

CHRISTINE ROUNDTREE  
Executive Director



VINCENT A. CIANCI, JR.  
Mayor  
CHRISTOPHER NOCERA  
Chairperson

**Providence Human Relations Commission**

*"Building Pride In Providence"*

January 27, 1999

The Honorable President and Members of the Providence City Council  
City of Providence  
25 Dorrance Street  
Providence, RI

Re: PHRC Report of Services

Dear Mr. President and Honorable Members:

Pursuant to Section 1103 (b) (7) of the Providence Home Charter, it is my honor to present to you the Report of Services of the Providence Human Relations Commission.

We have had a very successful year as reflected in this report.

On behalf of my fellow commissioners and the staff of the PHRC, I want to thank you for the support that you have given to our agency throughout the year and we look forward to continuing our work for the people of Providence.

Sincerely,

Christopher Nocera  
Chairman

Christine Roundtree  
Executive Director

IN CITY COUNCIL  
FEB 4 1999  
READ  
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT  
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.  
  
CLERK

**FILED**

JAN 27 11 37 AM '99

DEPT. OF CITY CLERK  
PROVIDENCE, R. I.



OFFICE OF THE  
CITY CLERK

RECEIVED

JAN 27 1999



RECEIVED

JAN 27 1999

PROVIDENCE, R. I.

## NEW ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE TAKES EFFECT

Sexual Orientation now a protected class in the City of Providence

For the first time in the history of our city, our Anti-Discrimination ordinance has been revised to include sexual orientation as a protected class. In addition, the revisions reflect language pertaining to the Americans with Disabilities Act and all references to the word "handicap" have now been changed to "disability."

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects individuals from employment discrimination on the basis of natural origin as well as race or color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, disability, age or country of ancestral origin.

The new section reads:

*"It is unlawful for any employee to fail or refuse to hire any applicant for employment or otherwise discriminate because of race or color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, disability, age or country of ancestral origin."*

CITY OF PROVIDENCE ANTIDISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE

Section 15.57 Unlawful employment practices

A) It is unlawful for any employer to fail or refuse to hire any applicant for employment or otherwise discriminate because of

race or color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, disability, age or country of ancestral origin.

We at the PHRC are striving to provide equal rights and equal treatment to all of our citizens.

If you feel you have been discriminated against, you may contact our office, fill out an intake form, and a complete investigation will follow.

## ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL SUMMER AT CAMP PHOENIX

Seventy-Five Providence Youth Participate During Two Camp Sessions

Encouraging a positive relationship between the City's youth and Police officers in an environment that promotes racial, ethnic and cultural understanding were the founding principles of

Camp Phoenix in 1991. The PHRC, the Mayor's Council on Drugs and Alcohol Abuse and the Nickerson Community Center continue the tradition today. Camp Phoenix accommodates 50 campers per five-day, overnight session. This past year, the Chairperson of the Commission, Commission staff, a student intern, police officers, as well as community members volunteered for the camp sessions. The campers are selected to reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of Providence.



Activities at Camp Phoenix include music appreciation, drama, dance, athletics, and trips to the beach. Among the special programs offered are a guided tour of URI (to encourage thoughts of college), and presentations designed to enhance self-esteem

and self-confidence. Dramatizations about drug abuse prevention and awareness are held and presented in no-nonsense terms by local professional counselors.

An integral component of Camp Phoenix is to provide follow-up activities through the months succeeding the overnight camp stay.

Camp Phoenix follow up activities are an integral part of the camping experience. Graduates of the camp and the adult staff have visited the Haunted Labyrinth at Halloween, braved ocean whale watches, enjoyed college football and basketball games, and roller skated as a group at local rinks. They have also visited submarines in Groton Naval Base, and Mystic

Aquarium in Mystic, Connecticut. Another unique aspect of Camp Phoenix is the "outdoor winter survival" weekend for camp alumni.

Camp Phoenix was inducted into the Providence Recreation Hall of Fame.

## CLANTON AND ST. PETER RECEIVE WILLIAMSON-KIZIRIAN AWARDS

A Central High School and a Classical High School Graduate Awarded \$1,000 College Scholarships

1997 Award and Scholarship Luncheon

The Providence Human Relations Commission held its Ninth Annual Williamson/Kizirian Human Relations Award and Scholarship Luncheon on Friday, June 6, 1997 at the Providence Marriott.

