



# PHRC

PROVIDENCE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

## 2017 Annual Report



**Jorge O. Elorza**  
**Mayor**

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**The Hon. Jorge O. Elorza**

Mayor

**Kayla L. Powell**

Executive Director

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**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Raymond Two Hawks Watson**

Chairperson

**Patricia LaSalle**

Vice-Chairperson

**John Gaffney**

Secretary

**MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION**

**Chace Baptista**

**Kai LoMuscio**

**Maria Monteiro**

**Lucy Rose**

**Nittaya Saenbut**

**Cesar Teo**

**Matthieu Yangambi**

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December 5, 2017

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

We are proud to submit the Providence Human Relations Commission's 2017 Annual Report for your review, pursuant to the City Charter art. XI §1103(b)(7), and was written into the city's Charter in 1963. Our mission, then and now, is to promote human rights and positive community relations.

Nationally, 2017 has been a challenging year for the kinds of constituencies served by the PHRC. Groups which previously existed within the fringes of society feel emboldened and have begun to engage in hateful and violent rhetoric.

In response to these challenges, the Commission has made a comprehensive effort to better face this environment, responding with a pivot to education and outreach and a new, focused mission statement reflecting our efforts to meet the residents of Providence where they need us. Our efforts this year represent a marked change in scope and goals. Over the last twelve months, the Commission has strengthened its relationships with state- and local-level partners, increased its participation in community events, renewed its commitment to addressing issues of substance, and placed itself on a strong footing for continued success.

The Members of the Commission and its Director wish to thank Mayor Elorza, Acting Council President Matos, and the members of the City Council for their continued support. We look forward to continuing to educate, collaborate, and advocate into 2018 and beyond.

Sincerely,

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Raymond Two Hawks Watson  
Chair, PHRC

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Kayla L. Powell  
Executive Director, PHRC



# INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Discrimination in all its forms threatens the welfare of Providence’s citizens and undermines our ability to thrive as a diverse city. The **Providence Human Relations Commission (PHRC)** was formed in 1963 with a broad mission to further the cause of equal rights and non-discrimination. Over the years, it has taken on the roles of complaint investigation, outreach, education, community engagement, and public policy advocacy. In 2017, the Human Relations Commission expanded its educational and outreach mission, codified its relationship with its state-level counterpart, and adopted a new mission statement. This new vision is intended to reconcile the Commission’s obligations in the City Charter and its current budgetary and structural restraints, while responding to a national political environment that is increasingly hostile to racial, sexual, and ethnic minorities, undocumented individuals, and women.

The Commission’s current mission statement is as follows:

“The PHRC 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.”

Throughout its history, the Commission’s membership has reflected the broad diversity of the City of Providence. Current members represent many races, religions, ancestral origins, sexual orientations, and gender identities. Its members are able-bodied and disabled. They reflect a number of disparate education levels and professions. The experiences that members bring are vital to ensuring the Human Relations Commission can undertake work that benefits all underprivileged groups, with an eye towards intersectionality.

In 2017, our work grew to encompass a variety of new programs and goals. What follows within this report are the specifics of the Commission’s work in several categories: **Organizational Development, Complaint Investigation & Adjudication, Policy & Advocacy, and Education & Outreach.**



# COMMISSIONERS & STAFF



**Raymond Two Hawks Watson**  
Chairman



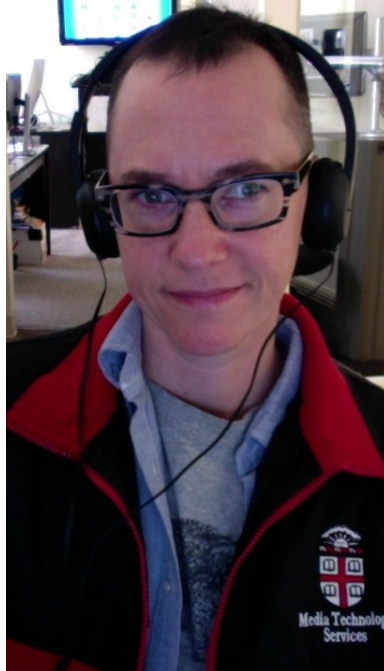
**Patricia E. LaSalle**  
Vice-Chairwoman



**John Gaffney**  
Secretary



**Chace Baptista**  
Commission Member



**Kai X. LoMuscio**  
Commission Member



**Maria Monteiro**  
Commission Member





# COMMISSIONERS & STAFF



**Lucy Rose**  
Commission Member



**Nittaya Saenbut**  
Commission Member



**Cesar Teo**  
Commission Member



**Dr. Matthieu Yangambi**  
Commission Member



**Kayla L. Powell**  
Executive Director



# ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to effectively serve the people of Providence, the Commission must see to its own growth, refresh its education, and ensure its structure is responsive and efficient. The PHRC undertook the following developmental activities in 2017:

