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# Achievements and Challenges of Human Rights Commissions in US Cities

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This report contains the views of the author and does not necessarily represent the views or policy of the Boston Commission on Human Rights.

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## Achievements and Challenges of Human Rights Commissions in US Cities

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Human Rights Institutions

Human Rights Institutions (HRIs), including Human Rights Commissions (HRCs), are independent human rights bodies established with broad constitutional or other legal mandates to promote and protect human rights. Apart from HRCs, other types of human rights institutions include ombuds institutions, hybrid institutions, consultative and advisory bodies, and human rights institutes and centers at national and local levels. National human rights institutions, including national HRCs, are established and operate under standards set out in the [United Nations Paris Principles](#) (1993). They are encouraged by the UN as important mechanisms for promoting and protecting human rights at a national and local level.

In June 2013, the US Conference of Mayors also adopted a [resolution](#) committing to uphold international human rights. The resolution urges cities to uphold and promote human rights locally to foster equality and opportunity, working in partnership with other government actors and local communities. The resolution was facilitated by the report entitled "[Bringing Human Rights Home](#): How States and Local Governments Can Use Human Rights to Advance Local Policy," published by the Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law School, which has been useful for adopting human rights locally, for example, through city-level HRCs.

**B. Purpose of Study:** This study aimed to identify the recent concrete achievements of the most active US city level HRCs (as reflected in passage of concrete legislation, initiatives, programs), especially in the five substantive areas of (1) police reform, (2) immigrant rights, (3) LGBTQ+ rights, (4) housing discrimination, and (5) health inequities. The goal of the study was to inform the Boston HRC of the best practices to advance human rights for Bostonians.

**C. Key Findings and Recommendations.** The study found that the lack of funding and lack of staff are the major challenges facing HRCs across the US. To address these challenges, the study recommends for the BHRC the following:

- Create committees and sub-committees on the subject areas the BHRC wants to address with one or two commissioners on each and experts from NGOs, community groups, and academics
- Create internship opportunities for students (e.g., PhD students) in human rights and social sciences to conduct research in the areas of BHRC interest, and law students to assess discrimination cases under supervision of law professors.

Using these mechanisms and tools, including the resources of the public university in Boston, can offset some of the BHRC's staff and funding shortcomings.

## II. METHODS

Two methods were used to collect data, including: (1) a review of city-level HRC websites and documents, and (2) interviews with HRC Commissioners and Executive Directors.

**A. Websites and documents review:** The researcher visited approximately 190 websites of city HRCs and identified 20 HRCs to be most active and therefore to include in the study (see Appendix B). The online materials reviewed included annual reports and project reports to identify the most recently (2015-2021) implemented initiatives. About 40 ordinances were also reviewed to understand the mandates of HRCs (see Appendix A).

**B. Interviews:** The researcher also conducted interviews with 17 key informants from 15 active HRCs to understand their perspectives on the achievements attained. The key informants interviewed included HRC Directors, Executive Directors, and Commissioners (see Appendix C). Achievements were analyzed and categorized based on the five substantive topics of the study.

## III. FINDINGS

### A. Structures and Mandates of HRCs

Most commissions addressing human rights issues identify themselves as either a Human Rights Commission (HRC) or a Human Relations Commission (HReC). While both types of commissions have a common goal of addressing human rights issues, their mandates may differ. For example, HRCs tend to have more quasi-judicial or legislative enforcement power to adjudicate cases of discrimination. On the other hand, HReCs tend to have less quasi-judicial powers and are more focused on intergroup relations and conflicts (e.g., [LA County HRC](#), New Orleans). There is, however, no clear line between the two as some HReCs, similar to HRCs, have an adjudicatory mandate in addition to addressing intergroup relations (e.g., [Pittsburg HReC](#), [Philadelphia HReC](#)). For simplicity, this study used HRC to refer to both Human Rights Commissions and Human Relation Commissions. In general, HRC powers are in four areas: (1) enforcing civil rights laws, (2) providing policy advice; (3) promoting intergroup relations; and (4) providing human rights education. These mandates are often established in the ordinance establishing the commission (see Appendix A).

**Enforcing Civil Rights Laws.** At least three-quarters of the HRCs reviewed have mandates that include the authority to receive complaints, conduct investigations and/or public hearings to determine probable cause, issue subpoenas (half of the HRCs have subpoena power), and resolve cases through settlement, mediation, or conciliation. Some HRCs can seek injunctive relief as well as punitive damages (e.g., [New York City \(NYC\)](#), [Chicago](#)) while some are unable to seek damages (e.g., [Bloomington MN](#), [Fairfax VA](#)). These HRCs include, for example, those of Philadelphia, Pittsburg, [Nashville](#), [San Francisco](#), [Ann Arbor](#), [Louisville KY](#), [Rockville MD](#), and [Springfield MO](#). On the other hand, some HRCs do not have enforcement power but can only refer complaints to the appropriate departments, such as the state human rights division or city

attorney, or to mediation services (e.g., [Brooklyn Park MN](#), [Virginia Beach VA](#)), while other HRCs mandates only authorize mediation (e.g., Bloomington MN, LA County).

In terms of *policy advice*, most HRCs can recommend policy and ordinance changes to the City Council, often collaborating with legal aid and advocacy groups in drafting proposals. Most HRCs also provide *human rights education* and engage communities to promote *intergroup relations*, including resolving intergroup conflicts. Some HRCs, especially those in major cities with immigrants, tend to give priority to addressing intergroup relations, including hate crime and bias incidents (e.g., LA County, NYC, San Francisco). Other roles of HRCs include conducting community dialogues, research, and submitting annual reports of human rights activities conducted to the City Council.

## **B. Achievements**

Achievements were analyzed and categorized for six topics: (1) General/ cross-cutting initiatives (2) police reform, (3) immigrant rights, (4) LGBTQ+ rights, (5) housing discrimination, and (6) health inequities. For many of the achievement presented in this report, the researcher also highlights the partners involved, the tools employed, and the challenges faced (if applicable). The report also presents the structural, political, and economic challenges that limit the capacity of HRCs to function effectively.

### **1. General/ Cross-cutting initiatives**

#### **(a) Creating committees and subcommittees on human rights issues addressed.**

Several HRCs have established advisory committees, subcommittees, and working groups to address areas targeted by HRCs, such as on immigrant rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and police policy reforms. (e.g., [Des Moines](#), [Eugene](#), [Howard County](#)). BHRC could adopt this approach by creating committees and subcommittees with one or two commissioners and experts from NGOs, academics, and community groups on each of the human rights issues the commission is focusing on.

#### **(b) Creating internship opportunities for students to work with HRCs.**

Several HRCs collaborate with colleges and universities programs and departments and student interns to help with researching the areas addressed by the commissions (e.g. [Nashville Metro Human Relations Internship Program](#); Eugene; and Pittsburg). This includes internship opportunities for PhD students in human rights and social sciences to conduct research in the areas of BHRC interests, and law students to assess discrimination cases under supervision of law professors. This approach helps students to get practical experience but also minimizes a commissions' research consultation costs.

#### **(c) Providing awards to human rights champions**

Many HRCs provide awards to individuals, employees, and businesses that play active roles in promoting human rights to acknowledge their contributions. BHRC can do the same to agencies and individuals championing human rights in the areas the Commission is focused on.

