



# City of Providence Human Relations Commission

2018 Annual Report



Sol Taubin, Executive Director  
Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor



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## City of Providence Human Relations Commission

# Letter to Mayor & City Council

Hon. Jorge O. Elorza  
Mayor

February 15, 2019

Sol Taubin  
Executive Director

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

### Executive Committee

Pursuant to City Charter art. XI §1103(b)(4), please find attached the Providence Human Relations Commission's 2018 Annual Report.

Patricia LaSalle  
Chair

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.

Chace Baptista  
Vice-Chair

John Gaffney  
Secretary

In 2018, the Commission has continued to ensure Providence residents have access to the most comprehensive public antidiscrimination investigation and adjudication services available, through an ongoing partnership with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights. The Providence Human Relations Commission has also worked to build internal capacity, expand access to meaningful services, and elevate community voices.

### Commissioners

Kai LoMuscio

With critical and hard-fought protections for marginalized communities continuously stripped by the Trump administration, and [plans for such actions to continue](#), the City's commitment to building and resourcing structures that expand and protect civil rights locally has never been more relevant. With your support, the Providence Human Relations Commission looks forward to building out its outreach and advocacy functions, continuing its fight against discrimination and the broader systems of oppression that discrimination instantiates in 2019.

Maria Monteiro

Cesar Teo

Celeste Terry-Lo

Raymond Two Hawks  
Watson

### Providence Human Relations Commission

401-680-5740

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 protect human rights, center community in our work, and expand access City-wide.

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[www.providenceri.gov/hr-commission](http://www.providenceri.gov/hr-commission)

**Patricia LaSalle**  
Chair, Providence Human Relations Commission

**Sol Taubin**  
Executive Director, Providence Human Relations Commission



## Introduction & Background

Impaneled in 1963, the Providence Human Relations Commission's mission is bifold: 1) to foster mutual understanding and respect among the city's diverse populations, and 2) to ensure equal opportunities for all Providence residents in housing, education, employment, credit, and public accommodations by combating discrimination based on race, ethnicity, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, marital status, ability status, age, and country of ancestral origin. The Commission works to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to empower the people of Providence through education, advocacy, and collaboration, to ensure access to resources, protection of rights, and promotion of positive community relations. Currently serving on the Commission are Chair Patricia LaSalle, Vice-Chair Chace Baptista, Secretary John Gaffney, Commissioner Maria Monteiro, Commissioner Kai Lo Muscio, Commissioner Cesar Teo, Commissioner Celeste Terry-Lo, and Commissioner Raymond Two Hawks Watson. Since submitting its last Annual Report in December of 2017, the Commission has been fortunate to welcome Commissioner Celeste Terry-Lo as a new member, and, staffing the Commission, legal counsel Steve Ryan and Executive Director Sol Taubin. The Commission thanks former Chair Raymond Two Hawks Watson, Member Lucy Rose, legal counsel Adrienne Southgate, and Executive Director Kayla Laurel Powell for their service.

While the Commission experienced a brief hiatus during the search for a new Executive Director, it reconvened in early fall and has gained momentum moving towards the new year. As part of its work in 2018, the Providence Human Relations Commission has built organizational capacity, streamlined processes for complaint adjudication and investigation, expanded outreach and education efforts to align with a broader cultural equity strategy, and played a key advisory role in the Administration's work to build equitable and inclusive systems, and expand access to City services. In 2019, the Commission looks forward to continuing to build capacity, foster meaningful engagement, protect critical civil rights, and expand its advocacy work at the municipal and state levels.