## Review of Best Practices

Early in the spring, the Executive Director began a comprehensive, outward-looking review of best practices and standards from other cities. Intended to assist both with creating new, innovative programs and to provide avenues of improvement with existing ones, the Commission reviewed comparable agencies and organizations in the cities of Orlando, Little Rock, Seattle, Fort Worth, Chicago, Cincinnati, and San Francisco. Insights from these Best Practice Reviews have been applied to a number of events this year, including informing a new focus on acting as a convener of disparate non-profits and other governmental agencies to multiply their efforts through coordination.

## Commission & Staff Retreat

The Commission recognized a need to step back and take an opportunity to refresh their training and solidify the PHRC's new direction. In September, a partnership with the Providence Friends Meeting, SouthCoast Fair Housing, and the Rhode Island Commission on Human Rights allowed for a half-day staff retreat. At this event, members of the Commission synthesized a new mission statement, received an update on changes to the Open Meetings Act from the City Solicitor's office, and received training from SouthCoast Fair Housing on fair housing law and current issues. The Fair Housing training had a focus on individuals with disabilities, and was organized in response to data provided by the Rhode Island Commission on Human Rights which said that nearly half of all claims of housing discrimination in FY17 were related to disability status.

*Commissioner Cesar Teo and Executive Director Kayla Powell staff an event table at the Roger Williams Park Casino*





# ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Equal Pay Task Force

On June 6, 2017, the Providence City Council passed an ordinance creating an “Equal Pay Task Force” (EPTF) within the Providence Human Relations Commission, with the goal of promoting equal pay for equal work by studying best practices, collecting data from City departments, reviewing purchasing standards and contractors, and making policy recommendations. The EPTF met for the first time in November.

**The Equal Pay Task Force will file an interim report with the Providence City Council and the Human Relations Commission by the end of calendar year 2017, and a full report upon the conclusion of its initial investigation.**

**The Commission thanks Celeste Terry-Lo, Dr. Diya Das, Etie-Lee Schaub, Esq, Kelly Nevins, Doris De Los Santos, Elvys Ruiz, and Patricia LaSalle for their work and looks forward to their report.**



*Mayor Jorge Elorza and Councilman Luis Aponte with 2017 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Hall of Fame inductees (L to R) Jim Vincent, Muraina “Morris” Akinfolorin, and Rob DeBlois.*





# COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION & ADJUDICATION

As part of the Commission’s stated mission, it is empowered to “seek, investigate, mediate, and/or adjudicate complaints of discrimination filed with the Commission and promote compliance with civil rights law.” Over the last decade, the Commission’s role and budget changed, as active investigation was gradually ceded to our state-level counterpart, the Rhode Island Commission on Human Rights (RICHR). This transition occurred for a number of reasons, but primarily due to their greater capacity to conduct investigations and their broader authority to levy penalties.

## Memorandum of Understanding with the Rhode Island Commission on Human Rights

Previously, the PHRC’s Executive Director would forward complaints filed to the RICHR for investigation. In the interest of ensuring all complaints are investigated in a timely manner, and the constituent’s experience remains uniform, the Commission took action.

To better define this partnership, the Providence Human Relations Commission and the Rhode Island Commission on Human Rights negotiated & entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on July 24, 2017. Under the terms of this renewable, one-year agreement, the Human Relations Commission will ensure any complaints of discrimination shall be sent to the RICHR for prompt intake, and the RICHR shall provide to the PHRC statistics on claims of discrimination within the borders of Providence. Some examples of these statistics are available on the following page.

