



City of Providence

Human Relations Commission

2019 Annual Report



CITY OF PROVIDENCE
Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor





Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Letter to Mayor Elorza & City Council	2
Introduction & Background	3
Year in Review 2019	4
Expansion of Rights	4
Education	5
Cultural Engagement	5
Protection of Rights	6
Looking Ahead	7



City of Providence Human Relations Commission

Letter to Mayor Elorza & City Council

February 20, 2020

Hon. Jorge O. Elorza
Mayor

Andi Wheeler
Executive Director

Executive Committee

Patricia LaSalle
Chair

Chace Baptista
Vice-Chair

John Gaffney
Secretary

Commissioners

Kai LoMuscio

Maria Monteiro

Cesar Teo

Celeste Terry-Lo

Raymond Two Hawks Watson

Steven Vadnais

Kelia Bravo

Providence Human Relations Commission

401-680-5719

Providence City Hall
25 Dorrance Street,
Suite 113, Providence, RI
02903

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

Pursuant to City Charter art. XI §1103(b)(4), please find attached the Providence Human Relations Commission's 2019 Annual Report.

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.

In 2019, the Commission took bold steps to reform government processes and promote an inclusive and accountable city government in collaboration with the community. While currently in a state of transition, outgoing Executive Director Sol Taubin worked diligently with the Commission to prepare for changes in the years ahead, and to ensure that the work done reflected the will and needs of the community while expanding the influence of the good work of the Providence Human Relations Commission. Looking ahead, the work of the oncoming Executive Director, Andi Wheeler, and the growing Commission will aim to implement the projects that were started and continue to grow influence across departments and the City of Providence strategically, building capacity and ensuring continuity of work for years to come.

At a time when human rights are being challenged, stripped, and manipulated at new levels, the ability for diverse communities to thrive should be an imperative of local governments. The Commission looks forward to continuing this promise to our communities, finding opportunities for growth in government processes, expanding outreach to the most vulnerable, and presenting an inclusive vision of a greater Providence.

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 work and expand human rights and relations while centering the community in our work.

Patricia LaSalle
Chair, Providence Human
Relations Commission

Andi Wheeler
Executive Director,
Providence Human
Relations Commission



Introduction and 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, Commissioner Raymond Two Hawks Watson, Commissioner Stephen Vadnais, and Commissioner Kelia Bravo. Since submitting its last Annual Report in February of 2019, the Commission has been fortunate to welcome Commissioners Stephen Vadnais and Kelia Bravo as new members. While the Commission experienced a brief hiatus during the search for a new Executive Director at the end of 2019, the work done previously by the Commission was substantial and much of it will be continued in full in 2020.



Expansion of Rights

Source of Income Discrimination

In March of 2019, Council member Miller, along with Council members Matos, Anthony, Aponte, Harris, LaFortune and Kerwin, introduced an ordinance in amendment of the City's antidiscrimination ordinance, seeking to codify protections from lawful source of income discrimination in housing for tenants across the city. Mayor Elorza held a press conference in support of the ordinance passing, alongside Council Pro Temp Correia and PHRC Vice-Chair Chace Baptista. As Rhode Island's Fair Housing Practices Act does not currently protect residents from lawful source of income, the Providence Human Relations Commission proactively worked on mapping out the complaint intake and enforcement process. These collaborations included a training on fair housing practices by the Southcoast Fair Housing for the Providence Human Relations Commission.

Language Access Strategy

Municipal agencies receiving federal funds must provide reasonable accommodations for persons with limited English proficiency, as per Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 13166. The Commission has reviewed how the City provides access to services for persons with limited English proficiency, and has implemented a series of interventions, with the goal of improving meaningful language access to services City-wide. In 2019, departments were briefed and surveyed to better understand what level of translation and interpretation was being provided, simultaneous interpretation equipment was purchased for city-wide use, community interpretation infrastructure was built out and contracted to AMOR's Language Justice team, a language toolkit codifying shared city-resources and standard operating procedures was developed, as well as encouragement of departmental budget allocations to improve compliance. An RFP for a blanket contract for translation and interpretation services is also in process.

Americans with Disabilities Act/Accessibility work

In 2019, accessibility considerations have been built into the Great Streets public realm design guide, and the City currently builds to standard for all future-facing renovations and infrastructure investments. A working group was convened by the Providence Human Relations Commission Director in late 2019 to review and update City-wide public property audits and identify gaps for retroactive repairs, and to streamline workflow and develop an assessment rubric in partnership with the Department of Public Works to better triage complaints. Considerations include property type, frequency of use by mobility-impaired individuals, severity of repair and community assets in the periphery. Future work is to include partnerships with the departments of Human Resources and Information Technology, to expand accessibility in these respective realms.