# Year in Review 2018

## Organizational Development

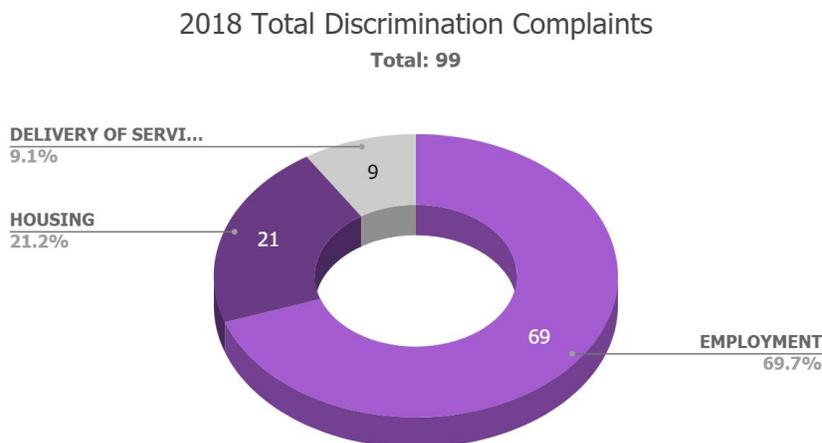
Building on former Director Powell's work, new Providence Human Relations Commission Executive Director Sol Taubin has doubled down on a commitment to organizational development and capacity building in 2018, engaging the Commission and Mayor's Office in strategic planning efforts, reactivating the Commission's communication lines and [webpage](#), and building relationships to represent the City in important coalitions such as the Rhode Island Department of Health's Refugee Resettlement Network and United Way's Housing and Homelessness Policy Workgroup. Under Director Taubin's leadership, the Providence Human Relations Commission has also renewed its memorandum of understanding with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, securing expanded investigatory and adjudicatory resources for Providence residents reporting claims of discrimination or retaliation. In addition, the Providence Human Relations Commission held Executive Committee Elections on its December 12th, 2018 meeting in City Hall, for the 2019 year. Chair Patricia LaSalle, Vice-Chair Chace Baptista and Secretary John Gaffney were elected by unanimous vote, bringing a wealth of knowledge and leadership experience to the Commission's Executive Committee. All three members have served on the Commission for numerous terms. A call for applications for residents interested in serving the City through potential appointment was also announced. The Commission looks forward to working with the Mayor's Office and City Council to fill open seats and welcome new members in 2019, adding capacity to critical work to protect and expand civil rights.

## Protecting & Expanding Civil Rights

### Complaint Investigation & Adjudication

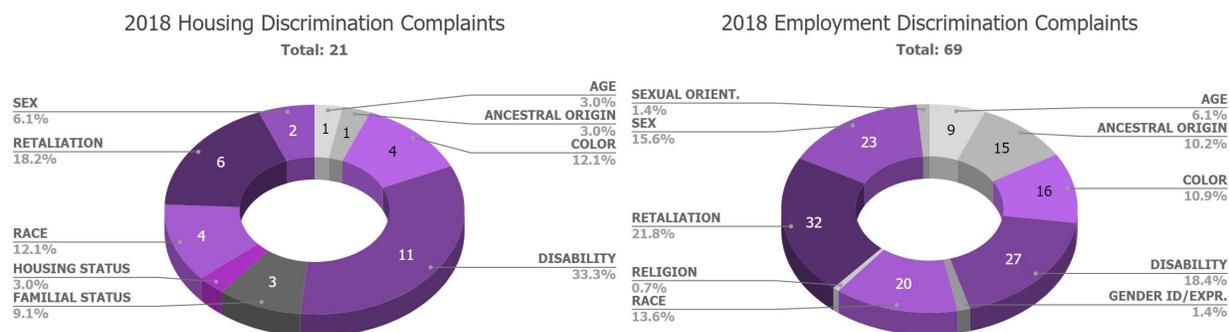
Through its partnership with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, the Providence Human Relations Commission ensures discrimination charges filed by members of the Providence community are

investigated and adjudicated. The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights enforces R.I.G.L. Section 28-5-1 et seq. (Fair Employment Practices Act), R.I.G.L. Section 34-37-1 et seq. (Fair Housing Practices



Act), R.I.G.L. Section 11-24-1 et seq. (Hotels and Public Places Act), R.I.G.L Sections 23-6.3-11 and 23-6.3-12, R.I.G.L Section 42-87-1 et. seq. (Civil Rights of People with Disabilities Act); and R.I.G.L. Section 40-9.1-1 et seq. (Equal Rights of Blind and Deaf Persons to Public Facilities Act). In addition, through memoranda of understanding with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Commission assists in the enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title VIII of the 1968 Civil Rights Act (federal Fair Housing Act).

In 2018, the Providence Human Relations Commission saw 99 charges of discrimination filed through its partnership with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights. Of those, 69 were related to employment, 21 were related to housing, and 9 were related to delivery of services, with no charges filed regarding public accommodations or credit. This data has helped shape the Commission's work plan for 2019, which includes providing trainings and information to community stakeholders on fair housing and equal opportunity employment, continuing to partner with City departments on accessibility improvements, and focusing its legislative advocacy around these same themes. A breakdown of employment and housing discrimination complaints can be found below.



## Limited English Proficiency Plan

The Providence Human Relations Commission continues to play an advisory role in the City's expansion of accessible language services through the development and implementation of a municipal Limited English Proficiency Plan. Director Taubin has worked closely with City staff to survey departments' anticipated translation and interpretation needs and assets, reporting on progress to the Commission and incorporating their feedback on the project's direction. City departments are poised to issue a blanket contract in 2019, following a public procurement process informed by the department-level audits Director Taubin completed and the request for quotes issued under former Director Powell's leadership in 2018.