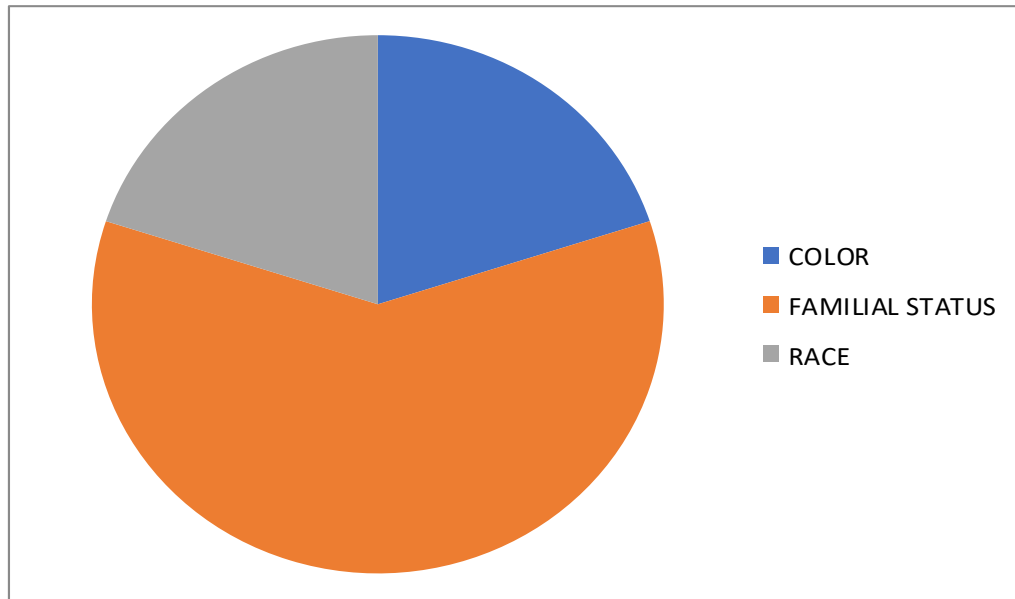
This information has proved to be critical in setting long-term strategic priorities and informing allocation of resources. In response to the number of fair housing complaints which were reported in FY17, the Commission was able to ensure training on fair housing was provided at the annual retreat, and that upcoming priorities were set accordingly.

*As part of the Commission’s recognition of the Transgender Day of Remembrance, the transgender flag flew over City Hall from Nov. 17-21, 2017*

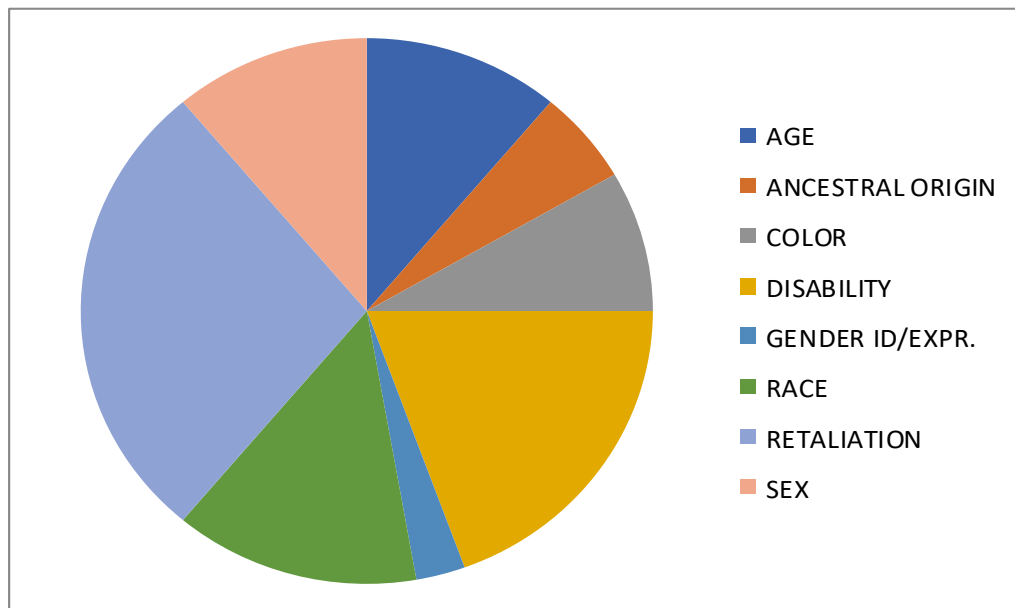


# COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION & ADJUDICATION

## 5 HOUSING DISCRIMINATION CLAIMS—7/1/17-9/30/17



## 19 EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION CLAIMS—7/1/17-9/30/17



\*Note: Housing discrimination claims originate from individuals renting/purchasing or attempting to rent/purchase within Providence. Employment discrimination claims originate from individuals working, but not necessarily living, within Providence.



# POLICY & ADVOCACY

Throughout its history, the Commission has remained active in areas of policy and advocacy, as empowered by the Charter. The Commission offers political and community leaders the chance to view ordinance, policy, and procedures through an equity lens. We have provided guidance in the following areas in 2017:

## **Providence Community-Police Relations Act**

Throughout the hearing process leading up to the ultimate adoption of the Providence Community-Police Relations Act (PCPRA), the Human Relations Commission remained engaged with community members, public safety officials, and political leaders. These activities culminated with the submission of a letter to the Providence City Council voicing strong support for the passage of the PCPRA.

