



# ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION



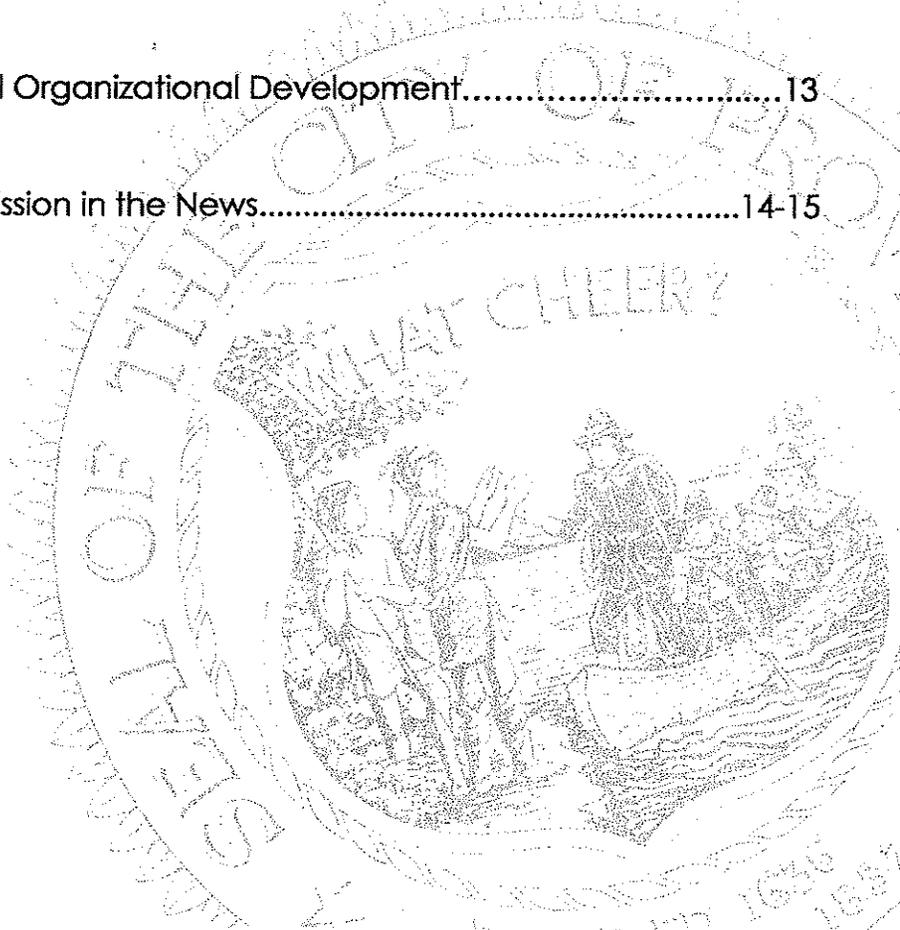
Mayor David N. Cicilline

IN CITY COUNCIL  
SEP 18 2008

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

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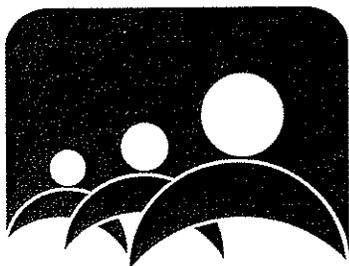
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**PHRC**

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.

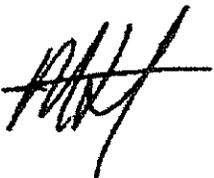
The City of Providence has become one of the most diverse cities in the United States, and this has drawn attention to the role the PHRC plays in the city of Providence. The PHRC began a transformational and restructuring process to develop a new direction of the Commission. We strongly believe that 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.

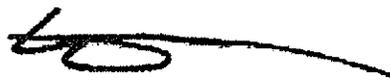
Over the past year, we continued to vigorously process complaints, enforce the city ordinance against discrimination, work diligently to strengthen the Human Relations Commission and ensure that it meets the current needs of our residents. We also developed a new outreach and education program to coordinate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





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 be 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.



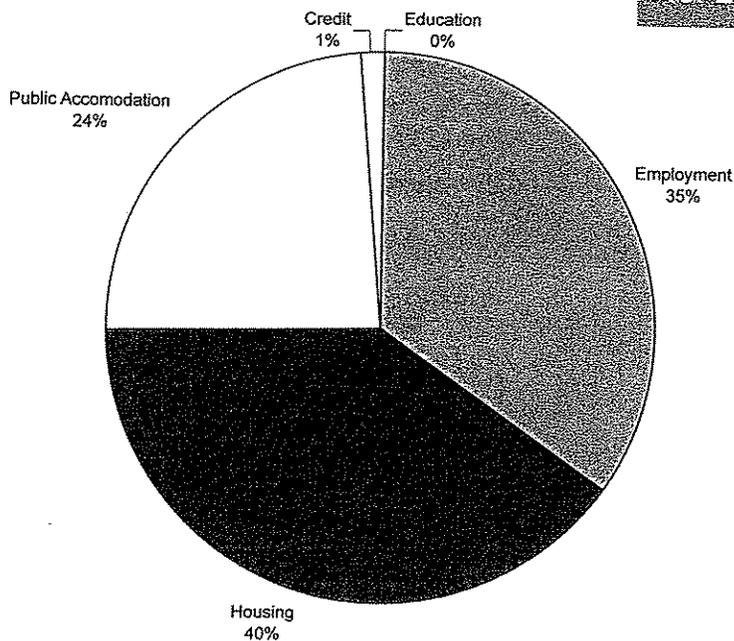
### Numbers of Complaints of Discrimination Filed for 2007-2008

|            | Race/<br>Ethnicity | Religion | Disability | Age | Marital<br>Status | Sex | Sexual<br>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 Progresso 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



