

Form Name: 2025 Annual Reports for Boards, Commissions and Similar Entities
Submission Time: December 23, 2025 9:36 am
Browser: Chrome 142.0.0.0 / Windows
IP Address: 65.202.206.129
Unique ID: 1417568734
Location: 37.5702, -77.4239

2025 Annual Report For Boards and Commissions

Name of Board, Commission or Similar Entity Human Rights Commission

Current members (indicate chair, vice-chair, etc.) Samantha Galina, Chair
Aoife Ryle, Treasurer
Christopher Pittman, Secretary
Dr. Bre'Auna Beasley
Luise Farmer
Matthew LaGarde
Kristina Lloyd
Elle Merkle
Emily Newsom
Emily Wolfteich
Anthony Bastardi, student
Ismael Romero, student

Is there any proposed legislation on which the board or commission recommends that the City Council or the General Assembly act? No

Meeting Dates of meetings held in 2025 January 23, 2025
March 13, 2025
May 8, 2025
July 24, 2025
September 11, 2025

Is there any information requested by the standing committee to which the board or commission is assigned to report? Please upload the documents or share in the box below <https://www.formstack.com/admin/download/file/18955962245>

Not at this time. We hope to meet with the Education and Human Services Standing Committee in 2026 to share our work.

Is the 2025 meeting attendance record included? Yes - Select Yes to upload documents

<https://www.formstack.com/admin/download/file/18955962248>

Is a copy of the body's current by-laws or rules of procedures attached?

Yes - Select Yes to upload documents

<https://www.formstack.com/admin/download/file/18955962250>

New Projects

The Commission is working on an ordinance that would grant enforcement powers, we hope to bring that to City Council in 2026.

If there is additional information the body would like to share, please upload the documents or share in the box below.

<https://www.formstack.com/admin/download/file/18955962252>

Commissioner	Jan-25	Mar-25	May-25	Jul-25	Sep-25	Nov-25
Dr. Bre'Auna Beasley		Y	N	Y	N	N
Whitney Brown	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
Luise Farmer	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Samantha Galina	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Matthew LaGarde					Y	Y
Kristina Lloyd					Y	Y
Elle Merkle	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Emily Newsom					N	virtual
Christopher Pittman	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Aoife Ryle	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Riqia Taylor	Y	Y				
Emily Wolfteich		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Anthony Bastardi					Y	Y
Ismael Romero					Y	Y
Davion Washington	N	Y	Y	N		
Deon Wright, Jr.	Y	Y	Y	N		

 * indicates that Commissioner was not serving

CITY OF RICHMOND

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

BYLAWS

MISSION

The mission of the City of Richmond Human Rights Commission is to safeguard the rights of all its citizens. It seeks to protect individuals from unlawful discrimination because of race; color; religion; sex; pregnancy; childbirth or related medical conditions; national origin; age; marital status; disability; sexual orientation, transgender status or gender identity.

This includes investigating unlawful acts, practices, complaints, issues, and solutions; assimilating policy and recommendations; preparing a multi-platform, comprehensive Resource Guide; and conducting forums for the purpose of educating the public-at-large.

ARTICLE I - OBJECTIVES

Section 1. The purpose of the Human Rights Commission is to give effect to the rights of every individual in the city of Richmond; to equal economic, political and educational opportunity; to equal accommodations in all business establishments in the City and to equal service and protection by public safety; to eliminate prejudice and discrimination because of race, color, creed, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, or disability; to inform the citizens of the city of Richmond of developments in human relations; to provide expert advice and assistance to the agencies, council, administration and employees of the City in undertaking ameliorative practices to keep good order and to officially encourage all people living and working in the City to promote and provide equal opportunity for and goodwill towards all people. The sole responsibility of the Human Rights Commission will be to provide assistance to persons who believe that their rights have been violated.

Section 1.2 The role of the Commission is to assist the individual by identifying the appropriate agency (at the local, state and/or national levels) that can address their claim.

ARTICLE II - MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. The Human Rights Commission shall consist of 13 members; 6 adult members are appointed by City Council; 5 adult members appointed by the Mayor to three-year terms. Two (2) non-voting youth members shall be appointed. Of these two youth members, the Council shall appoint one and the Mayor shall appoint one. The members appointed must reside in the City and be broadly representative of the community with respect to race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, childbirth, or related

medical conditions, national origin, age, military status, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, transgender status or gender identity.

Section 2. The 11 adult members shall be appointed for terms of three years. No adult member shall be appointed to more than two successive full terms; provided, however, that a person appointed to fill an unexpired term may be reappointed to two successive full terms upon completion of the unexpired term for which the person has been appointed.

Section 3. Two (2) non-voting youth members who shall be students of Richmond public schools administered by the School Board of the City of Richmond, Virginia, enrolled in the tenth, 11th, or 12th grades. Each of the two youth members shall be appointed to one term commencing September 1 and ending August 31 of the immediately succeeding calendar year. No youth member shall serve more than one term; provided, however, that a person appointed as a youth member to fill an unexpired term may be reappointed to one successive full term upon completion of the unexpired term for which the person has been appointed.

Section 4. A member who seeks to resign from the board shall submit a written resignation to the chair of the board, the staff liaison, or the city clerk's office. If possible, the resignation should allow for a thirty-day notice so the appointing authority can appoint a replacement.