## **Workplace Gender Transition Guidelines**

Providence has long held a reputation as one of the most LGBTQ-inclusive cities in the nation, in part because of the strong support of its elected officials for this often-marginalized community. A gender transition in the workplace often involves a number of steps and can differ from one individual to another, necessitating a written policy. Director Powell worked closely with Human Resources and the LGBTQ Liaison to adapt a set of best practices to the City’s specific needs, creating a written policy which was implemented for all City departments at the end of June.

Employee training in support of this initiative is ongoing. A briefing for Department Directors was held in August, and training for the Providence Police Department’s peer-support leaders is in the planning phase. The Providence School Board’s policy committee is scheduled to review the guidelines for adoption in December.



*Executive Director Kayla Powell provides training to Department Directors on the Workplace Gender Transition Guidelines*



# OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Going forward, the Commission regards outreach and education to hold the highest priority among its areas of authority. The Commission specifically sees its responsibility through the lens of ensuring Providence’s residents understand their rights, know what resources are available, and have the tools necessary to move forward with constructive inter-community relationships. Throughout 2017, the Human Relations Commission has taken part in, sponsored, tabled at, and organized a number of events in support of its outreach & education goals.

## **The 14th Annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Hall of Fame Awards—January 31, 2017**

Undoubtedly the Commission’s ‘flagship’ event, the 14th Annual MLK Hall of Fame brought elected officials, community and faith leaders, and nonprofit organizations to City Hall, in order to recognize the achievements of the year’s honorees. Muraina “Morris” Akinfalorin, Rob DeBlois, and Jim Vincent were recognized for their achievements in the areas of acceptance, social justice, civil rights, and equality.

The Hall of Fame currently consists of 37 individuals whose names reside on a plaque outside the Mayor’s Office in Providence City Hall. The Commission looks forward to inducting new members early in 2018.

## **Cape Verdean Independence Day Flag Raising—July 7, 2017**

In recognition of Cape Verdean Independence, and in honor of the large community of individuals of Cape Verdean heritage within Providence, the Commission organized its 2nd Annual Raising of the Cape Verdean Flag at City Hall. In addition to hosting officials from Cabo Verde, Officer Rhonda Araujo, Michael Évora, Esq., and Maria Monteiro were recognized with citations for their contributions to the Cape Verdean community in Rhode Island.

## **Community Conversation on Municipal IDs—August 8, 2017**

As the City of Providence moves to implement a Municipal ID program, it is vital that the needs and wishes of underserved communities are reflected. In order to ensure this, the Human Relations Commission co-sponsored a Community Conversation on this program at the Southside Cultural Center to solicit input, ideas, and recommendations from members of the community. Members of the Commission engaged with numerous other local advocacy organizations and dozens of community members, noting a number of recommendations and considerations which will be addressed in the implementation of the program.





# OUTREACH & EDUCATION

## Dorcas International Institute’s ‘World Refugee Day’—August 20, 2017

As part of ‘World Refugee Day’ activities, Dorcas International Institute held a forum, informational fair, and celebration of refugees in Rhode Island at the Roger Williams Park Casino. In support of our mission to conduct outreach to marginalized communities, the Commission staffed a table at the event, providing information to interested individuals on their rights, how to ensure instances of discrimination are fully investigated, and how they can engage with City services.

## Transgender Day of Remembrance Flag Raising — Nov. 20, 2017

In commemoration of the Transgender Day of Remembrance and Trans Awareness Week, Director Powell collaborated with the Department of Public Property to display the transgender flag above City Hall in a show of support, recognition, and remembrance.



*Commissioner Lucy Rose, Rhode Island Commission on Human Rights Executive Director Michael Évora, John Britto, and Acting Council President Sabina Matos watch Skyla Anderson sing the Cabo Verdean National Anthem at a City Hall flag-raising ceremony.*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Providence Human Relations Commission would like to acknowledge the contributions of following individuals or entities and thank them for their assistance during 2017:

**Linda P. Fitzgerald** for her years of contributions to the downtown Providence art and cultural community, and for her service as a former member of the Commission. We wish her luck in her relocation to Los Angeles.

**Celeste Terry-Lo** for her engagement with the Commission and her work as Chairwoman of the Equal Pay Task Force.

**The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights** for its willingness to share resources and collaborate to further the cause of equal rights for every Rhode Islander.

**The Providence Friends Meeting** for generously opening their Meeting House to the Commission as a host site for its annual retreat.

**Dorcas International Institute** for being a willing partner in furthering the rights of immigrant and refugee families, and for inviting the Commission to table at several of its events.

**SouthCoast Fair Housing** for providing training to the Commission in the area of fair housing.



*Commissioners, staff, and guests are joined by Mayor Jorge Elorza at the first PHRC Retreat*

