above requirements are not met the complainant is informed immediately and presented with other options that he/she may pursue.

Complaint Process: the Investigator and the complainant meet and fill out a "Petition Seeking the Filing of a Complaint" form including a detailed explanation of what has occurred. The PHRC process is explained to the complainant. The case is reviewed by the Executive Director and PHRC sends a letter requesting a Position Statement (the respondent view of what occurred) about the charge.

Fact finding Meeting: Once a position statement is received from the respondent, PHRC reviews both statements and a fact-finding meeting is scheduled for all parties involved. During this fact-finding meeting, questions are asked of both parties. If there is probable cause—evidence indicates that there is reason to believe that the anti-discrimination ordinance could been violated; we attempt to conciliate the case. If conciliation fails, the charge could go to an administrative hearing.

Investigations: All information sought is related to the complaint under investigation. Subpoenas, interrogatories, and depositions are the formal tools of discovery, although less formal means of discovery is also used by the staff. We gather facts from the person making the complaint, witnesses, respondents, and through site visits, and other means.



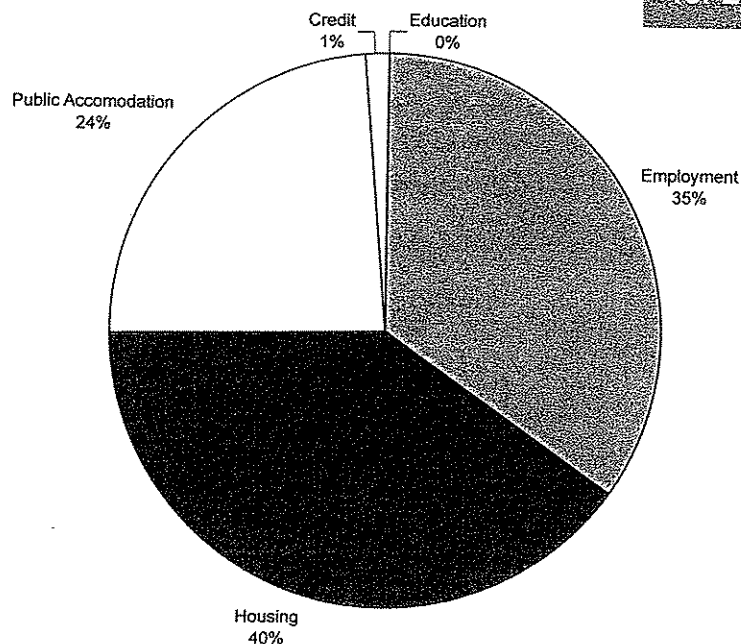
Numbers of Complaints of Discrimination Filed for 2007-2008

| | Race/ Ethnicity | Religion | Disability | Age | Marital Status | Sex | Sexual Orientation |
|------------|--------------------|----------|------------|-----|-------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| Employment | 14 | 2 | 4 | 2 | | 2 | 2 |
| Housing | 14 | | 3 | 11 | 1 | 1 | |
| Public | 7 | | 6 | | | | |
| Credit | | | | 2 | | | |
| Education | | | | | | | |

Disposition and Status of Complaints Filed for 2007-2008

| Type | Count |
|-----------------------|-------|
| Probable Cause | 4 |
| No Probable Cause | 13 |
| Settlement | 3 |
| Out of Jurisdiction | 11 |
| Statute of Limitation | 3 |
| Mediation | 18 |
| Open | 10 |
| Closed | 13 |

Percentage of Cases by Discrimination Area for 2007-2008



SELECTED CASE EXAMPLES

The following three cases are an example of the type of cases we have investigated during this year. In order to preserve confidentiality, identifying information was omitted from the actual case.

- 1) An African America male, employee of a national chain restaurant, alleged that he was a victim of sexual harassment by coworkers, making demeaning and derogatory sexual remarks. He complained to upper management numerous times, including writing letters to the corporate office. He felt due to his race his complaints fell on deaf ears. He felt his only recourse was to file a complaint with the Providence Human Relations Commission. Once the complaint was filed and the investigation processes begun the corporation took immediate notice of the respondent's issues and settled for an undisclosed amount.
- 2) A middle aged Caucasian woman had been employed at a company for over ten years. A new company acquired this company, with new rules and regulations. This woman lost her position and she felt it was due to her age due to the fact that she was replaced by a much younger person. Furthermore, younger employees with similar qualifications retained her position. After a full investigation by the Commission a probable cause finding was entered. Due to her filing with the PHRC, she will be able to go back to her position.
- 3) A Caucasian woman went into a restaurant and felt the hostess discriminated against her because of the way she dressed, asking her, "Are you homeless?" She felt very offended and decided to file a complaint. Through the investigation it was found no probable cause but the restaurant owner did offer an apology to the women and offer to ensure that his business will do a better job of not judging customers by their appearances. The business owner was educated about issues of poverty and class, and a community member was satisfied with the apology.



During the fiscal year, the PHRC developed an education and training program for the community that included four well attended and well received workshops. The goal was to provide high-quality, quarterly workshops and seminars to the general public about issues related to inter-group relations and civil rights as well as the discrimination areas the PHRC investigates.