# PHRC IN THE NEWS

## The Providence American

Vol. 21 No. 16 August 9, August 23, 2007

Your Source For Your News

Last Update: Jul 18 @ 12:43 PM

SEARCH

### Committed to Justice, Equality and Respect

By Peter C. White



Melba Depena, Executive Director of the Providence Human Relations Commission, is a woman of many talents. She was born in the city of Santiago, Dominican Republic, the eldest of two children born to Narciso and Maria Depena. Melba arrived in the United States in 1982 and has lived in the City of Providence since her arrival and attended Roger Williams Middle School and Central High School. Melba earned her Bachelor of Science and Master's degrees in Human Resources and Family Studies with a concentration in College Student Personnel. Melba has always been involved in human development and is credited with co-founding various women's recovery groups like Ladies United for Change (LUCIFER), the Latina Leadership Institute, Sororas Latinas Unidas—LUI Chapter, and De Mujer a Mujer, and has been an active participant in other community organizations such as Instituto Dominicano de Rhode Island, Girl Scouts of Rhode Island, Urban League of Rhode Island, Leadership for a Future, The Latino Political Action Committee, The Latino Civic Fund, and Dominican American National Roundtable.

Politically Melba coordinated political campaigns for Congressman Riksanth Panilo, Senator Isaac Pacheco, Secretary of State Matthew Brown and Myrtle York. Professionally she has worked at the Executive Assistant to the Vice President at the University of Rhode Island Providence Campus, Field Director for Matt Brown's 2002 campaign for Secretary of State, Coordinator of Rhode Island Kids Count's Counting Kids Program, Coordinator of the Multicultural Center at the University of Rhode Island, and Executive Director of the RI Democratic Party, position that made her the first woman and the first Latina to ever run the Party. Currently, Melba Depena is the first Latina Executive Director of the Providence Human Relations Commission. It is leading her team into an era of active community outreach. Melba may walk softly but her role in City government requires that she carry a big stick. The Human Relations Commission was established by Ordinance in 1993 to enforce laws of equal opportunity for all Providence residents, at a time when civil unrest was sweeping many urban areas throughout the country. The Providence Human Relations Commission was created in response to the turmoil that the city was experiencing at the time. The purpose of the commission was to build a mutual understanding and respect among the city's diverse population.

### Business as usual

#### PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS

### Providence Human Relations Commission unveils new awareness campaign

PHRC will also host several public events to seek community input

PROVIDENCE — The Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC) has kicked off a new comprehensive public awareness campaign entitled Discrimination is Illegal. The campaign is designed to inform people of their rights and provide information on how to report discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, credit, education and public accommodations.

The message, Discrimination is Illegal, can be found on bus shelters, RIPTA buses and in newspapers. It's also being broadcast on local radio stations. According to Human Relations Commission Executive Director Melba Depena, the goal of the campaign is to encourage residents who feel that they have been the victim of discrimination to file a complaint with the Commission.

PHRC is in an effort to solicit input from community leaders on the agency's mission. Other upcoming events include:

- Intercultural Communication in the Workplace - July 31st

Workshop aimed at fostering better relationship among co-workers of different race and ethnicity through communication.

- Fair Housing in Rhode Island - August 7th

Workshop will review state and federal fair housing practices and laws as it applies to housing providers to avoid discrimination against tenants and rental applicants.

For more information on the Breakfast of Champions and the upcoming workshops, contact the Human Relations Commission at (401) 351-0475 or visit the City's web site at [www.providenceri.com](http://www.providenceri.com).

"We've worked hard over the past year to strengthen the Human Relations Commission to ensure that it meets the current needs of our residents," said Depena. "In addition to promoting social justice through advocacy, training and education, we stand ready to investigate any complaints of alleged discrimination."

"We are very excited and encouraged by this tangible evidence of revival of the Providence Human Relations Commission after several months of dormancy and rebuilding," stated Thomas P. Whitten, Chairman, Human Relations Commission. "Thanks to the cooperation, diligence and support of Mayor Clifton, the commission now has a complement of dedicated commissioners and a well prepared, highly qualified staff."

Providence En Español  
Publicado el 07-19-2008

### Comisión de Relaciones Humanas convoca reunión

En contra de la discriminación

PROVIDENCE. Ante los cada vez más comunes casos de discriminación que tienen lugar en Providence en áreas tales como vivienda, empleo, acomodación pública, educación y estatus de crédito, la Comisión de Relaciones Humanas de la ciudad inicia una serie de reuniones comunitarias en diversos centros y organizaciones no lucrativas de la zona.