The Williamson/Kizirian award was presented to retired Urban League Executive Director, Ms. B. Jae Clanton, who has since passed away. Ms. Clanton was recognized for her role as a tireless community advocate. As Urban League Executive Director, Ms. Clanton directed services such as personal counseling, employment training, educational programs, and transitional living services for teenage parents. She was responsible for a budget of \$3.2 million and a staff of 110.

The award is named for Frederick C. Williamson and Harry Kizirian, who, as Providence Human Relations Commissioners, provided two decades of distinguished service to the cause of equal opportunity and positive intergroup relations. Part of the luncheon was also the awarding of a \$1,000 college scholarship to Ana Almeida, a 1997 graduate of Central High School.

Ana wrote the winning essay in which she describes her positive experiences while attending an ethnically diverse school, one whose reputation in local media is that it is "full of gangs".

Presenting her essay before an audience of 100, she recounted that Central High School is a very special school where all students of all ethnic groups work together for a common cause such as a blood drive, and other similar activities to benefit those in need. Ms. Almeida is now a student in the Brown University freshman class.

The scholarship is presented to a high school senior who will be entering an institution of higher learning and whose essay successfully conveyed how people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds came together in a positive way.



1997 Award recipient B. Jae Clanton with award namesakes Harry Kizirian (l) and Fred Williamson (r)

Gary St. Peter, local attorney, was presented the 10th Annual Williamson/Kizirian Human Relations Award on June 26, 1998.

St. Peter, a former commissioner and chair of the PHRC, has done extensive work with people with developmental disabilities and has served on the Mayor's's Advisory Commission for People with Disabilities.

The Commission's special recognition award was given to former commissioner and commission secretary, Cecelia "Dottie" Ramos. Ms. Ramos served on the commission for 12 years. She was also recognized for many volunteer efforts throughout Providence and specifically in the Mt. Hope neighborhood.

Ms. Josephine Shagwert, the winner of the \$1,000 college scholarship, successfully addressed the topic, "How I Would Fight Discrimination." Her essay is excerpted here:

"Discrimination is rooted in ignorance, fear, or misunderstanding and in order to dispel those causes communities must confront them and create constant dialogue about solutions... Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of Cape Town and perhaps one of the best know activists against apartheid, made this statement at the funeral of a much loved white human rights activist, "We Africans speak of a concept difficult to render in English. We speak of 'Ubuntu' or 'Boto.' You know when it is there and it is obvious when it is absent. It has to do with what it means to be truly human, it refers to gentleness, to compassion, to hospitality, to openness to others, to vulnerability, to be available to others and to know that you are bound up with them in the bundle of life, for a person is only a person through persons."

IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, PLEASE CONTACT:

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION  
151 WEYBOSSET STREET PROVIDENCE, R.I. 02903

VOICE: (401) 421-3708  
FAX: (401) 274-1070  
TDD (401) 751-0203

MULTILINGUAL: SPANISH AND ITALIAN

# PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION



## REPORT OF SERVICES JULY 1996 - JULY 1998

VINCENT A. CIANCI, JR.  
MAYOR OF PROVIDENCE

CHRISTOPHER NOCERA  
CHAIRMAN

CHRISTINE ROUNDTREE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## PHRC COMMISSION

**CHRISTOPHER NOCERA**  
Chairperson

**THOMAS FOLEY**  
Vice Chairperson

**MARY DEAN**

**VICTOR MENDOZA**

**HOWARD PHENGSONPHONE**

## STAFF

**CHRISTINE ROUNDTREE**  
Executive Director

**PASQUALINA BUCCI**  
Deputy Director

**VINCENT MCWILLIAMS**  
Housing Investigator

**FRANK SIMEONE**  
Housing Specialist

**DEBORAH HUDSON**  
Administrative Assistant

**KATIA LUGO**  
Secretary/Interpreter

**CHRISTINE SIMEONE**  
Clerk/Typist



To the Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

On behalf of my fellow commissioners of the Providence Human Relations Commission, I am proud to present you with our Annual Report.

This past year has been a very exciting and productive one at the Commission. In particular we were honored to work with Dorcas

Place in providing the citizens of Providence with a Landlord/Tenant Handbook written in both English and Spanish. This easy-to-read booklet has been used throughout the city to help both landlords and tenants to know their legal rights. The other highlights of the year have included working with the Providence Police Department in providing two weeks of camp for the youth in Providence under the auspices of Camp Phoenix - A Partnership of Hope and our sponsorship of the Fair Housing Forum for students from Classical High School, Central High School, ALP and RI School for the Deaf.

