



Pittsburgh

2025 Housing Equality Conference:

Navigating Today's Challenges and
Building a Fairer Tomorrow



Featuring

Hill Harper

**Actor, Author,
Entrepreneur**

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



THANK YOU!

At PHRC, we are so grateful for everyone who made this conference possible. It was an incredible day of conversation and inspiration to continue working for housing justice.

We owe special thanks to our ASL interpreters and captioners for making this event accessible, to the agencies who shared information at networking tables, and to our hosts at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown.

We'd like to share some thoughts, reflections, and feedback that arose from the conference and to invite you to continue this conversation in support of housing opportunities for all Pennsylvanians.

You can find links to the session recordings throughout this summary. Please feel free to view and share.





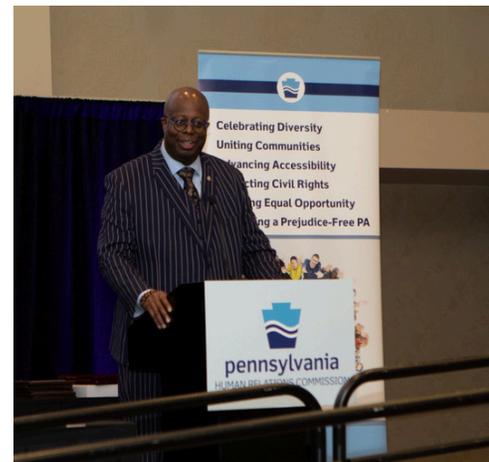
2025 Housing Equality Conference: Navigating Today's Challenges and Building a Fairer Tomorrow

OPENING REMARKS



Our day began with inspiring words from leaders across the Commonwealth. PHRC Regional Director Dr. La Dawn Robinson, PHRC Director of Fair Housing and Commercial Property, Caroline Griffin, and PHRC Executive Director, Chad Dion Lassiter gave greetings and opening remarks.

We were honored to have PA Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis provide remarks. Lt. Governor Davis highlighted the housing challenges that we're facing in Pennsylvania, and the urgency of action to work towards safe, livable, affordable communities. Our opening remarks concluded with introductions of our partners who hosted networking tables throughout the event. You can view the recording of the opening remarks [here](#).



"The Governor and I... recognize the work that you are doing to support our most vulnerable residents. And I will never stop fighting to make sure Pennsylvania is a place where every single one of us can succeed."

-Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis



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SESSION 1A: FROM CONFLICT TO COLLABORATION: STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN TENANT STABILITY

In this panel discussion, panelists discussed how RentHelpPGH, Neighborhood Legal Services, ACTION-Housing, and Just Mediation Pittsburgh work together to keep tenants in their homes. They spoke about the importance of fostering communication between landlords and tenants and working collaboratively to create solutions that work for both parties. You can view the recording of the discussion [here](#).

Moderator: Anita Levels, PHRC Civil Rights Outreach Coordinator

Panelists:

Kamyah Barry, Court Resource Navigator, RentHelpPGH

Adam DiBuo, J.D., Manager for Housing, Neighborhood Legal Services

Natalie Ryan, Director of Housing Stabilization, ACTION-Housing

Amethy Weikel-Sandstrom (she/they), Program Manager, Just Mediation Pittsburgh



"The whole is much greater than the sum of its parts...Tenants need legal assistance so they can mediate properly, they need rental assistance to solve their current issue and stabilize themselves for the future.

They need all of these resources in concert with one another, so it's not just expanding one of our organizations. It's expanding as a whole, as a unit, as a collaborative so these programs are functioning as well as they can."

-Adam DiBuo, JD

Resources:

- RentHelpPGH: [Lawyer of the Day | RentHelpPGHResources](#)
- Just Mediation Pittsburgh: [Mediation | Just Mediation Pittsburgh | Pittsburgh](#)
- ACTION-Housing: [Housing Stabilization - Action Housing](#)
- Neighborhood Legal Services: [Neighborhood Legal Services < Neighborhood Legal Services](#)



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SESSION 1B: LET'S TALK! DEMYSTIFYING THE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION PROCESS

This session discussed how fair housing protections enable individuals with disabilities to request changes that are needed to for them to use and enjoy their housing. Panelists shared an overview of the reasonable accommodation process, focusing on how housing providers and tenants can work together to find reasonable solutions. You can view the recording of the discussion [here](#).

