



Pennsylvania
Human Relations Commission

Civil Rights Division and Housing Overview

P E N N S Y L V A N I A H U M A N
R E L A T I O N S C O M M I S S I O N

Pennsylvania's Civil Rights Agency

**Presented by: Sheryl Meck, Director of Civil Rights
Outreach Division and the Civil Rights Outreach
Coordinators**



www.pa.gov/en/agencies/phrc

Engagement Acknowledgement



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Disclaimer

Information, materials, and/or technical assistance are intended solely as informal guidance and are neither a determination of your legal rights or responsibilities under the PHRA and/or applicable Federal laws, nor binding on any agency with enforcement responsibility under those same laws.

PA Human Relations Commission

MISSION

The PHRC promotes equal opportunity for all and enforces Pennsylvania's civil rights laws that protect people from unlawful discrimination.

VISION

As Pennsylvania's civil rights leader, it is our vision that all people in Pennsylvania will live, work and learn free from unlawful discrimination.

VALUES

- Equality
- Service
- Integrity
- Excellence
- Teamwork
- Respect



Our Offices

The PHRC spans the entire Commonwealth with designated investigatory regions.

333 Market Street,
8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
(717-) 787-9780

Central
Office
Senior
Leadership &
Enforcement

301 Fifth Avenue
Suite 390,
Piatt Place
Pittsburgh, PA
15222
(412) 565-5395

Pittsburgh
Regional Office

333 Market Street,
8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
(717-) 787-9780

Harrisburg
Regional Office

110 North 8th Street
Suite 501
Philadelphia, PA
19107
(215) 560-2496

Philadelphia Regional
Office



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Governing Laws

PHRA

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (PHRA) was enacted in 1955 and covers discrimination in employment, housing, commercial property, education, and public accommodations.

PFEOA

The Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities (PFEOA) was enacted in 1961 and is specific to postsecondary education and secondary vocational and trade schools.



Sectors of Protection

Pennsylvania law protects individuals in the below areas:

1. Employment - seeking, obtaining or holding a position
2. Education - attending public or private school, college, trade school or university
3. Housing - renting, purchasing, selling or obtaining a loan for a home
4. Commercial Property - having access to or the purchase, sale or lease of commercial property
5. Public Accommodations - access to public places or services



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Protected Classes

In general, Pennsylvania law prohibits discrimination based on:

01

Ancestry

05

Age (40+)

02

Retaliation

06

National Origin

09

Sex

03

Disability

07

Religion

10

Color

04

Use, handling & training
of support/service
animal for disability

08

Familial Status
housing only

11

Race



How to File a Complaint

If an individual feels that they have been the victim of illegal discrimination, they should file a complaint with the PHRC.

- a dedicated, trained, neutral PHRC investigator will walk the Complainant through the process and help with the preparation of the complaint.
- PHRC staff will investigate the complaint and PHRC counsel will serve as counsel for the Complainant.
- If the allegations in the complaint are covered under federal laws enforced by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the PHRC will file the complaint with the appropriate federal agency.
- Complainants do not incur any attorney fees during the investigation process from the PHRC. Complainants do have the right to obtain private legal services at their own expense, but this is not required.



Intake

- If a person believes they have experienced housing discrimination, their first step is to connect with PHRC's intake team.
- They will be asked to fill out a housing questionnaire to provide contact information, what they experienced, and who they are filing a complaint against.
- The intake team will assess their information to see if this is a situation that PHRC can investigate under state law.
- If the complaint is jurisdictional and timely, the intake team will help them finalize their complaint, then the person who was filed against will be notified.



Investigation

- They will be asked to provide information to a neutral investigator, who is responsible for investigating if there was a violation of the PHRA
- This investigator may ask for documents, interview witnesses, to hold a fact-finding hearing, or seek other ways of obtaining evidence.
- Mediation services may be an option, depending on the case and if both parties agree to mediation.
- The investigator will also explore if it is possible to settle the case before a finding.



Statute of Limitations

Complaints that are filed with the PHRC that are considered untimely will be referred to Federal partners for consideration.