**(d) Disseminating the “know your rights” human rights education materials**

Several HRCs have a “know your rights” type of initiative mainly focused on disseminating human rights educational information and materials including on the city’s anti-discrimination law and the protected classes, the HRC’s role, and guides on how people can file discrimination complaints with the HRC. The materials can be general or specific targeting specific groups, such as LGBTQ+ rights, immigrant rights, housing discrimination, etc. (e.g. DC, Pittsburgh). For example, the DC-OHR and Pittsburgh HRC developed “know your rights” resources on immigrant rights that were distributed to immigrants and refugees service agencies to share with their clients.

**(f) Creating human rights liaisons and champions.** The implementation of human rights heavily depends on champions and translators to help organizations translate their work into the framework of human rights in a way that resonates with the language spoken in everyday people’s lives. The lack of trained human rights champions is therefore a major challenge facing HRCs (e.g., Eugene). The Washington DC OHR Human Rights Liaison Program (HRL) addresses some of these challenges by training direct service providers in diverse communities as human rights liaisons or/and champions. They are trained in the OHR processes and the laws enforced by the agency, how to identify discrimination their clients face and how to help them file complaints with the OHR. In 2018, the OHR held training workshops with over 120 DC providers.

**(g) Implementing anti-hate initiatives to improve intergroup relations**

Most major city HRCs (e.g., LA County, NYC, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington, DC) are home to people from diverse backgrounds, including immigrants. Since these cities are more likely to experience more intergroup differences, they tend to have vibrant initiatives on hate crimes and bias incidents, including Xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism. These programs promote safety, good inter-group relations, and a sense of belonging to all residents. A good example of such initiatives is the LA County HRC’s “[LA versus Hate](#)” initiative. The initiative includes awareness creation art-based campaigns, hate crime reporting mechanisms (e.g. 211LA and website link), a coordinated response team to offer a culturally competent response, and psychological and legal support to the victim.

## **2. Police reform**

Generally, initiatives on police reform have focused on the creation of Civilian Police Review Boards, ensuring representation of HRC commissioners on these Boards, involving HRCs in recruiting police officers, strengthening police departments through training, monitoring of racial profiling data, and engaging marginalized groups and youth in police reform.

**(a) Allocating seats for human rights commissioners on the Civilian Review Board and the Police Commission**

HRCs, such as those in Eugene and Ann Arbor, have seats as liaisons to their respective Civilian Police Review Boards. This allows the commissioners to evaluate the work of the Independent

Police Auditor from the civilian perspective to ensure that the process is fairly conducted. In addition, the [Eugene HRC](#) has a permanent seat (3–4-year term) on its Police Commission with member voting power. This helps to create a climate of mutual respect and partnership between the community and the police department. The [Virginia Beach HRC](#) also serves as a liaison between the police and the community to improve community policing.

**(b) Strengthening the capacity of the police department in identifying and reporting hate-motivated crimes**

To improve police reporting of hate crimes, the [LA County HRC](#) also worked with the LA County Police Department and 46 other police departments in LA to strengthen police methods for recognizing hate crimes. This includes having the police department add a check box on their incident report form to indicate whether each incident reported involves acts of a hate crime. This reporting method was facilitated by the Hate Crime Law amended in 2019 for which the HRC advocated. The LA County HRC also trained officers in the district attorney’s office on pursuing hate crime law violations. Now, police officers and district attorneys understand the hate crimes law, the penalties involved, and the obligation to report hate crimes.

**(c) Requiring Civilian Police Review Boards to refer complaints of discrimination filed against police officers to the HRC for investigation**

Evidence suggests that police officers are rarely held accountable for the complaints of discrimination and misconduct filed against them. This is often due to the fact that the police and district attorneys depend on each other to prosecute cases. To address these challenges, in Pittsburg, the Civilian Police Review Board refers all complaints of discrimination filed against police officers to the HRC for investigation. The [Ann Arbor HRC](#) also cooperates with the Civilian Police Review Board when a complaint of discrimination has been filed against a police officer.

**(d) Involving the HRC in the process of recruiting police officers**

A few HRCs, including Eugene, are involved in the process of recruiting the city’s police officers as well as the police chief. This ensures that police officers are not only recruited based on qualifications but also in a manner that ensures representation of the city population.

**(e) Conducting implicit bias and de-escalation training for police officers**

To improve police-community relations, several HRCs have advocated for training on implicit bias, de-escalation, and cultural competency for the police and other first responders, including LA County, [Des Moines](#), and [Nashville](#). For example, the Nashville HRC partners with the City Police Academy through a “[mobile diversity seminar](#)” project. The HRC takes the cadets to diverse communities to have guided conversations and shared experiences with community members, especially with non-profits serving immigrants and refugees, the LGBTQ+ community, and historically black universities. The goal is to help create lasting relationships, mutual understanding, and trust between the police and the community.

**(f) Monitoring traffic stops data to identify racial profiling incidents**

Other HRCs are working on anti-black racism initiatives including on analyzing traffic stop data to identify the prevalence of traffic stops motivated by racial discrimination (Nashville, Ann Arbor, LA County, NYC, Philadelphia). Through this process, for example, Nashville Metro HRC produced a report known as “[Driving while Black](#)” submitted to the City Mayor for implementation. Similarly, LA County is implementing the 2015 California Racial and Identity Profiling Act, which requires that the state release detention and police search data to the public for the public to monitor racial profiling.

**(g) Engaging marginalized groups and youth in police reform**

Several HRCs, including [New York City](#), LA County, Philadelphia, and [San Francisco](#), implemented initiatives for engaging marginalized groups through public hearings and dialogues to learn about their experiences with the police and what they envision in police reform. These groups include immigrants, LGBTQ+, black community, youth, and the community at large. As a result of these forums, HRCs produce reports with recommendations for their City Councils to improve policing practices and accountability. For example, every five years, the LA County [HRC’s Policing and Human Relations Project](#) conducts public hearings with communities impacted by prejudicial policing, including women of color, members of the LGBTQ community and key partners, including law schools, law enforcement agencies, oversight agencies, community organizations, and advocates. The Philadelphia HRC’s Youth, Community and Police Relations Initiative and San Francisco’s My Brother's and Sister's Keeper Community Safety Initiative also engage youth, including youth of color, with law enforcement agencies to develop policies and strategies that address systemic and structural racism in policing.

**(h) Assisting in banning the use of force weapons in crowd control**

The [Seattle HRC](#) with other advocates helped the city to pass a resolution that bans the Seattle police from using tear gas, pepper spray, blast balls, and other “crowd control weapons.” The HRC was also instrumental in getting a new youth jail closed in King County.

### **3. Immigrant Rights**

Most of the implemented initiatives and achievements on immigrant rights have focused on eliminating hate crimes and fostering good interpersonal relationships; improving language access, access to employment and housing; providing legal support and protection from deportation; encouraging participation of immigrants in city government advisory bodies, and on recognizing immigrants’ cultures and contributions.

**(a) Creating refugees and immigrant advisory bodies and liaisons**

Several HRCs established refugee and immigrant advisory bodies, including councils, sub-commissions, and liaisons (e.g., multi-cultural liaison), which have been important mechanisms for advising HRCs and other city commissions, boards, and agencies on issues facing immigrants and their inclusion (e.g., Des Moines, Eugene, Howard County MD).

**(b) Providing awards to champions of (immigrants) human rights**

Many HRCs provide awards to individuals, employees, and businesses that play active roles in promoting human rights, including those who work on immigrant rights. [The Bloomington MN HRC](#), for example, provided a human rights award to a law firm doing pro bono work for immigrants.