Expanding Financial Inclusion

Multiple-marginalized populations in Providence have limited access to banking services and credit, driving the use of mostly unregulated alternative financial products which drain wealth from communities, including check cashing services and payday loans. Un- and under-banked residents, who account for 31.6% of households in the Providence-Warwick metro statistical area, face even greater challenges. A strategy to expand financial access was developed by the Providence Human Relations Commission, involving: 1. The convening of a Bank On Coalition with local banks who: a. agree to accept IDPVD as a viable form of

identification to open an account; b. offer no-fee checking and savings products that align with national Bank On standards; and, c. offer first-time or second-chance credit products to consumers 2. The bidding out of mission related deposits (MRDs) to incentivize banks to open new branches in underbanked neighborhoods, hire local, and provide neighborhood-level educational programming; and, 3. The engagement of banks' CRA officers to better align banks' investments with city priorities in affordable housing development and neighborhood stabilization. An RFP has been written to bid out mission related deposits, in efforts to expand bank footprints into unbanked city neighborhoods. This RFP has been shared with Councilwoman Kat Kerwin, City Treasurer Jim Lombardi, and the Finance Department for guidance and feedback.



Education

TGI Network Training

After a person was outed as being transgender by a City Judge in court, in efforts to expand cultural competence among employees and ensure the municipal workforce was inclusive to employees and residents of all backgrounds, the Providence Human Relations Commission contracted TGI Network in June of 2019 to facilitate three workshops on gender diversity to the Providence Human Relations Commission, City of Providence Judiciary, City of Providence Solicitor's Office, and City of Providence Department Directors. In total, over 45 staff members received this training.

PHA Housing Choice Voucher Program Training

The Providence Human Relations Commission partnered with the Providence Housing Authority and City neighborhood associations to offer three workshops across the city for landlords to learn about the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, expanding access to safe and affordable housing city-wide. Workshops lasted 1.5 hours and were scheduled between September 3, 2019 and November, 15, 2019 with partnering neighborhood associations and City Councilors including Councilpersons Kerwin and LaFortune. In total, approximately 80 people attended four workshops.

AMOR Community Interpretation Work

As part of its language access work, the PHRC is partnering with AMOR's Language Justice Team, hosted at PRYSM, to build out community interpretation infrastructure. AMOR has agreed to plan and implement a series of 3 x 1 hour workshops for multilingual staff over the course of the next year, on the principles of language justice and community interpretation; to create a one-pager for public-facing departments to support constituents using community interpreters; to train department directors on the contents and use of this document during a one-hour workshop; and to review the City's language access toolkit, by June 30, 2020.



Cultural Engagement

The PHRC works to build community by hosting cultural events, building relationships with community organizations, and disseminating information to Providence's diverse constituencies. In the past year, the PHRC hosted the City's Native American Heritage Month Celebration, Women's History Month Celebration, Asian

Pacific American Heritage Month Celebration, Pan-African Heritage Celebration, and Transgender Day of Remembrance Flag Raising, almost all new events the City had not celebrated before. In standardizing support and outreach around cultural events, the PHRC is able to build relationships with cultural communities and further engage folks in more meaningful conversations around policy and advocacy.



Protection of Rights

The PHRC re-entered into an understanding with the RI Commission on Human Rights to send discrimination concerns and complaints to them, with periodic reports back on the types of complaints submitted in Providence. The PHRC also started to explore different ways to increase intakes of discrimination complaints, including through the PVD 311 system, increasing access to the discrimination complaint process. New methods of understanding the data from RICHR, increasing access even further for people making complaints, and analyzing the content of the complaints to lead programming, advocacy, and public education efforts is in progress for 2020.



Looking Ahead

While many new and bold ideas were translated into action in 2019, the Commission will need to continue to expand its influence through collaborations and relationship building, being open to new, emerging strategies and finding missed opportunities for celebration, education, and advocacy. At the 2019 annual retreat, the Commission identified several committees, including an outreach committee, to help bolster this work. Developing relationships with external community members and stakeholders to collaborate fully on necessary ideas and turn those ideas into achievable results will be key. The Commission will also work to leverage relationships with internal city departments, finding concrete ways to make ending systems of oppression the work of every city employee.

To ensure continuity of work, the Commission will also be working to develop community advisory boards that bring forth fresh ideas and identify critical needs of the community. These boards will not only move Providence further towards collaborative governance, but will also help the Commission work to develop a 3-5 year strategic vision and plan. The Commission looks forward to this collaboration, looking forward to continuing to execute its mission through this work in 2020.