At our Ninth Annual Scholarship luncheon we were privileged to present Ms. B. Jae Clanton with the Williamson-Kizirian award for the tireless work she has done in promoting racial harmony and justice in the community. At that luncheon we also awarded a \$1,000 college scholarship to Ana Almeida, a recent graduate of Central High School and currently a student at Brown University.

All this was possible through the hard work and dedication of Executive Director Christine Roundtree and the staff of the Human Relations Commission.

We thank the Mayor and the City Council for their support and encouragement through the past year and we look forward to continuing our efforts to improve human relations amongst the citizens of Providence.

Sincerely,

**CHRISTOPHER NOCERA**  
Chairperson



Dear Mayor Cianci and City Councilmembers:

There is widespread misconception about the nature of prejudice and its reduction. When I appeared as part of a panel on a local television talk show a couple of years ago, I was asked how long the PHRC had been in existence. I answered that the Commission was established in 1963. The host said to me, "Well, if you've been around that long, why is there still prejudice and discrimination?" Unfortunately, many people share that unrealistic view.

In recent years, just as in decades past, we have seen civil unrest protesting gross injustice as well as acts of bigotry. Conflict among groups has a long history. No one agency, indeed no group of agencies, can eliminate prejudice and discrimination. We cannot eliminate conflict between family members so why do we think we can eliminate conflict in society? Conflict is a fact of life. Indeed, in our increasingly multicultural society it would be a miracle if there were no conflict.

This Commission and other like entities can, and do, successfully address acts of discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas, although it is no easy task even with laws on the books. However, that human condition known as prejudice is an even more insidious enemy in our society. What we can hope to accomplish is to increase our level of understanding of each other by employing open and honest, yet sensitive dialogue and by rededicating ourselves to fairness and justice, by taking a new view of ourselves and by examining our own natures and rooting out feelings of intolerance.

Sincerely,

**CHRISTINE ROUNDTREE**  
Executive Director

# What's Happening in Housing, Education and Employment Programs?

## Making the law more understandable and accessible

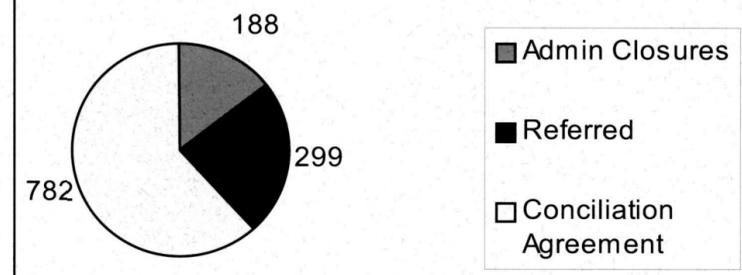
The Equal Housing Opportunity Program finished the year on a good note. This year 727 persons who had called the office were advised or referred. Major issues included health and safety, security deposits, and evictions. People needing legal advice were referred to Legal Services and the Volunteer Lawyer Program. The PHRC will be working actively with State and City Agencies to educate landlords and tenants about the law. Another issue in the Housing Program is the presence of lead paint in many older homes. Children living in those homes are at risk for serious health problems.

The Commission worked in conjunction with Dorcas Place in publishing the Landlord/Tenant Handbook. The Landlord/Tenant book was first released by Dorcas Place in 1987. In 1995, the partnership

of the PHRC and Dorcas place facilitated the printing of the book in Spanish for

almost 3,000 books have been distributed to tenants and landlords. The book has been very successful and has resulted in many

### DISPOSITION OF HOUSING INQUIRIES



first time. The Landlord/Tenant book was originally created in response to the 1987 revisions of the Rhode Island Landlord Tenant Law to improve the law's protection of tenants. For the year ending in June, 1997,

inquirants calling or coming to the office. Another printing is in the works for this year. With the help of the Dorcas Place book, the legal language has become a more understandable one.

## Recommendations Implemented For Addressing Racial and Ethnic Issues in Providence Schools

We know that problems of insensitivity to racial and cultural issues exist within our educational system (as well as in all segments of society). In 1989, the Commission joined with others to present a seminar entitled "Racial Tension Among Providence Youth." Executive Director Christine Roundtree maintained then as now that the larger problem is between adults and youth in the school setting rather than between or among the youth themselves. This assumption was upheld somewhat after reading survey forms completed by some students attesting to insensitive remarks they were subjected to on occasion by their teachers. Accordingly, it was recom-

mended that an internal mechanism be established, by recreating the position of Human Relations Specialist within the schools to address student grievances of this nature and that each student is made aware of the procedure.