**(c) Extending protections to immigrants based on citizenship/immigration status**

HRCs in NYC, Pittsburg, San Francisco, Virginia Beach, and [King County WA](#) helped their cities to pass legislation to protect immigrant rights. For example, with the advocacy of the HRC, in 2020, Pittsburg updated its anti-discrimination code to include "perceived or actual citizenship/immigration status and language" as protected classes to protect immigrants against COVID-19 related hate crimes and housing discrimination. Similarly, the NYC HRC released enforcement guidance in 2019 to explain the different ways discrimination based on actual or perceived immigration status and actual or perceived national origin may appear in employment, housing, and public accommodations. For example, in NYC, landlords or employers may not retaliate against tenants or employees by threatening to call ICE. The NYC HRC has also filed several charges against landlords who retaliated by calling ICE on their tenants. **Challenges:** Undocumented immigrants rarely file complaints with HRCs as they tend to perceive HRCs as just another part of the government (like ICE).

**(d) Protecting undocumented immigrants against ICE and ensuring access to services**

To enhance communities' trust and immigrants' use of city services, some HRCs adopted policies that prohibit city employees from assisting the federal government with deportation but also called for their employees to serve immigrants (King County WA, [Howard County MD](#), [Rockville MD](#), Seattle, Virginia Beach, NYC). In 2019, Howard County HRC's Committee on Immigration also [conducted a study and prepared a report](#) with recommendations that led the County Executive to stop the county from cooperating with ICE. The Howard County City Council is also working to add immigration status as a protected class.

**(e) Providing certification for U and T visas to protect victims of certain crimes**

In NYC, the HRC became the first agency in a major US city to provide certification for U and T visas to protect victims of certain crimes and victims of trafficking against deportation so that they can assist law enforcement in the investigation and prosecution of those crimes.

**(f) Granting non-citizens the ability to serve on city commissions and boards**

San Francisco [is the first major city in the country](#) to allow non-citizens, including undocumented residents, to serve on all the city commissions and advisory boards. The San Francisco HRC helped the city's Immigrant Rights Commission with the drafting and passing of the ordinance.

**(g) Monitoring workforce demographic data to ensure equitable employment**

In Nashville, the HRC has periodically analyzed the city government workforce demographic data to identify if the workforce reflects the city population and produced an [inclusivity report](#). The report found that Hispanic employees were underrepresented. As a result, the city took

measures to ensure more job opportunities were available for Hispanics in the county government.

**(h) Improving language access services to people with limited and non-English proficiency**

At least six HRCs have played a part in passing a language access ordinance or launching a language access program to ensure the rights of people with limited English proficiency (mostly immigrants) to access language services when accessing public services. These include the HRCs of [Washington DC](#), Pittsburg, Eugene, Prince George’s County VA, and King County WA. Some of these HRCs also provide training, monitoring and awareness campaigns on language access rights (e.g. D.C). The [DC language access program](#) partners with the DC Language Access Coalition and Consultative Agencies – agencies serving immigrant communities.

**(j) Supporting the establishment of immigrant empowerment and welcoming programs**

Other HRCs participate in establishing and assessing immigrant-related welcoming and empowering initiatives including the creation of a Multicultural Center (Eugene) and Ethnic Community-based capacity building programs and small business ownership programs for foreign-born residents (Eugene, Des Moines).

**(k) Providing rent relief to undocumented immigrants during Covid-19**

In response to the pandemic, the San Francisco HRC in collaboration with the board of supervisors wrote legislation to provide rent relief to undocumented immigrants, which was passed in June 2020.

#### **4. LGBTQ+ Rights**

Initiatives implemented for LGBTQ+ people are focused on expanding anti-discrimination ordinances to be inclusive of gender identities and expressions, adoption of the gender-neutral bathroom policy, banning of conversion therapy, LGBTQ+ acknowledgment, transgender-inclusive health coverage, gender-inclusive city documents and identification forms, transgender-inclusive housing policies, and employment and inclusive working environment for LGBTQ+ people.

**(a) Issuing legal enforcement guidance on inclusive gender identities**

Most HRCs enforce anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBTQ+ people. However, a few HRCs, such as those in NYC and DC, have also issued legal enforcement guidance to provide clarity on the HRC’s interpretation of the ordinance. For example, in 2019, the NYC HRC issued a legal enforcement guidance on gender identity and expression to include new definitions for cisgender, gender identity, gender expression, gender, gender non-conforming, intersex, sex, and transgender. In 2015, the NYC HRC also passed a [legal enforcement guidance](#) to clarify that gender discrimination may also include: (1) enforcing dress codes and grooming standards that impose different requirements based on sex or gender, (2) intentionally failing to use an individual’s preferred name, pronoun, or title, (3) refusing to allow individuals to use single-sex

facilities consistent with their gender identity, and (4) failing to provide an employee with health benefits and accommodations that cover gender-affirming care, including gender transition care.

**(b) Adopting pride month proclamations to acknowledge LGBTQ+ people.**

Several HRCs helped their cities adopt proclamations to declare the month of June as LGBTQ+ Pride month to acknowledge, respect, and highlight the contributions of LGBTQ+ people, including Bloomington MN, Rockville MD, Des Moines, City of Columbia, [Bloomington IN](#), and [Rockville-Montgomery County MD](#). Some partnered with the Human Rights Campaign, the national LGBTQ+ advocacy group, to improve their LGBTQ+ [Municipal Equality Index](#).

**(c) Facilitating the adoption and implementation of gender-neutral bathroom policy**

Several HRCs, including those in NYC, Des Moines, Tacoma, and the Washington DC OHR, proposed the adoption of a law that requires government agencies and public businesses to designate every single-stall public bathroom gender-neutral to ensure transgender and gender non-conforming individuals the right to use bathrooms consistent with their gender identity. The Washington DC OHR and the NYC HRC also raise awareness on these issues and monitor the implementation of the gender-neutral bathroom law.

**(d) Improving health insurance coverage and employment benefits to transgender people**

Bloomington IN and Nashville TN advocated for their cities to add health coverage for transgender people, increasing their Municipal Equality Index with regard to LGBTQ+ rights.

**(e) Improving the method for identifying LGBTQ+ demographic data**

Nashville and Des Moines HRCs have improved the methods of collecting identity data at the city level to ensure they are inclusive of LGBTQ+ people and have updated the city documents to be gender inclusive. For example, Nashville [recommended a policy](#) on using an employee satisfaction survey that includes a self-identification question. The outcome led to more inclusive employment and working environments for LGBTQ+ persons.

**(f) Implementing inclusionary housing and programming policies for transgender inmates**

To eliminate segregation and maltreatment of transgender persons in detention facilities, the San Francisco HRC partnered with the SF Sheriff's Department and the transgender community to develop and implement inclusionary housing and programming policies for transgender inmates at county jails. The goal is to ensure that transgender inmates and those in police custody are housed and searched according to their gender identity and housing preference. The HRC is also supporting LGBTQ+ officers in developing a "transitioning in the workplace" guide.