PHRA statute:

- 180 days from the act of harm (includes Saturdays, Sundays & holidays)
- If the 180th day ends on Sat., Sun., or holiday, the time period ends the next business day
- Subject to equitable tolling

Federal statutes:

- EEOC = 300 days
- HUD = 365 days (not formally deferring)



Discriminatory Actions

- Discriminatory statements
- Discriminatory inquiries
- Steering
- Refusal to sell, lease, or finance housing
- Unfair appraisals
- Predatory lending
- Discriminating in housing terms or conditions
- Unequal provision of services & facilities
- Sexual harassment
- Refusal to provide reasonable accommodations & modifications



Potential Housing Case Remedies

- Reasonable accommodation or modification is made
- Changes to lease and/or other policies
- Posting of Fair Housing Notices
- Training for Respondents
- Reimbursement of fees and out-of-pocket expenses
- Money for humiliation & embarrassment
- Civil Penalties



Recent Housing Awards

\$1.5 million – Housing provider failed to provide accessible units and ignored requests for reasonable accommodations for tenants with disabilities

\$100,000 – Maintenance worker sexually harassed a female tenant

\$90,000 – Housing provider revoked lease and failed to address neighbor harassment based on race

\$77,000 – Housing provider made discriminatory statements and refused to rent to a household based on familial status



Fair Housing Laws



Goals of Fair Housing

Goal #1: End Housing Discrimination

Goal #2: Promote Diverse, Inclusive Communities

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing

“Taking meaningful actions, in addition to combating discrimination, that overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to opportunity based on protected characteristics.”



What do fair housing laws cover?

- **Sale**, and **rental** of housing, and **housing-related transactions**
- **Types of housing:** apartments, single family homes, manufactured housing communities, condominiums, public housing, nursing homes, dormitories, and more.
- **Discrimination Theories:**
 - **Disparate Treatment:** treatment that directly discriminates against a member of a protected class
 - **Disparate Impact:** a policy that impacts a member of a protected class.



Overview: Fair Housing Laws

- **Federal:**
 - Fair Housing Act of 1968 (FHA)
 - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
 - Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)
- **State:**
 - Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (PHRA)
- **Local:**
 - Check your local ordinances!



Housing Jurisdiction

- **Covered Providers:**
 - FHA: housing providers with 4 or more properties, unless they publicly advertise vacancies or receive federal funding
 - PHRA: housing providers with 1 or more properties
- **Filing Timeline:**
 - FHA: Complaint must be filed within 365 days of the date of the last harm
 - PHRA: Complaint must be filed within 180 days of the date of the last harm



PHRC Civil Rights Division

- Established February 2024
- Director and 4 Civil Rights Outreach Coordinators
- Responsibilities:
 - Provide complex facilitation and conflict resolution services for communities facing conflicts and tensions pursuant to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act.
 - Lead local projects or initiatives
 - Develop and implement comprehensive outreach plans targeting communities in conjunction with the PHRC Advisory Councils and the PHRC Social Justice Ambassadors Program.
 - Engage in proactive outreach to educate the public about the dangers of bias and hate and the importance of anti-racism



Upcoming Community Response Plans



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PHRC CIVIL RIGHTS OUTREACH DIVISION



CUMBERLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY RESPONSE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4
12 P.M.

YWCA CARLISLE & CUMBERLAND COUNTY
301 G STREET
CARLISLE, PA 17013

Sheryl Meck, PHRC Civil Rights
Outreach Director

Montrell Smith, PHRC Civil Rights
Outreach Coordinator

REGISTER TODAY!
Scan QR code



Questions? Contact
Sheryl Meck, shmeck@pa.gov



Please join us for a safe space to talk about
your experiences and learn about your
rights. Our team will also be available to
gather narratives and instances of
discrimination.

All are welcomed to join.

PHRC CIVIL RIGHTS OUTREACH DIVISION



DELAWARE COUNTY COMMUNITY RESPONSE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11
6-8 P.M.