Workshops:

• Intercultural Communication in the Workplace

The goal of this workshop was to inform the Providence workforce about communication challenges in interacting with different cultures. The guest speakers were Reverend Matthew Kai, Pastor, Westside Tabernacle Baptist Church, George Ortiz, Chief Operations Officer from Progreso Latino, and Donna Fishman, from the Rhode Island Coalition for Affirmative Action. This interactive workshop was designed to help participants learn principles of effective communication within culturally diverse workplace and aimed at fostering better relationships among coworkers of different races and ethnicities. The workshop was held at the University of Rhode Island, Feinstein Providence Campus and there were over 60 participants.

• Training for Landlords: Fair Housing is used often do you know what it means?

The goal of this workshop was to instruct landlords on the state and federal fair housing practices and laws so they would avoid discrimination against tenants and rental applicants. The guest speakers were Doris De Los Santos, Coordinator, Lead Technical Asst. Center RI Housing Resource Commission, John Nimmo, Assistant Director, Housing Network of Rhode Island, and Katie Aliberti, Outreach Organizer, Housing Network of Rhode Island. The workshop was conceived because of the large amount of phone calls the PHRC and other organizations received from landlords on fair housing practices and concerns. Guest speakers covered the following: Who is protected by Fair Housing Laws, Screening & Selecting Tenants, Lead Inspections and how does fair housing affects you and your tenants? The workshop was held at the International Institute, Providence and over 25 landlords were present.

• Is There Discrimination in the Workplace?

Another interactive workshop designed to help participants learn the principles of the workplace discrimination and aimed at fostering better relationships among coworkers of different races and ethnicity. The guest speakers were Gertrude Jones, from Lifespan, Michelle Duso, Power4Good and moderator James Vincent, from the Rhode Island Affirmative Action Professional (RIAAP). This workshop was held at University of RI, Feinstein Providence Campus and there were 50 participants from local banks, companies and city departments.



OUTREACH, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

• Foreclosure Prevention Day

The purpose of this activity was to provide city residents information about how to avoid foreclosure and protect their credit in this housing crisis. During the day, eight agencies that have trained foreclosure counselors participated to answer questions and assist those seeking help as they try to keep their home. Participating organizations included: Acorn Housing, The Elmwood Foundation, Housing Network of Rhode Island, State of RI Housing Resource Commission, Rhode Island Housing Help Center and West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation. This event was cosponsored by the Mayor's Office and the Office for Planning and Development.

Outreach Breakfasts

In addition to the workshops, the PHRC held community breakfasts for community leaders who work with people most affected by the work of the PHRC. These meetings were designed to engage the community in our mission, seek their opinions about our movement forward, and gain their support for our efforts.

PHRC Breakfast: Breakfast of Champions, June 28, 2007

Providence School Department, 797 Westminster Street, 3rd Floor, Superintendent's Conference Room, Providence, RI, 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

The focus was to engage community leaders in a conversation about the new direction of the PHRC, and explain the work we will be doing. Sharon Chancellor, President of Chancellor HRD moderated the discussion, capturing insights and opinions of the 46 community leaders who attended.

PHRC Breakfast: Community Relations, March 26, 2008

Providence School Department, 797 Westminster Street, 3rd Floor, Superintendent's Conference Room, Providence, RI 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

The goal was for community leaders to inform the PHRC of the needs of the city and offer their perspective on the work the Commission should be doing. Community leaders were asked to answer questions in three small groups, and report their discussion to the larger group. This event was facilitated by Commissioner Wendy Becker with approximately 50 community leaders from diverse organizations attending.

A report highlighting the discussion and recommendations from these breakfasts was written and sent to all participants. The report made clear that participants wanted active engagement by the PHRC in facilitating regular community meetings among diverse groups in Providence, and ongoing discussions and trainings of the issues affecting us all. Further, community leaders wanted further clarification of our work as we move forward as an active voice on issues of civil rights and human relations.



In order to more effectively do the work of the commission, the staff was involved in important training over the course of the year.

MEDIATOR TRAINING

Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island
570 Broad Street, Providence, RI 02907

Both the Executive Director and Investigator are certified trained mediators, after completing a 34 hour Mediation Skills Training Program. Mediation is a process in which two sides discuss a dispute with a neutral third party. The role of the mediator is to assist them to reach a solution that works for both parties.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY- EEOC

Boston Area Office
JFK Federal Building, Boston, MA

Both Executive Director and Investigator attended the EEOC Training April 10, 2008.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is a federal agency responsible for enforcing employment discrimination laws. The Training Institute provides a variety of training to commissions to help them understand, and correct discrimination in the workplace. The training offered insightful and practical in theories of discrimination, investigative interview, investigative techniques, circumstantial evidence, documentary evidence, testimony and review of federal laws.

Trainings attended by the Executive Director

The following trainings were conducted by New Roots Providence.

- Developing Board Leadership
- Program Design
- Evaluation Training
- Revitalizing Your Board of Directors
- Clarifying your Mission, Vision and Purpose
- Introduction to Grantwriting