**(g) Implementing testing programs to uncover discrimination against transgender people in employment and healthcare settings.**

The Washington DC OHR has been a good example in uncovering and eliminating discrimination against transgender people in employment and other areas of public accommodations through its testing program. The OHR has conducted several résumé testing projects with employers (sending qualified transgender applicants as testers) to assess how

employers responded to résumés from applicants perceived as transgender compared with résumés of applicants perceived as cisgender. Some of the achievements from the testing program include: (1) [a report](#) revealing that 48 percent of the tested employers preferred and 33% of employers frequently offered interviews to less qualified applicants perceived as cisgender over more-qualified applicants perceived as transgender, (2) two resources, including a [best practice guide](#), for employers on improving the employment and inclusion of transgender people that have been used nation-wide, as well as a [self-assessment resource tool for employers](#) hiring of transgender people.

The [NYC HRC](#) has also used its testing program to uncover gender-identity discrimination in healthcare settings, including in a substance abuse treatment shelter that was not accommodative of transgender women and men in housing. Following the HRC's investigation, the facility was fined \$10,000 in civil penalties and required to implement a transgender-inclusive housing policy, to participate in anti-discrimination training, and to be monitored by the HRC.

#### **(h) Improving leadership, services, and support for the LGBTQ+ community**

San Francisco is one of the leading cities with many initiatives that address the needs and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ people. The SF HRC has partnered with several [initiatives](#) that focus on improving leadership, services and support to the LGBTQ+ community. For example, the San Francisco HRC (1) partners with the *Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project* to support formerly incarcerated transgender persons with leadership training, in-custody and re-entry support, and coalition building services; (2) partners with a youth recreation and information center and city health and social service providers to coordinate culturally competent trauma counseling, peer support, and leadership development; (3) partners with the *Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center (APIWC)* on improving safety and wellness services for transgender and gender-nonconforming communities, including leadership mentorship.

#### **(i) Building a coalition of organizations for transgender support services**

The San Francisco HRC developed a partnership with an advocacy coalition for transgender people known as the [TAJA's Coalition](#) (Transgender Advocates for Justice & Accountability). The partnership, now in its third year, focuses on creating a citywide transgender coordinating council, anti-violence public awareness campaigns, and leadership development for trans-serving stakeholders.

#### **(j) Conducting mandatory training on nondiscrimination law to businesses**

Some HRCs have also conducted hearings and training and monitored businesses to ensure non-discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. For example, in 2016, the Pittsburg HRC recommended mandatory training for staff and management of 11 bars in a neighborhood that discriminated against LGBTQ+ people, people of color, and women.

#### **(k) Banning conversion therapy for minors**

Pittsburg PA and Bloomington MN HRCs collaborated with agencies advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and legal aid organizations to pass ordinances banning conversion therapy for minors (age 17 and under) and vulnerable adults. About 27 states in the US have banned it.

### **(l) Creating LGBTQ+ liaisons and workgroups for City commissions and boards**

Several HRCs have appointed LGBTQ+ liaisons to city commissions and boards, including for the police department, while others have created LGBTQ+ workgroups or councils (e.g. Virginia Beach, Eugene, Howard County MD).

## **5. Housing Discrimination**

Most HRC housing initiatives focus on having human rights liaisons in housing workgroups, fair housing training, outreach activities, affirmative fair housing policies, access to shelter for the homeless, testing to uncover discrimination in housing, minimizing forced and rapid gentrification in poor neighborhoods, and addressing housing segregation.

### **(a) Having a human rights commissioner as a liaison to housing boards and taskforces**

Some HRCs have designated liaisons to groups working on studying and addressing fair housing, including homelessness task forces, housing policy boards, and fair housing task forces, including Eugene, Pittsburg, Chicago, and [Louisville Metro HRC](#). For example, the Eugene HRC has a liaison on the Housing Policy Board, representing the perspectives of the community on affordable housing policy. The Eugene HRC also led the task force on homelessness.

### **(b) Providing legal assistance and mediation to tenants**

Several HRCs have launched legal assistance and mediation programs for tenants as well as referral resources, including Eugene, Philadelphia, NYC, and Tacoma WA. For example, in 2015, the Philadelphia HRC launched a mediation project that used the support of volunteer lawyers in mediating cases of discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. This helped to resolve issues at an earlier stage and to avoid lengthy investigations. The HRC also generates additional revenue through the mediation contract it has with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). For example, the HRC receives \$700 from the EEOC for each dual-filed discrimination case it investigates and closes. In 2016, the HRC generated \$137,000 from its case closings ([Philadelphia HRC 2018 report](#)). Also, the San Francisco HRC partners with a college of law's mediation clinic, where students assist with mediating cases.

### **(c) Removing racial covenants from old housing properties**

Both Bloomington MN and Ann Arbor MI HRCs work on projects focused on eliminating racial covenants (elements of housing deeds legalized in the 1920s that discriminated against racial groups in housing). Although racial covenants are illegal and unenforceable under the Fair Housing Act of 1968, they still exist in some cities. The Bloomington HRC has been working with pro bono lawyers to remove the racial covenants in housing deeds.

### **(d) Providing Fair Housing Training for rental property certification and other stakeholders**

To prevent housing discrimination, the Des Moines HRC has proposed to make Fair Housing Training a requirement for rental property certification. HRCs of Des Moines, Eugene, and Washington DC also conduct voluntary fair housing training with housing providers, as well as with immigrant-serving organizations, LGBTQ+ communities, and incarcerated residents.

**(e) Conducting fair housing testing programs**

Several HRCs have conducted housing testing with housing providers to uncover discriminatory practices in housing, including Des Moines, Seattle, Chicago, and [Fairfax County MD](#). Mostly they have examined discrimination or unequal treatment based on race, national origin, and source of income and provided training to violating landlords.

**(f) Expanding access to temporary shelters and long-term housing to the homeless**

The Eugene HRC stands as a good example in addressing chronic homelessness and the criminalization of the homeless, major issues in Eugene. Eugene’s HRC ordinance embraces the full range of human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The HRC used a human rights-based approach to advocate for the right of the homeless to access shelter and housing by (i) framing homelessness as a human rights issue, using language that resonates with people’s daily lives, such as “sleep is a human right” and “the right to rest;” (ii) engaging people dealing with homelessness to share their lived experiences; (iii) framing the lack of housing and homelessness as a problem impacting the larger community to gain larger community support (e.g. everyone has the right to sleep); and (iv) using peer-to-peer outreach – active participation of homeless people – to gather ideas that reflect their actual needs. In response, in 2018, Eugene and Lane County in Oregon allocated a budget to study homelessness, which offered 10 recommendations for Eugene to eliminate chronic homelessness. Several churches also opened their buildings to provide temporary shelter, rest stops, and services to the homeless. Eugene also created “community safety funding” to open [several initiatives to address homelessness and shelter barriers](#) including rest stops, navigation centers, dusk to dawns (tents), overnight parking, a center for homeless youth, and weekend centers. **Challenges:** Due to COVID-19, the number of beds in shelters was reduced for safety. The shortage of funding from the city government has also delayed the completion of the plan.

**(g) Preventing mass buying of homes and rapid gentrification in poor neighborhoods**

To reduce housing inequity that disproportionately affects communities of color, the Philadelphia HRC, in partnership with the City Council and the Community Legal Services conducted research and drafted an [ordinance, passed by the City Council, to limit mass buying of homes and forced gentrification](#). The ordinance regulates the activities of wholesalers, including (re)certification requirements, provision of adequate information on housing markets to homeowners to ensure fair selling prices, and imposition of fines for violators.