Moderator: Brittany Mellinger, PHRC Fair Housing Training & Outreach Coordinator

Panelists:

Olivia Benson, Regional Housing Coordinator, Inglis-Self-Determination Housing PA

Sharon McEchoes, Disability Options Network, Westmoreland County Lead

"A tenant often kind of feels powerless, if I hit a wall, I have to move and start a new life. A couple of people that I've dealt with have raised a family in a home and don't want to give it up and end up living in the living room and the kitchen and that's it. They don't realize (their rights)."

Sharon McEchoes



Resources:

- **Inglis Self-Determination Housing PA:** <https://www.inglis.org/programs-and-services/inglis-community-services/self-determination-housing-of-pennsylvania-sdhp>
- **Disability Options Network:** <https://www.doninc.org/>
- **PA Human Relations Commission:** <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/phrc/programs-and-services/file-a-complaint/housing---commercial-property-discrimination-complaint.html>
- **US Department of Housing and Development:** [Assessing a Person's Request to Have an Animal as a Reasonable Accommodation Under the Fair Housing Act](#)





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SESSION 1C & 2C: RACIAL WEALTH GAP SIMULATION

Through this simulation, participants were supported in understanding the significance and repercussions of racial disparities perpetuated by various federally sanctioned policies. Participants gained insight into how these policies perpetuate systemic inequalities across various domains such as property ownership, education, wealth accumulation, economic mobility, among others, and exacerbate poverty within communities of color. Additionally, the simulation underscored the importance of addressing race, utilizing reliable data sources, and elevating the nexus between poverty alleviation and policy enhancement. This session was offered to two groups of attendees throughout the morning.

Learning objectives

- Participants will be able to break down barriers to engaging in conversations about economic policy, based on racial identity, and develop an understanding of the role policy plays in creating or removing barriers to opportunities.
- Participants will increasingly develop an understanding that racial inequities are not based on individual attitudes, rather they are structural at national, state and often times local levels.
- As awareness increases, participants will be able to support policies and strategies to redress structural inequities in various areas, but especially in housing and economic opportunity.

Facilitators:

Tonya Mitchell-Weston, President/CEO, Housing Authority of the County of Warren

Dr. Audia Robinson, Community Investment Operations Analyst, FHLBank Pittsburgh





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SESSION 2A: IMMIGRANTS & HOUSING: NAVIGATING A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

This panel examined the multifaceted challenges facing immigrant communities in securing safe and affordable housing. These challenges include a fear of retaliation when reporting issues, a lack of knowledge about how to address housing concerns, technological barriers, increasing income requirements, and a lack of affordability, as well as language barriers. Intersectional identities of immigrant households, including those with disabilities, those who have experienced domestic violence, and those with limited English Proficiency were discussed. Panelists highlighted the importance of supports and education for immigrant households, as well as training and relationship building with local landlords.

Moderator: Shaheeda Wilks, PHRC

Panelists:

Howard Alvarez, Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corporation

Dejonna Bates, Esq., Community Justice Project

Sarah Siplak, Jewish Children & Family Services

Benu Rijal, Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh

"Having a safe, stable place to live... it's the true beginning of it all."

-Dejonna Bates, Esq.

"Refugees are bringing a desire to build a better life. They will work harder, have their children in school, live in a safe place."

- Sarah Siplak



Resources:

- **Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corporation:** <https://phdcincubator.org/en/home/>
- **Community Justice Project:** <https://www.communityjusticeproject.org/>
- **Jewish Children & Family Services:** <https://www.jfcspgh.org/>
- **Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh:** <https://bcapgh.org/>
- **PHRC:** [Immigrant Protections factsheet](#)



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SESSION 2B: FAIR HOUSING FOCUS: A LIGHTNING ROUND SESSION

We had a fantastic lineup of speakers who highlighted key and timely issues around access to housing opportunities. Presenters each had 10 minutes to share an introduction to their work on a housing issue. You can view the recording [here](#).

You can access the presenters' slides [here](#).



Moderator: Brittany Mellinger, PHRC Fair Housing Training & Outreach Coordinator

Topics & Panelists:

- **Rachel Shepherd, City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations (PghCHR)** - Housing Status as a Protected Class: Improving Stability and Reducing Recidivism
 - PghCHR [website](#)
- **David Dean, Pennsylvania Association of Realtors (PAR)** - Impact of the NAR Settlement
 - PAR [website](#)
- **Tammy Thompson, Catapult Greater Pittsburgh** - Understanding Tangles Titles: A Commonly Unknown Thief of Generational Wealth
 - Catapult Greater Pittsburgh [website](#)
- **Stephanie Meyer, PA Department of Human Services (DHS)** - Pennsylvania Housing Action Plan
 - PA Housing Action Plan [website](#)
- **Lauren Burman, Esq., Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP)** - Utility Protections for Tenants
 - PULP [website](#)
- **Dr. Elise Silva, University of Pittsburgh Institute for Cyber Law** - AI & Tenant Screening
 - Pitt Cyber [website](#)
- **Charlise Smith, Willasae's Agency for Vision and Empowerment (WAVE)** - Creating Proactive Housing Tools and Partnerships for Housing Stability
 - WAVE [website](#)



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Lunch Program 12-1:30 P.M.