## Americans with Disabilities Act & Accessibility

The Commission also advises on issues related to the Americans with Disabilities Act, using data from complaints to shape its recommendations to City departments and its outreach and education work. Director Taubin has served as the City's interim ADA coordinator since Director Powell's departure, advocating for municipal investments in assistive technology, and convening City staff from various departments to improve municipal processes. The Law Department is poised to hire an attorney to work on ADA in 2019, and the Commission looks forward to working closely with the Law Department to improve employment and architectural accessibility, ensure accommodations for public meetings and hearings, center the disability community in conversations on emergency preparedness, and more.

## Outreach & Education

As part of its mandate to expand positive community relations, the Providence Human Relations Commission has begun piloting an outreach strategy that builds new relationships while celebrating Providence's diverse cultural communities, and cultivates meaningful and authentic engagement by centering community voice in conversations around policy. In convening various community groups, the Commission also connects constituencies to the departments serving them, promoting cultural responsiveness in City services and driving systems change. A variety of tools and mechanisms were leveraged in 2018 as part of the Commission's outreach strategy, among them flag raisings and cultural heritage celebrations. Being intentional about these events, the Commission has honed in on opportunities for communities historically left out of the City's narrative to be recognized and honored. Templates for large-scale celebrations organized by the Commission have also allowed for partnerships to be built with community-based cultural organizations; information about MWBE & IDPVD services to be funneled into communities; and new vendors and partners to be engaged. The Commission looks forward to continuing to build out its outreach and engagement strategy, while also focusing its attention on providing training and educational materials to community stakeholders, in 2019.

## Transgender Day of Remembrance Ceremony



In 2018, the Providence Human Relations Commission co-hosted the City's inaugural Transgender Day of Remembrance Ceremony, in partnership with Mayor Elorza, TGI

Network of Rhode Island, Rhode Island Pride, and Youth Pride Rhode Island. The speaking program at City Hall recognized the leadership and advocacy of the transgender community in Providence, mourned lives lost to transphobic violence, and re-affirmed the City's commitment and vision of respect for the dignity of all people. The Commission looks forward to hosting the Transgender Day of Remembrance Ceremony again next year, as well as continuing to work with organizers from the transgender and gender nonconforming communities to advance responsive and affirming policies City-wide.

## Native American Heritage Month Celebration

In 2018, the Providence Human Relations Commission also hosted the City's inaugural Native American



Heritage Month Celebration, in partnership with Mayor Elorza. The event at City Hall paid tribute to the rich ancestry and traditions of indigenous communities across the Americas that have shaped, and continue to shape, the City of Providence into what it is today. The Commission looks forward to hosting the Native American Heritage Month Celebration again next year, as well as continuing to work with organizers from local nations, and of

indigenous descent, to advance responsive and affirming policies City-wide.



## Looking Ahead

While much was accomplished in 2018, the Commission must continue to build capacity, supporting its ability to carry out its mission. Clear priorities have also emerged for the Commission's work moving forward: in 2019, the Commission plans to focus on outreach, education, and advocacy, responding to the needs that communities have raised and that discrimination complaints illuminate. To do so, the Commission will continue to build meaningful relationships with underrepresented cultural communities and issue-based coalitions, develop and implement community-facing trainings on fair housing and equal opportunity employment, recommend policy change at the municipal level, and, establish a presence at the Statehouse on matters that affect the rights of Providence residents to fair housing, employment, education, credit access, and public accommodations.

In 2019, the Commission looks to focus on organizational development and capacity building by hosting an annual retreat, investing in professional development for Commission members, drafting a multi-year strategic plan, filling open seats with passionate new members, and resourcing its proposed work and current functions. The Commission looks forward to building out training programs on equal opportunity employment and fair housing for community stakeholders, and providing at least 50 community advocates with comprehensive training in 2019. It will continue to protect municipal civil rights through a renewed partnership with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, executing intake and referral functions for discrimination complaints, and, work on the implementation of the City's Limited English Proficiency plan and a wide range of interventions designed to promote and expand accessibility. It will look to center and operationalize equity in policy making, co-facilitating a racial equity working group with the Office of Sustainability for 10 city departments to analyze their budgets, policies, and operations through a lens of racial equity. And it will push for systemic impact by advocating for policy change at the State level on issues such as source of income discrimination, payday lending, and bail reform. The Commission looks forward to continue to execute its mission through this work, in 2019.