**(h) Expanding access to fair housing based on criminal background, source of income, homelessness, housing status, and veteran’s status**

The Washington DC OHR and the San Francisco, and Ann Arbor HRCs helped their cities adopt ordinances to protect people with criminal backgrounds against discrimination in housing (Fair

Chance or Ban the Box). Ban the Box regulates landlords to fairly use criminal records in making housing decisions for applicants and tenants. On the other hand, the San Francisco, Washington DC, Philadelphia, NYC, Des Moines, Ann Arbor, and [Chicago HRC](#) helped to pass the “Source of Income” ordinance to protect people who are receiving government benefits, such as Section 8, from being discriminated against in housing. Other HRCs helped to pass homelessness, veteran status, and housing status as protected classes (Seattle WA, Portland OR, Bloomington IN).

**(i) Issuing legislation and guidance against housing discrimination due to COVID-19**

In response to COVID-related hate crimes and discrimination against people of Asian backgrounds, the NYC HRC reissued guidance to clarify that “actual or perceived infection” with COVID-19 is a protected class under “disability.” Specific to housing, the law prohibits housing providers from harassing or discriminating against a tenant based on the presumption that she/he has contracted or is more likely to contract COVID-19 because of his/her actual or perceived race, national origin, disability, etc. Moreover, providers must not evict or charge residents an additional fee related to cleaning or disinfecting a building or ask them to leave their apartment because of fears or stigma around COVID-19. Instead, housing providers should provide residents with reasonable accommodations for disabilities, including those due to COVID-19.

Also, in 2020, the San Francisco HRC facilitated the City's adoption of emergency legislation to protect tenants from evictions and rent increases during the pandemic. This includes the Mayor’s COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act (SB-91) to prohibit evictions for nonpayment of rent incurred from March to June 2021. Also, the Mayor signed a temporary moratorium to prevent rent increases from May-October 2020. Landlords cannot evict tenants but may take them to small claims court beginning in August 2021 for any unpaid rents. **Challenge:** Many families will face challenges paying their back rent.

**(j) Adopting inclusionary zoning policy to increase affordable housing units**

The Nashville HRC worked to pass an Inclusionary Zoning Policy to increase access to affordable housing units. Through this policy, developers who want to build rental housing could be permitted to add additional stories beyond the acceptable limit in exchange for adding more units that are affordable. The HRC presented and testified about the policy.

## **6. Health Inequalities**

**(a) Using a racial equity lens to address health inequalities exacerbated by COVID-19**

COVID-19 exacerbates marginalization and health inequities experienced by marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ people and people of color. For example, African Americans are more likely to test positive and die from COVID -19 than other Americans. In response, several HRCs have prioritized racial equity in health (LA County, San Francisco, NYC, Nashville). Others have passed resolutions or called their mayors to declare racism a public health crisis

(Bloomington MN, San Francisco). In San Francisco, an Office of Racial Equity was established within the HRC to help every city department establish a racial equity plan.

### **(b) Supporting health screening initiatives for vulnerable groups**

Some HRCs support health screening initiatives for vulnerable groups, including black men and LGBTQ+ persons. For example, in Indiana, the [Evansville-Vanderburgh County HRC](#), in partnership with the *Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males*, has hosted a [“Black Barbershop Health Initiative,”](#) which offers free health screenings and education to African American males at local barbershops, including for diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. The San Francisco HRC also coordinated COVID-19 testing for LGBTQ+ persons.

**(c) Environmental justice** is also another area some HRCs are working on. For example, the Bloomington HRC is partnering with the City’s Sustainability Commission on a project addressing environmental conditions that disproportionately impact racial groups in terms of health, housing, and socioeconomic disparities.

## **C. Challenges - Structural, political, economic, and environmental**

### **1. Structural Challenges**

**(a) Shortage of funding and staff.** Shortages of funding and staff are the major challenges facing almost all of the HRCs. Most HRCs have very limited budgets, making it difficult for the HRCs to hire the necessary staff for administrative and outreach activities. For example, HRCs such as those in Des Moines and Seattle are operating with less than half of the necessary staff. Most HRCs also depend on volunteers who are not city employees, and who may be limited in time to champion human rights work (e.g., Eugene, Bloomington MN).

**(b) HRC structure.** The way an HRC is structured in the ordinance establishing the commission dictates the ability and flexibility of the commission to act. For example, HRCs with more quasi-judicial power have more freedoms to adopt and rescind rules through the City Council to improve the functioning of the commission (e.g., Pittsburg, NYC, and San Francisco). As a result, these HRCs have frequently recommended changes to, for example, add protected classes to city legislation. In addition, a [recent study](#) found that an HRC power structure also tends to dictate funding and/or considerations from the City Council. Often HRCs established with quasi-judicial power tend to have more consideration in budgets and even additional support when running into a financial shortage. However, the budget allocations tend to be restricted to administration work in addressing complaints and less to outreach programs. On the other hand, HRCs such as the LA HRC, due to the lack of a legal enforcement mandate, has found itself lacking backup from the city government when it has a shortage in its budget. Nonetheless, the LA HRC still enjoys some flexibility in terms of adopting outreach initiatives compared to HRCs whose mandates are more restricted to resolving discrimination issues.

**(c) Limitations of anti-discrimination ordinance.** Most HRCs ordinances limit commissions to addressing discrimination, especially in housing, employment, and public accommodations. However, a few HRCs (e.g., Howard County MD, Eugene, Seattle, and Portland OR) have had

their ordinances amended by their City Councils to embrace the full range of human rights stated in the UDHR, and, therefore, have a wider scope for addressing multiple human rights issues in addition to discrimination. For example, on November 28, 2011, after soliciting input from community members, the [Eugene City Council unanimously voted](#) to revise Eugene's 20-year-old human rights ordinance which primarily focused on discrimination against protected classes, to make it a duty of the HRC to embrace the full range of human rights as enumerated in the UDHR. Eugene also ensures the implementation of all human rights across all city departments through the City Diversity and Equity Strategic Plan (DESP). Two human rights commissioners also sit as liaisons on the Equity and Human Rights Board made up of representatives from all city departments to oversee the DESP. The HRC liaisons work with city staff on ideas for human rights implementation.

**(d) State law limitations.** State law and State preemptions also set back the work done by city-level HRCs. Rulings made by HRCs on discrimination cases may be overturned when the case goes to state-level or higher courts. For example, this happened in Pittsburg City in Pennsylvania, involving a Catholic foster care agency that discriminated against same-sex couples in adoption. The Pennsylvania HRC (PHRC), as well as the district court, ruled in favor of the couple trying to adopt but on appeal, the US [Supreme Court](#) ruled in favor of the Catholic foster care agency.

**(e) Bureaucracy of the city council delays accomplishment of goals.** Since most HRCs act as advisory bodies, they largely depend on the city manager's permission to fulfill their duties. However, the bureaucratic processes in the Mayor's office delays decisions, such as in approving funds, recommendations, and hiring staff (e.g., Eugene, Des Moines). Also, City Mayors may not approve all recommendations of HRCs.

## 2. Political Challenges

**(a) Local government and community perspectives of HRCs.** How an HRC is perceived also affects how it operates and even its funding (LA County, NYC, Pittsburg, and Bloomington IN). For example, most local governments tend to view an HRC as a good thing to have but not a necessary mechanism, and, therefore, do not make serious efforts to support its operations. At the community level, most people do not know about HRCs and the work they do, mostly due to limited outreach. On the other hand, some people have negative views towards HRCs due to several factors, such as when an HRC has failed to establish probable cause in a discrimination case. Some look at HRCs as just another part of the government (e.g. undocumented immigrants), and, therefore, distrust HRCs.