ACCESS CENTER
701 BOOTH STREET
CHESTER, PA 19013

Sheryl Meck, PHRC Civil Rights
Outreach Director

Joshua Nix, PHRC Civil Rights
Outreach Coordinator

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Questions? Contact
Sheryl Meck, shmeck@pa.gov



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LATINO SENSITIVITY ORIENTATION

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12
5-7 P.M.

WISSAHICKON VALLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY
650 SKIPPAK PIKE
BLUE BELL, PA 19422

Hector Luis Torres-Diaz, PHRC
Civil Rights Outreach Coordinator

Omar Henriquez, PHRC Civil
Rights Outreach Coordinator

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Scan QR code



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Sheryl Meck, shmeck@pa.gov



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No Hate In Our State Townhalls

PHRC Townhalls bridge divides and fosters understanding in communities.

No Hate in Our State Town Hall

BLAIR COUNTY

**Wednesday
October 2, 2024**

6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Railroad City Cultural Center
1247 14th Street
Altoona, PA

 [REGISTER NOW](#)
SCAN QR CODE

What is a "No Hate in Our State" Town Hall?

"No Hate in Our State" town halls bridge divides and foster understanding in our communities. It provides an open forum where residents, activists, and others can come together to voice their concerns, learn about their rights, and begin the healing process.

Free & Open to the Public

Panelists:



Harriet Gaston
Blair County African American Heritage Project
Founder, Blair County NAACP, Penn State Altoona



Victor Thomas
Former Basketball Player, Pastor, Representative of Gloria Gates Medical Care



Bill Wilkinson
Retired Law Enforcement Professional, Security Consultant, Community Policing Advocate



Chad Dion Lassiter, MSW
Executive Director, PHRC



Sheryl Meck
Director, PHRC Civil Rights Division



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Additional Civil Rights Division Functions

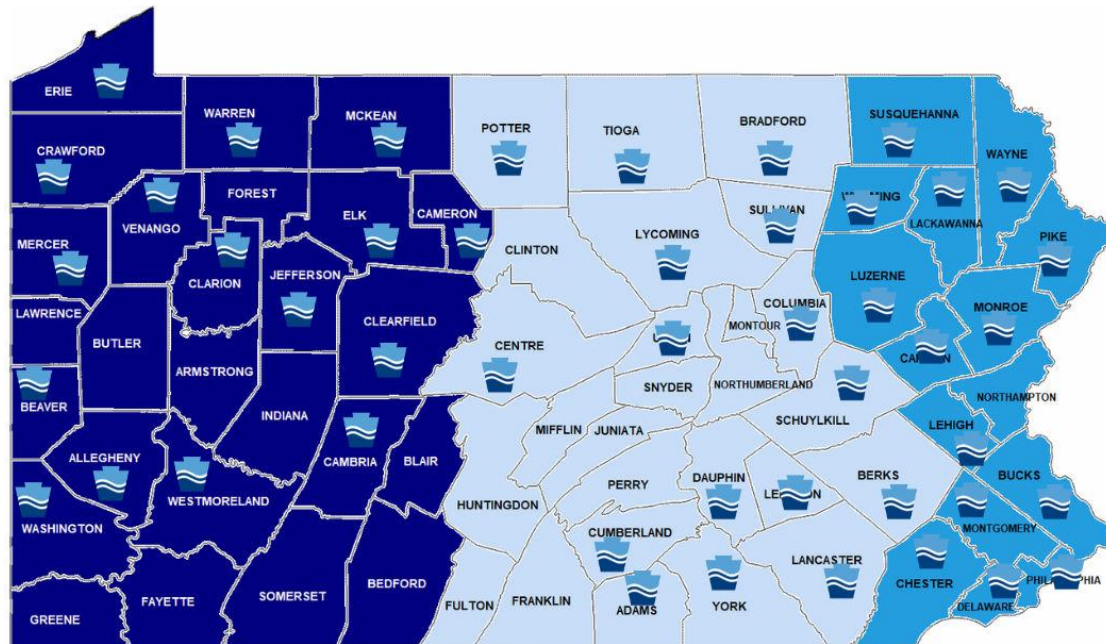
PHRC Civil Tension Reduction Task Force
Grassroot collaboration/NAACP branches
Advisory Council
Social Justice Ambassadors
Increasing connection in Western PA
Free trainings
Restorative dialogue and conversations
Monthly CROC virtual session for the public (January 2025)
Monitor Civil Unrest
Observe school board meetings