Estos encuentros tuvieron el pasado jueves 14 de julio en la Asociación de Vecinos de Mt. Hope, miércoles 16, en el Instituto Internacional y jueves 17, en el Centro Comunitario West End.

Las reuniones comunitarias continuarán el lunes 21 de julio, en John Hope Settlement House, a partir de las 2:00 de la tarde; jueves 24 de julio, en la Liga Urbana de Rhode Island entre 5:00 y 9:30 de la tarde, en el Centro DaVinci, el miércoles 30 de los comentes, de 11:00 de la mañana a 12:00 del mediodía.

Los organizadores de la ininterrumpida destacaron que el objetivo de estas reuniones es afianzar su misión de poner fin a la discriminación de que son objeto muchas personas en las áreas antes mencionadas en la ciudad de Providence. Asimismo confían en que estos encuentros comunitarios tendrán a mejorar las relaciones entre grupos diversos que conviven en esta urbe.

"Estamos buscando una vía del público sobre sus experiencias en lo que respecta a la diversidad cultural, discriminación y proporcionando información acerca de como la Comisión de Relaciones Humanas de Providence (PHRC) ayuda en inglés y español a quienes desean asistencia", dijo Melba Depena, directora Ejecutiva.

Se recomienda especialmente a los residentes de Providence asistir ante PHRC, misma que solo quiere ser receptiva a las necesidades de la comunidad a medida que avanzan sus iniciativas. "La Comisión de Relaciones Humanas de Providence ha hecho grandes avances en el último año", dijo Mel Depena. "Pero queremos asegurarnos de que estamos abordando las necesidades específicas de todas las comunidades afectadas por la discriminación", concluyó.

Con el propósito de llegar a todos y cada uno de los residentes de Providence, PHRC ha organizado encuentros comunitarios en diferentes localidades a través de la ciudad. Las personas, compañías u organizaciones interesadas en participar en estos encuentros gratuitos pueden comunicarse al la Comisión (401) 351-0475.

Por Maribel Estrada Torres Gómez

PROVIDENCE EN ESPAÑOL

PROVIDENCE. A pesar de que existen numerosas leyes en contra de la discriminación, en cualquier categoría en que se presente, muchas de ellas no se aplican. La discriminación puede ser un problema a nivel mundial. La discriminación puede ser por raza, edad, sexo, idioma, tipo de los ojos, en esta ocasión, y de manera especial, cuando como referencia al taller "¿Existe discriminación en el trabajo?" (¿Existe discriminación en el lugar de trabajo?), organizado por la Comisión de Relaciones Humanas de Providence, se exploraron un espacio de empoderamiento sobre dicho tema, sus leyes y las consecuencias de cuando que más se practican en la actualidad.

El taller se realizó el martes 25 de febrero, en el Campus Providence. Fue un momento muy importante de la Jornada Alternativa de Profesores del estado (Providence Alternative Action Project) y contó con la presencia de los señores Gerardo Arias, director de Diversidad de Lifenex, y Melba Depena, directora Ejecutiva de la PHRC.

La primera sesión del evento, al que asistieron aproximadamente 40 personas, entre empleados y empleados de compañías, se enfocó en la definición de "discriminación", la cual proporciona la presencia como una situación en la que una persona o grupo es tratado de forma discriminatoria a causa de su raza, edad, sexo, idioma, tipo de los ojos, en esta categoría social existen.

Entre esas categorías se encuentran la raza, la orientación sexual, el idioma, el grupo étnico, la edad y la discapacidad. Esta es una amplia legislación contra la discriminación en cuanto a la igualdad de oportunidades de empleo, vivienda y bienes y servicios.

Para, a pesar de la amplia variedad de leyes, la discriminación puede ocurrir en los actos de empleo, en la

El Límite Español

# ¿Existe discriminación en el lugar de trabajo?



durante el taller de discriminación laboral, participaron como panelistas, Gerardo Arias.

LA COMUNIDAD / COMMUNITY

08.03.07

## Enseñan comportamiento laboral frente a diferentes culturas

Eduardo Hernández  
Equipo Expreso

PROVIDENCE. En la actualidad que vivimos en un mundo globalizado, es importante tener en cuenta que cada cultura tiene sus propias normas y valores. En este sentido, la Comisión de Relaciones Humanas (PHRC) de Providence, Rhode Island, organizó un taller sobre comportamiento laboral frente a diferentes culturas. El taller se realizó el martes 25 de febrero, en el Campus Providence. Fue un momento muy importante de la Jornada Alternativa de Profesores del estado (Providence Alternative Action Project) y contó con la presencia de los señores Gerardo Arias, director de Diversidad de Lifenex, y Melba Depena, directora Ejecutiva de la PHRC.



Melba Depena, directora Ejecutiva de la Comisión de Relaciones Humanas del City Hall de Providence.

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## Comisionados del Comité de Relaciones Humanas