**(b) Differences in interests between HRCs and advocate partners as well as community tensions.** Sometimes advocate partners want HRCs to work on issues HRCs are not focused on or see as ambiguous (e.g., Ann Arbor, Des Moines, Nashville). This often requires negotiations to agree and sustain relationships. Heated community tensions also challenge commissioners.

**3. Social, economic, and environmental challenges due to COVID-19.** COVID-19 and its impacts on health safety, hate crimes, unemployment, and poverty are the major social, economic, and environmental challenges. Due to the pandemic, many HRCs outreach activities have been postponed. Other HRCs have adopted online virtual meetings but some people do not

have internet access. The pandemic has also exacerbated inequities and marginalization, leading to more workload on HRCs but no additional resources to carry out this work.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study identified various promising practices to improve police reform, immigrant rights, LGBTQ+ rights, housing access, and health equity that the BHRC can learn from to realize human rights for Bostonians. Two key routes forward for the Boston HRC are:

**A. Lack of funding and staff:** Many HRCs lack funding and staff. To address this challenge, there are several options: (1) Creation of committees and subcommittees for each of the areas of the BHRC interest with one or two commissioners on each and experts from NGOs, community groups and academics, as well as subcommittees or task-groups working on specific areas; (2) Collaboration with college and university programs, including internship opportunities for PhD students in human rights and social sciences to conduct research in the areas of BHRC interest, and law students to assess discrimination cases under supervision of law professors. Using these mechanisms and tools, including the resources of the public university in Boston, can offset some of the BHRC's staff and funding shortcomings.

**B. Revision of Ordinance:** The way an HRC is structured in the ordinance establishing the commission and the flexibility of an HRC to adopt changes dictate the ability and flexibility of the HRC to act. Those with quasi-judicial power have more freedom to adopt and rescind rules through the City Council to improve the functioning of the commission, including adding protected classes as they see fit. The BHRC in collaboration with the City Council and local organizations could create surveys and conduct forums to solicit community members' input in revising the BHRC ordinance to enable the BHRC to embrace the full range of human rights in the UDHR, using the [Eugene HRC model](#).

In terms of tools, building partnerships and engaging community stakeholders are the key tools. This includes working with marginalized groups and organizations serving marginalized groups. Second, conducting dialogues and public hearings with communities is also essential for gaining the perspectives of marginalized groups and communities and ensuring transformative solutions. Third, [issuing legal enforcement guidance](#) is also a critical tool to ensure transparency and clarity regarding an HRC's interpretation of an anti-discrimination ordinance and ensure effective implementation of the law (e.g. [NYC HRC](#) and [DC-OHR](#)). Fourth, using a human rights-based approach and framework (e.g., Eugene) could also help people resonate with the issues in question and participate. Lastly, one of the challenges facing HRCs is the lack of champions to promote the work of HRCs. Creating champions and human rights liaisons (e.g., Eugene, Washington, DC) will help spread the work in the community and ensure effective participation of community members and social justice organizations in human rights issues. Some of the strategies to creating human rights champions include providing annual human rights awards and providing training to NGOs, targeting the needs of different groups, such as those focusing on immigrants, the homeless, LGBTQ+, people incarcerated, etc.

**V. APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: HRCs Mandates**

#	City/County	Human rights body (hyperlink to ordinance)	<b>Mandates and duties of HRCs</b>  <b>Examples:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive/initiate complaints</li> <li>• Investigate</li> <li>• Mediate, conciliate</li> <li>• Adjudicate - public hearings, issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Make determination, offer remedy</li> <li>• Recommend policies</li> <li>• Adopt rules and regulations to function</li> <li>• Conduct human rights education outreach</li> <li>• Hold public hearings and dialogues</li> <li>• Research and report in publications</li> </ul>
1.	Ann Arbor, MI	<a href="#">Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive, investigate, mediate complaints, and refer unresolved mediations to appropriate agencies or the City Attorney</li> <li>• Recommend policies and programming</li> <li>• Submit annual reports, conduct studies</li> <li>• Respond to hate crimes</li> <li>• Report annually to City Council</li> <li>• Provide human rights education</li> </ul>
2.	Austin, TX	<a href="#">Austin City Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive and initiate complaints, mediate and conciliate, investigate, subpoena power</li> <li>• Conduct human rights educational programs</li> <li>• Conduct research and hold public hearings and dialogues and make recommendations</li> </ul>
3.	Baltimore, MD	<a href="#">Baltimore Community Relations Commission (CRC) (Office of Equity and Civil Rights)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept and investigate complaints, and conciliate</li> <li>• Conduct hearings and issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Adopt and publish rules and regulations</li> <li>• Policy recommendation, annual report</li> <li>• Conduct educational programs</li> <li>• Conduct studies/investigations/dialogues</li> <li>• Create advisory councils, committees</li> </ul>



4.	Bloomington, MN	<a href="#">Bloomington Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive and investigate complaints, conciliate mediate disputes. The HRC does not conduct hearings (except for contracting compliance) nor make judgments</li> <li>• Educate the public on human rights</li> <li>• Recommend policy/ordinance changes</li> </ul>
5.	Bloomington, IN	<a href="#">Bloomington Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold hearings, issue subpoenas, compel attendance, administer oaths, take testimony determine probable cause, conciliate</li> <li>• Helps with investigations to establish probable cause</li> <li>• Conduct human rights education</li> </ul>
6.	Munroe County, IN	<a href="#">Monroe County Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate, hold hearings, issue subpoenas, conciliate.</li> <li>• Adopt rules and regulations</li> <li>• Investigate, hold dialogues, research for publications</li> <li>• Determine probable cause jointly with the legal department</li> <li>• Conduct human rights education</li> </ul>
7.	Brooklyn Park, MN	<a href="#">Brooklyn Park Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive complaints to forward to the state department of human rights for further actions or to mediation services</li> <li>• Recommend policy</li> <li>• Adopt bylaws for the conduct of its affairs</li> <li>• Conduct education and outreach</li> <li>• Develop human rights strategic plan</li> </ul>
8.	Chicago, IL	<a href="#">Chicago Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive and investigate complaints, hold public hearings, adjudicate cases, and impose damages</li> <li>• Support victims of hate crimes through litigation in criminal courts</li> </ul>
9.	Columbia, MO	<a href="#">Columbia Missouri Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive and mediate complaints</li> <li>• Make recommendations</li> <li>• Adopt rules, regulations, and guidelines</li> <li>• Advise on policy</li> <li>• Conduct human rights educational programs</li> <li>• Promote diversity and human relations</li> </ul>