Keynote Address: Hill Harper, Award-Winning Actor, NY Times Best-Selling Author, Entrepreneur & Youth Advocate

"We have to be willing to be vulnerable, we have to be willing to work hard, we have to be willing to speak truth to power, and to do the work that matches that."

-Hill Harper



In his keynote address, Hill Harper challenged attendees to think about legacy and impact on communities through examining August Wilson's work, "Gem of the Ocean." Keys to achieving our goals of housing justice include collective energy and partnerships, systemic approaches, investing in detailed blueprint for change, and focusing on outcomes for change. He inspired attendees to do work from the heart, fiercely advocating for change.

You can watch the the recording of the Lunch Program [here](#).





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Lunch Program 12-1:30 P.M.

Social Justice Award: Senator Jay Costa



Senator Jay Costa was awarded the PHRC Social Justice Award. He brought remarks about the legislature's continued work of preventing housing discrimination. He spoke about the importance of advocating for housing programs and services, eviction sealing, and removing barriers to housing.

"We need to make sure our collective voices are heard and that we push back."

"We will continue to fight for the things that are really important."

-Senator Jay Costa





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SESSION 3A: WORKING FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CIVIL RIGHTS OUTREACH AND HOUSING



Moderator: Sheryl Meck, PHRC Civil Rights Outreach Director

Panelists:

- **Anita Levels**, Civil Rights Outreach Coordinator
- **Omar Henriquez**, Civil Rights Outreach Coordinator
- **Montrell Smith**, Civil Rights Outreach Coordinator
- **Hector Torres-Diaz**, Civil Rights Outreach Coordinator

The PHRC Civil Rights Outreach Division was launched in early 2024 to address civil tensions, conflicts, and incidents across Pennsylvania and promote anti-racism through education and outreach. This session provided an overview of the PHRC, fair housing protections in Pennsylvania, and the work of the Civil Rights Outreach Division over the past year. You can view this session recording [here](#). You can view the slides from the session [here](#).



"We are Pennsylvania's peacemakers...We are the team that is committed to showing up in times of civil unrest. We will travel anywhere throughout the state, to your community, to sit at your table and to share in listening to your heart and your experiences."

-Sheryl Meck



SESSION 3B: DISABILITY CASE INVESTIGATION FOR ENFORCEMENT PROFESSIONALS

This interactive workshop session covered the fundamentals of investigating housing cases on the basis of disability. Each year, the PHRC receives more disability-related complaints than any complaints on the basis of any other protected class. Participants in this session learned about the process of investigation, looking protected classes and acts of harm, using relevant proof formulas for cases, reviewing evidence, and investigating and writing up cases.

You can view the session recording [here](#).

You can view the session slides [here](#).

Presenter:

Gloria Richardson, Investigative Supervisor, PHRC Harrisburg Regional Office



"I tell landlords that... I want to educate you before you make this mistake, because I don't want to see you on a case in my office. I want you to stop any harmful act now...I'm not out to get you, I'm trying to get you to stop from doing something that is going to be harmful."

-Gloria Richardson

Resources:

How to file a Complaint at PHRC: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/phrc/programs-and-services/file-a-complaint.html>

Illegal Discrimination & Your Civil Rights Brochure: https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/phrc/phrc-outreach/Complaint%20Process%20Brochure_finalnocrop.pdf



Conference Feedback

"I was incredibly pleased to learn of the mediation and eviction prevention work being done in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County."

The sessions were all incredible. The speakers were dynamic and passionate about their topics."

"I gained a better understanding of what immigrants in Pittsburgh and service providers who work with them deal with when it comes to obtaining housing."

"I learned many things at the conference. The most impactful was the Racial Wealth Gap Simulator. I wish all Pennsylvanians were aware of the systemic oppression our government has been perpetuating throughout our history as a nation."

"The breakout session on the investigation process was very informative!"