The following recommendations have been implemented:

1. Each school has a mediator on site to conciliate these incidents before they get out of hand. It seems that the regular route of students talking with guidance counselors or trusted teachers does not work in these situations. Therefore, a specific human relations specialist to deal with specific problems of this sort is required. These specialists are either bi- or multilingual or

they have immediate access to translators. 2. We are working in conjunction with the School Department to develop a multiracial and multiethnic student human relations council (in addition to the traditional student council) to address these matters. These human relations councils will act as liaison between students as well as between students and administrators.

3. Workshops on sensitivity and multicultural issues for teachers and school staff are being held frequently.

Further, we have had some success working with several schools to host functions highlighting ethnic and racial heritage. We shall continue to expand our presence in the schools and to work cooperatively with the School Department in this regard.

## Providence Work Force - Programs and Opportunities

### EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

The majority of inquiries regarding employment in fiscal year 1996-1997 were found to be misunderstandings either on the part of the employee or on the part of the employer. Therefore, after initial investigation of the charges, we were able to successfully mediate between the parties.

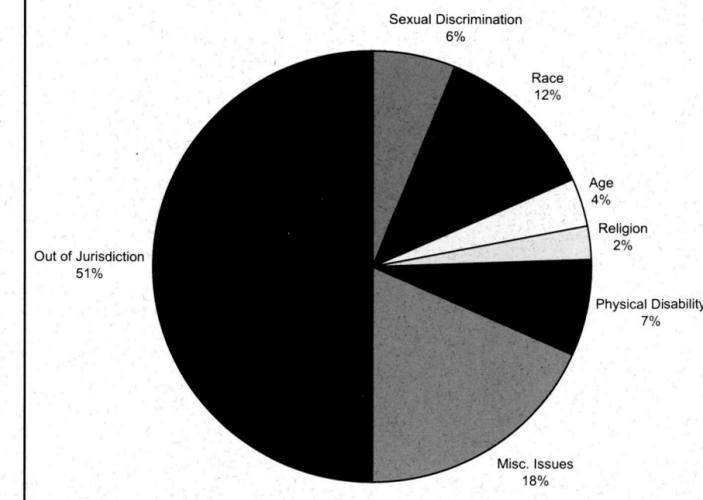
Of the forty-six inquiries, three progressed to the fact finding stage of our process which is a formal attempt to uncover the facts of the dispute and bring to light all relevant information. All parties directly or indirectly involved are requested to be present. Although established courtroom rules of evidence are not followed, legal counsel for the respondent often attends the proceedings.

Because the majority of our calls relating to employment were misunderstandings, we realize that there is a need for employers and employees in the city of Providence to be educated about employment law and be made aware of the rights of each party.

Based on our observations we have determined that outreach is needed not only by the corporations and private sector, but also within public agencies and nonprofit organizations. The charges among all are strikingly similar.

During the coming year, a substantial

### BREAKDOWN OF EMPLOYMENT COMPLAINTS



amount of our time will be devoted to education and awareness regarding employment rights and responsibilities. Questions have ranged from an employer asking if he can terminate a pregnant woman because she was not performing her duties, to an inquirer asking if he could be fired for having a previous criminal record.

The correct implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act has confused many employers. There is minimal case law to provide guidance into this relatively new Federal mandate. The PHRC has participated in an official role on the

Mayor's Advisory Commission for People with Disabilities since 1990. Twenty-one members serve on the ADA Commission and Christine Roundtree has served as Vice-Chairperson since then.

The rights of employees with disabilities and the responsibility of employers in this regard remain virtually unknown by many whose responsibility it is to have knowledge of the Act. Information by the public at-large is sorely lacking. We will cover information of the ADA as part of our outreach presentations.

### PUBLIC ACCOMMODATION

to rectify the situation, they offered the complainant two season passes with "handicap" privileges. They also changed their policy to read, "Any student, regardless of age, may purchase a student discount ticket." The dispute was successfully mediated on an informal basis

## From Our Files...

The complainant charged that a local theater discriminated against her because of her age and disability. The commission found that the complainant was denied a student discount ticket, even after showing her student ID, because she was over the age of twenty-five. She was also

denied "handicap" seating that was required to accommodate her disability.

The respondent stated that the employee who worked at the box office that night and denied the complainant a student discount ticket was newly hired. Management admitted that the error was their fault and