10.	Des Moines, IA	<a href="#">Des Moines Civil &amp; Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate or receive complaints, investigate mediate, hold hearings, issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Adopt, amend, and waive rules and regulation</li> <li>• Conduct educational and training programs</li> <li>• Submit annual report</li> <li>• Investigate /study discrimination, prejudice</li> </ul>
11.	District of Columbia (DC)	<a href="#">DC Commission on Human Rights (under the Office of Human Rights)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjudicate and certify cases with probable cause referred by the OHR</li> <li>• Receive, investigate and mediate complaints and refer appeals to the HRC</li> <li>• Draft policies and conduct awareness outreach initiatives</li> </ul>
12.	Durham, NC	<a href="#">Durham City Human Relations Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive and investigate complaints, conciliate, conduct hearings, issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Make policy recommendations</li> <li>• Adopt and amend rules and regulations</li> <li>• Hold public forums</li> <li>• Conduct research</li> <li>• Provide education programs</li> <li>• Report annually to City Council</li> </ul>
13.	Howard County, MD	<a href="#">Howard County Human Rights Commission (OHR and equity)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hear appeals with probable cause referred by the OHR</li> <li>• OHR (not the Commission) receives/initiates and investigates complaints, holds hearings, and conciliates or mediates cases</li> <li>• Investigate issues of employment discrimination and submit findings to EECO</li> <li>• Make policy recommendations</li> <li>• Conduct studies</li> <li>• Carry out education and outreach</li> </ul>
14.	Eugene, OR	<a href="#">Eugene Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate, research, and hold hearings</li> <li>• Eliminate systemic barriers to equitable opportunities and inclusion</li> <li>• Draft legislation and make policy recommendations</li> <li>• Provide human rights education on full range of human rights in the UDHR</li> </ul>

15.	Evansville-Vanderburgh County, IN	<a href="#">Evansville-Vanderburgh County Human Relations Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate, conciliate, conduct hearings, issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Adopt amend and rescind rules and regulations</li> <li>• Recommend affirmative action</li> <li>• Hold public hearings to address community issues</li> </ul>
16.	Fairfax, VA	<a href="#">Fairfax County Office of Human Rights &amp; Equity Programs (OHREP)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive, mediate, investigate complaints, hold hearings, conciliate</li> <li>• Request the County Attorney to petition for subpoenas, as has no power to subpoena (or to award damages/ injunctive relief)</li> <li>• Conduct human rights education and outreach</li> </ul>
17.	Iowa City, IA	<a href="#">Iowa City Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive and investigate complaints, mediate, issue subpoenas for investigation, conduct public hearings, seek injunctive relief</li> <li>• Make legislation recommendations</li> <li>• Conduct educational programs</li> <li>• Issue publications and reports of research and investigations</li> </ul>
18.	Los Angeles County, CA	<a href="#">Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations.</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No legal authority to adjudicate cases</li> <li>• Develop, recommend, and advise on policies, legislation, programs, and initiatives</li> <li>• Research focused on ensuring equal opportunity and intergroup relations</li> <li>• Conduct outreach and education</li> </ul>
19.	Louisville, KY	<a href="#">Louisville Metro Human Relations Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive/initiate complaints, investigate, seek to conciliate, hold hearings, determine charges, issue remedial orders</li> <li>• Adopt, promulgate, amend, and rescind rules and regulations to effectuate the commission, with the approval of the City government</li> <li>• Conduct education and outreach</li> </ul>



20.	Nashville, TN	<a href="#">Nashville Metro Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive, investigate, conciliate, and mediate complaints of discrimination and hate crime.</li> <li>• Conduct public hearings and community forums</li> <li>• Deliver education programs</li> <li>• Make policy recommendations</li> <li>• Deliver annual report on discrimination/ human relations</li> <li>• Adopt and change rules and regulations</li> </ul>
21.	New Orleans, LA	<a href="#">New Orleans Office of Human Rights and Equity (OHRE)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive, investigate, mediate complaints, conduct hearings, issue subpoenas, and resolve by conference, conciliation, and persuasion</li> <li>• Send findings, if necessary, to Civil District Court for enforcement</li> </ul>
22.	City of Newburgh, NY	<a href="#">Newburgh Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forward discrimination complaints received to the Division of Human Rights</li> <li>• Address community tensions</li> <li>• Issue publications/ reports of investigation</li> <li>• Conduct educational programs</li> </ul>
23.	New York City, NY	<a href="#">New York City Commission on Human Rights</a>	<p>Commission is divided into two major bureaus:</p> <p>(1) The Law Enforcement Bureau:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intake, investigate, prosecute, issue subpoenas, hold hearings, administer oaths and take testimony before administrative judges</li> </ul> <p>(2) The Community Relation Bureau:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study human relation problems</li> <li>• Conduct education and outreach</li> <li>• Make policy recommendations</li> <li>• Submit annual report and research publications</li> </ul>
24.	Westchester County, NY	<a href="#">Westchester County Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate, conciliate, hold hearings, adjudicating claims, issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Offer settlement, mediation, and conciliation</li> <li>• Award compensatory and punitive damages</li> <li>• Adopt rules and regulations</li> <li>• Submit annual report to County Executive and the Board of Legislators</li> <li>• Conduct education and outreach</li> </ul>



25.	Philadelphia, PA	<a href="#">Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate, conduct hearings, and adjudicate complaints of discrimination and violations of civil rights laws</li> <li>• Issue subpoenas, issue orders, and/or recommendations</li> <li>• Order remedies, settlement, or conciliation</li> <li>• Resolve community conflicts through dialogues</li> <li>• Provide human rights education</li> </ul>
26.	Pittsburgh, PA	<a href="#">Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate, receive, and investigate complaints, hold confidential mediation, hold hearings, issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Issue orders and/or recommendations, seek conciliation</li> <li>• Conduct studies, publish reports</li> <li>• Make policy recommendation</li> <li>• Adopt rules, regulations, and policies</li> <li>• Provide free policy review to employers, housing providers, and public accommodations</li> <li>• Deliver human rights education.</li> </ul>
27.	City of Portland, OR	<a href="#">Portland, Oregon, Office of Equity and Human Rights (Human Rights Commission)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work independently under the umbrella of the Office of Equity and Human Rights (OEHR)</li> <li>• Work to eliminate discrimination and bigotry, to strengthen inter-group relationships, and to foster greater understanding, inclusion, and justice</li> <li>• Recommends human rights policy and advises on programs, as guided by the principles embodied in the UDHR</li> </ul>
28.	Richmond, CA	<a href="#">Human Rights and Human Relations Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive, investigate and hear complaints of community tensions, discrimination, prejudice, and environmental rights</li> <li>• Seek conciliation, mediation, and consultation</li> <li>• Conduct studies and issue reports</li> </ul>
29.	Rockville, MD	<a href="#">Rockville Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive complaints, provide mediation, hold public hearings, obtain subpoenas (from court), order remedial action</li> <li>• Address conflicts and promote diversity and inclusion.</li> </ul>



30.	Rockville-Montgomery County, MD	<a href="#">Rockville-Montgomery County Office of Human Rights</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate and investigate complaints, determine probable cause, conciliate complaints, conduct hearings, request subpoenas from the County Attorney</li> <li>• Refer unresolved mediation to the HRC</li> <li>• Seek appropriate relief through the County Attorney</li> <li>• Issue regulations</li> <li>• Conduct studies and public hearings</li> <li>• Conduct human rights education</li> </ul>
31.	San Diego, CA	<a href="#">San Diego Human Relations Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate, mediate, hold hearings, issue subpoenas, administer oaths, take testimony, and issue appropriate orders</li> <li>• Issue rules and regulations and prepare ordinances.</li> <li>• Recommend policy</li> <li>• Conduct studies</li> <li>• Provide human rights education</li> </ul>
32.	San Francisco, CA	<a href="#">San Francisco Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate complaints, hold hearings, issue subpoenas, administer oaths, take testimony, and issue appropriate orders and petitions for court orders</li> <li>• Study, investigate, mediate, hold public hearings and make recommendations in addressing intergroup tensions and discrimination</li> <li>• Recommend policy and legislation</li> <li>• Conduct human rights education</li> </ul>
33.	Seattle, WA	<a href="#">Seattle Human Rights Commission (Seattle Office for Civil Rights)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hear appeals from the Seattle Office for Civil Rights (OCR) or Office of Labor Standards that have been investigated and have findings and determination</li> <li>• Make policy recommendations</li> <li>• Issue rules and regulations</li> </ul>
34.	King County (Seattle), WA	<a href="#">King County Civil Rights Commission (The Office of Equity and Social Justice, Civil Rights Program)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate, mediate, conduct public hearings, issue subpoenas</li> <li>• Adopt and amend rules and regulations</li> <li>• Propose legislation to the county council</li> <li>• Submit annual report</li> <li>• Conduct research and public forums</li> <li>• Conduct educational programs</li> </ul>