Beloved Community

PHRC on the Road: Building Pennsylvania's Beloved Community

The PHRC created the Beloved Community framework to assist communities of the commonwealth to intentionally build a culture of peace, understanding, and tolerance despite our differences within the context of an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. The Beloved Community tour addresses key issues and concerns such as disability discrimination, racial and gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, and the protection of marginalized communities.



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Social Justice Ambassador Program

- Appointed by the PHRC, to serve as an extension of its outreach effort within the community.
- Acts on a non-partisan basis to assist the Commission in exploring training, outreach, and event opportunities in their respective community to further its mission in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations, and education.
- Functions as a Commission liaison in promoting awareness of the existence and purposes of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act and the Commission.
- Will facilitate potential venues where trainings, meetings, and other outreach events can be held within their community.



You can learn more and apply to become an ambassador by [visiting our website](#) or by emailing ra-hrambsprogram@pa.gov



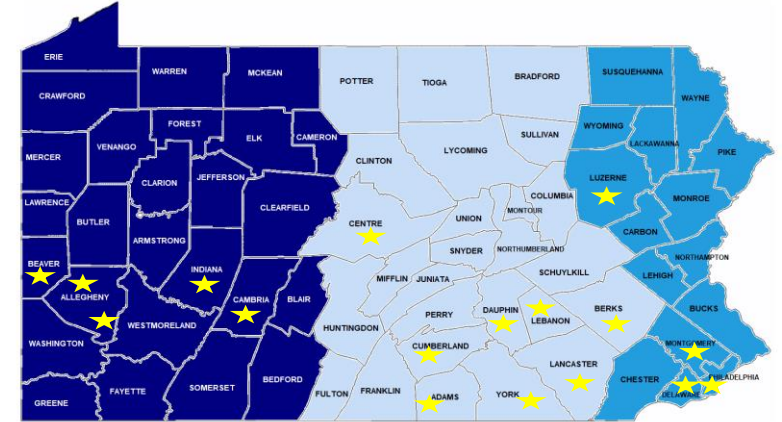
Advisory Councils

Connects PHRC resources and information to communities throughout PA, raising awareness about all Pennsylvanians' rights to live, work, and learn free from unlawful discrimination.

While the PHRC is active throughout Pennsylvania, local leaders have a much keener sense of the urgent issues, needs, and priorities of their communities. Advisory Councils bridge that gap by:

- Advocating for their communities
- Assist community members with filing complaints
- Planning events, trainings and discussions that educate their communities and celebrate the diversity within their communities.

If you'd like to join an active council or would like start a council in your area, [visit our website](#).



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Trends Across PA

Housing:

- Appraisal Bias
- Vouchers/Section 8 housing – landlord discrimination – blanket denials in certain areas – supports redlining/gentrification
- Renter income (2-3x income verse rental price)
- Uninhabitable homes due to lack of comprehensive minimal code across the Commonwealth
- PHRC White Paper - recommendations



Concerns Across PA

Pennsylvania has ranked in the top 10 states across the country with the highest number of hate groups.