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Thank you to our Networking Table Partners:



Asian Real Estate Alliance of America

website: <https://www.areaa.org/greaterphiladelphia>

Catapult Greater Pittsburgh

website: <https://catapultpittsburgh.org/>

City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations

website: <https://www.pittsburghpa.gov/City-Government/Boards-Authorities-Commissions/List-of-Boards-Authorities-Commissions/Commission-on-Human-Relations>



Disability Options Network

website: <https://www.doninc.org/>

Fair Housing Law Center

website: <https://fhlaw.org/>



Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh

website: <https://fhp.org/about/>

Pennsylvania Utility Law Project

website: <https://www.pautilitylawproject.org/>



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Continue your Fair Housing Learning with PHRC

Click the images below for more information about PHRC's Fair Housing resources.

 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

FAIR HOUSING EMPOWER HOUR

FAIR HOUSING FUNDAMENTALS	FAIR HOUSING & HOARDING	ADDRESSING FAIR HOUSING NEEDS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES
APRIL 30, 2025	MAY 28, 2025	JUNE 25, 2025



Learn key information about fair housing laws in Pennsylvania, including residents' rights and housing providers' responsibilities.



Learn about how fair housing protections apply to hoarding situations. This session will discuss reasonable accommodations and best practices for long-term tenant stability.



Rural communities face a unique set of challenges in ensuring equal housing opportunities. Learn more about barriers, resources, and fair housing partnerships in rural communities.

Training Programs 2025

 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

Are you looking for an informed presenter to speak to your community or organization on subjects affecting their ability to live, work, and learn free from discrimination? **Training and events are custom-tailored to the specific needs of your organization or community** and can be workshop or seminar style and CEU/CLEs (for specific trainings, email to learn more).

PHRC trainers are available to present a variety of social justice programs, including but not limited to:

- Civil Rights & Filing a Complaint**
Civil Rights Law and PHRC Jurisdiction
PHRC Overview & How to File a Complaint
Civil Tension Reduction Basics
- Preventing Discrimination in the Workplace and Schools**
Bullying and Harassment (workplace, education, and student editions)
Conflict Resolution
Implicit Bias for Law Enforcement
Sexual Harassment Prevention
Protected Characteristics & Discrimination in the workplace
- Humanity & Belonging: Creating Communities of Allyship**
Bias and Hate Speech
Cross-cultural, Cross-generational Humility
Humanity & Civility
Intersectionality of Discrimination and Trauma
- Fair Housing Rights**
Fair Housing Fundamentals
Fair Housing for LGBTQ+ Individuals
Fair Housing for Municipal Leaders
Fair Housing & Criminal Backgrounds
Fair Housing & Domestic Violence
Fair Housing & Individuals with Disabilities
Fair Housing & Hoarding
Service & Support Animals
Fair Lending
Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing
Redlining: Yesterday & Today

To learn more, contact phrc@pa.gov or fill out an [online training request at pa.gov/agencies/PHRC](https://www.pahrc.org/agencies).

 Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

PHRC SPEAKS: FAIR HOUSING FORWARD

Topic: Combatting Housing Discrimination in Western PA



Brittany Mellinger
Show Host
Fair Housing Training & Outreach Coordinator, PHRC



Dr. La Dawn Robinson
Show Guest
Pittsburgh Regional Office Director, PHRC

NEW EPISODE -
March 16, 2025
at 3:00 PM

About PHRC Speaks:
Housing is foundational to thriving communities. Join us as we explore housing issues impacting Pennsylvanians, and how to ensure everyone has fair opportunities in housing.

JOIN US ON PCNTV!

CONNECT WITH US: 

WWW.PA.GOV/EN/AGENCIES/PHRC

 pennsylvania HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

THE STATE OF FAIR HOUSING IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA



2023



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Take Action

File A Complaint

If you believe you've experienced unlawful discrimination in housing, employment, education, or public accommodations, you can file a complaint with the PHRC.

You can start the process by:

- Calling 717-787-4410
- Completing a questionnaire, and submitting it to PHRC:
 - Email: phrc@pa.gov
 - Fax: (717) 787-0420 or (717) 214-0584
 - Mail or Drop off:
 - **Harrisburg Regional Office**
333 Market Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101-2210
 - **Philadelphia Regional Office**
110 North 8th Street, Suite 501
Philadelphia, PA 19107
 - **Pittsburgh Regional Office**
301 Fifth Avenue, Suite 390, Piatt Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

[Learn more at www.pa.gov/agencies/PHRC](http://www.pa.gov/agencies/PHRC)



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THANK YOU!

Special thanks to the planning team who made this conference happen!

- Jodi Bradley
- Caroline Griffin
- Anita Levels
- Brittany Mellinger
- Gloria Richardson
- Dr. La Dawn Robinson
- Todd Schwartz
- Shaheeda Wilks



Planning team pictured with Lt. Governor Austin Davis



Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission



PA FAIR HOUSING LINE
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