35.	Springfield, MO	<a href="#">Springfield Missouri Commission on Human Rights &amp; Community Relations</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate and mediate complaints.</li> <li>Issue subpoenas for investigation meetings</li> <li>Conduct litigation hearings (City attorney represents the commission in all hearings)</li> <li>Refer unresolved complaints to the Missouri Commission on Human Rights or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with a cause finding</li> <li>Conduct educational programs</li> </ul>
36.	Tacoma, WA	<a href="#">Tacoma City Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study, investigate, and mediate community problems of prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination</li> <li>Receive, investigate, and resolve complaints of housing discrimination</li> <li>Conduct outreach and education</li> </ul>
37.	Union County, NJ	<a href="#">Union County Human Relations Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote and encourage a more peaceful and tolerant society by providing support to bias crime victims</li> </ul>
38.	Virginia Beach, VA	<a href="#">Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer victims to the appropriate agency to address the complaints</li> <li>Adopt rules and procedures for the conduct of its affairs</li> <li>Produce reports</li> <li>Deliver educational programs</li> </ul>
39..	Woodbridge City	<a href="#">Prince William Human Rights Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate and mediate complaints, hold public hearings, obtain subpoenas through County Attorney</li> <li>Adopt, promulgate, amend rules and regulations</li> <li>Make policy recommendations</li> <li>Conduct studies and issue reports</li> <li>Conduct education and outreach</li> </ul>
40.	York City, PA	<a href="#">York City Human Relations Commission</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate, hold hearings, issue subpoenas and make decisions</li> <li>Adopt, promulgate, amend, and rescind rules and regulations to effectuate the policies</li> <li>On the request of the Council, investigate claims of excessive use of force by police in civil rights protest activities</li> <li>Study discrimination and human relations and publish reports with recommendations</li> </ul>

**Appendix B: HRCs interviewed and issues addressed**

#	City	Human rights body	Priority issues	Contact
1.	Ann Arbor, MI	<a href="#">Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 734- 794-6141 Email: <a href="mailto:HRC@a2gov.org">HRC@a2gov.org</a>
2	Bloomington, MN	<a href="#">Bloomington Human Rights Commission</a>	Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights, Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: <a href="tel:952-563-8733">952-563-8733</a> Email: <a href="mailto:humanrights@BloomingtonMN.gov">humanrights@BloomingtonMN.gov</a>
3.	Bloomington, IN	<a href="#">Bloomington Human Rights Commission</a>	Police reform LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination	Phone: 812-349-3426/3429 Email: <a href="mailto:human.rights@bloomington.in.gov">human.rights@bloomington.in.gov</a>
4.	District of Columbia	<a href="#">DC Commission on Human Rights (under the Office of Human Rights)</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 202- 727-4559 Email: <a href="mailto:ohr@dc.gov">ohr@dc.gov</a>
5.	Des Moines, IA	<a href="#">Des Moines Civil &amp; Human Rights Commission</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination	Phone: (515)-283-4284 Email: <a href="mailto:humanrights@dmgov.org">humanrights@dmgov.org</a>
6.	Eugene, OR	<a href="#">Eugene Human Rights Commission</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 541-682-5277
7.	Fairfax, VN	<a href="#">Fairfax County Office of Human Rights &amp; Equity Programs (OHREP)</a>	Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 703- 324-2953, TTY 711 Email: <a href="mailto:fairfaxcounty.gov/humanrights">fairfaxcounty.gov/humanrights</a>



8.	Ellicott City, MD	<a href="#">Howard County Office of Human Rights and Equity</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights, Housing discrimination	Phone: 410-313-6430 TTY 410-313-6401 Email: <a href="mailto:HRC@howardcountymd.gov">HRC@howardcountymd.gov</a>
9.	Los Angeles County, CA	<a href="#">Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: (213) 738-2788
10.	Nashville, TN	<a href="#">Nashville Metro Human Rights Commission</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 615-880-3370/ 615-880-3374 Email: <a href="mailto:mhrc@nashville.gov">mhrc@nashville.gov</a>
11.	New York City, NY	<a href="#">New York City Commission on Human Rights</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 212-306-7450 (212) 416-0197 Email: <a href="mailto:amccauley@cchr.nyc.gov">amccauley@cchr.nyc.gov</a>
12	Philadelphia, PA	<a href="#">Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination	Phone: (215) 686-4670 Email: <a href="mailto:pchr@phila.gov">pchr@phila.gov</a>
13	Pittsburgh, PA	<a href="#">Pittsburg Commission on Human Relations</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 412.255.2600/ 412-436-9619 Email: <a href="mailto:human.relations@pittsburghpa.gov">human.relations@pittsburghpa.gov</a>
14	San Francisco, CA	<a href="#">San Francisco Human Rights Commission</a>	Police reform Immigrant rights LGBTQ+ rights Housing discrimination Health disparities	Phone: 415-252-2500 Email: <a href="mailto:hrc.info@sfgov.org">hrc.info@sfgov.org</a>
15.	Seattle, WA	<a href="#">Seattle human rights Commission (Seattle Office for Civil Rights)</a>	Police reform Immigrants' rights Housing/homelessness	Phone: (206) 684-4500/4503

## **Appendix C: Interviewed Commissioners February – May 2021**

1. Cathy Meyer, Commissioner, San Francisco HRC, April 28
2. Joshua Barr, Director, Des Moines HRC, May 07
3. Monica Palacio, Washington DC OHR Director, May 07,
4. Motoko Aizawa, Director, Washington DC HRC (OHR), March 31
5. Tyrone Grandison, Commissioner, Seattle HRC, May 14
6. Jam Hammond, Interim Director, Pittsburgh HRC, March 24
7. Robin Toma, IAOHRA Director and LA County HRC, February 19
8. Bonnie Souza, Commissioner, Eugene HRC, February 23
9. Barbara E. McKinney, Director, Bloomington Indiana HRC, May 04
10. Melody Fowler-Green, Executive Director, Nashville Metro HRC, May 04
11. Kenneth Saunders, Director, Fairfax VA OHR and Equity Programs, April 28
12. Brittany-Jade Saunders, Deputy Commissioner for Strategic Initiatives, NYC HRC, April 07
13. Albert Randy Duque, Acting Executive Director, Philadelphia HRC, March 04
14. Shalimar Thomas, Commissioner, Philadelphia HRC, March 11
15. Leslie Krauz Stambaugh, Chair, Ann Arbor HRC, April 22
16. Yolanda Sonnier, Howard County MD Office of Human Rights and Equity, May 12
17. Mollie Bousu, Chair, Bloomington Indiana HRC, April 09

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