- SPLC – (2023) 78 Hate and Antigovernment groups tracked
- White nationalist, Anti-LGBTQ, General antigovernment, racist skinheads, Ku Klux Klan, Moms For Liberty

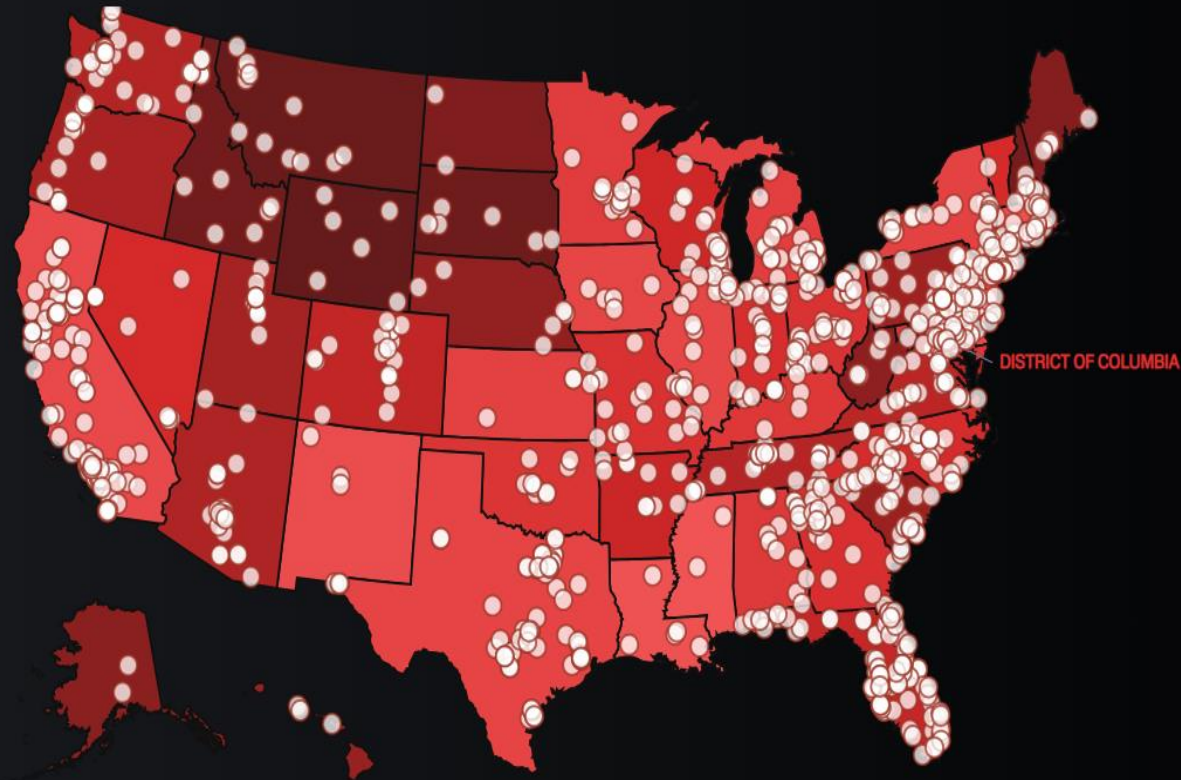
What is a hate group?

The Southern Poverty Law Center defines a hate group as an organization or collection of individuals that – based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities – has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics. An organization does not need to have engaged in criminal conduct or have followed their speech with actual unlawful action to be labeled a hate group. We do not list individuals as hate groups, only organizations.



United States Hate Group Map

IN 2023, WE TRACKED 1,430 HATE AND ANTIGOVERNMENT GROUPS ACROSS THE U.S.



PHRC Resources

- PA Fair Housing Line: 855-866-5718
- Free housing [training programs](#)
- Monthly housing webinars: [Fair Housing Empower Hour](#)
- [Brochures and fact sheets](#)
- [PHRC Speaks: Fair Housing Forward](#)
- [The State of Fair Housing in the Commonwealth of PA](#)
- [Civil Rights Division webpage](#)
- [PHRC Events page](#)



Contact Us

To file a complaint, contact the regional office nearest you or by calling (717) 787-4410 | (717) 787-7279 TTY users only

Harrisburg
333 Market St. 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-787-9780
717-787-7279 (TTY)

Philadelphia
110 N. 8th St. Suite 501
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215-560-2496
215-560-3599 (TTY)

Pittsburgh
301 5th Ave. Suite 390
Piatt Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15222
412-565-5395
412-565-5711 (TTY)



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QUESTIONS