ARTICLE III - OFFICERS ELECTIONS, TERMS AND DUTIES

Section 1. The Commission will be responsible for electing from among its membership a chair, a vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, and any other officers it deems necessary.

Section 2. Officer Elections Procedures. The Chair shall appoint a nominating committee of no less than three members of the Commission, who shall meet in the second-to-last meeting of each year to make recommended nominations for the offices of chair, vice-chair, and secretary. There shall be nominations from the Nominating Committee and from the floor. The recommended slate will be presented to the full Commission at the last meeting of the calendar year.

Section 3. Election shall be by a majority of the members of the Human Rights Commission. Elections shall be held during the last meeting of the calendar year, unless either (1) a quorum is not present at that meeting; or (2) at least three-fourths of the members present at the last meeting of the calendar year vote to delay the election to the first meeting of the new year or the chairperson calls a special meeting. In the event that the election does not take place during the last meeting of the calendar year, the election shall be the first order of business at the first meeting of the new year, and the newly elected officers who are present at the meeting shall be sworn in and take office immediately after their election.

Section 4. The term of office shall be two years, from January 1 to December 31. No officer may serve more than two consecutive terms in the same position.

Section 5. A vacancy in the position of the chairperson shall be filled by the vice-chairperson. In the absence of a vice-chairperson, the vacancy must be filled by an internal special election to be held within 45 days. A vacancy in the position of vice-chairperson shall be filled by an internal special election to be held within 45 days. A vacancy in the position of secretary shall be filled by an internal special election to be held within 45 days. Each elected officer will only serve the remaining unexpired term. Special elections are conducted by the Nominating Committee, and its procedures are guided by the nominating committee's publicly accessible procedures.

Section 6. The duties of the chairperson shall be:

1. To call meetings of the Human Rights Commission at least bimonthly and as necessary.
2. To prepare agenda for and preside at all meetings of the Human Rights Commission.
3. To appoint sub committees as needed.
4. To serve as the spokesperson for the Human Rights Commission with the City Council, the Mayor's Office or any other organization, person, agency or body regarding projects and work of the Human Rights Commission.
5. To execute all documents on behalf of the Commission and to act as a liaison between the Commission and the office of the City Clerk, the Boards and Commissions administrator, and the commission's staff person.
6. To serve as an ex-officio member of any subcommittee of the Human Rights Commission.
7. Prepare with the vice-chair an annual report for the city council due no later than February 15th of each year, concerning the commission's activities for the preceding year.
8. Prepare with the vice-chair by the first day of every month a summary of the Commission's activities for the preceding month for the Boards and Commissions Administrator.
9. Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the Commission.

Section 7. The vice-chairperson shall exercise the powers and perform the duties of the chairperson in their absence, disability, or disqualification and perform such other duties as may be assigned by the Commission.

Section 8. The secretary shall prepare the board minutes of the Commission's proceedings in accordance with the requirements of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") and any other applicable provisions of law. The minutes of each board meeting must include the vote of each member on each item before the board and indicate whether a member is absent or failed to vote on an item. The secretary shall retain agendas, approved minutes, internal review reports and bylaws. The minutes of the previously scheduled meeting must be provided to commissioners no less than 48 hours before the next

scheduled meeting. The Boards and Commissions Administrator and the commission's staff person shall retain all other board documents. The secretary or other officers shall issue notices for all meetings at least four (4) business days prior to the meeting's date. The secretary or other officer will provide a copy of the agenda to at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. In the event the Secretary is absent from any meeting, the chair presiding at the meeting shall designate an individual to perform the duties of Secretary for that meeting. Regarding amendments to the by-laws, once approved by the majority, the secretary or other officer shall add the approved changes to the bylaws and send new copies to all members.

Section 9. The treasurer is an elected position. The duties of the treasurer shall be:

1. Monitor the budget, balance, and expenses for the Human Rights Commission and update the Commission on expenses and balance at bi-monthly meetings.
2. Track City budget process and update the Commission accordingly.
3. Act as liaison to appropriate City staff person for the Commission's budget.
4. Create an annual budget for the Commission.

Section 10. The parliamentarian is a position appointed by the chairperson. The duties of the parliamentarian shall be:

1. Interpret and apply Robert's Rules of Order during meetings.
2. Advise chair and other officers on Robert's Rules.
3. Oversee elections of officers.
4. Provide training to commission members on Robert's Rules.

ARTICLE IV - MEETINGS

Section 1. The Commission shall meet at least every other month. The Commission may also schedule special meetings as needed to transact the business of the Commission. The meeting location shall be accessible to the public.

Section 2. Special meetings of the Commission may be called by the chairperson or upon written request of any three members of the Commission.

Section 3. Six current voting members shall constitute a quorum; however, a majority vote of all of the members of the Commission shall be necessary for any official action to be taken.

Section 4. A board member appointed by Council who is absent for four consecutive regularly scheduled meetings shall be subject to removal by Council pursuant to Charter §4.15 and City Code §2-768. A board member appointed by the Mayor who is absent for four consecutive regularly scheduled meetings shall be subject to removal by the Mayor. This does not apply to an absence due to illness or injury of the board member, an illness or injury of a board member's immediate family member, or the birth or adoption of the board member's child for 90 days after the event. The board member must notify the staff liaison and the chair of the reason for the absence not later than the date of the next regular meeting of the board.

Section 5. At each meeting, each board member shall sign an attendance sheet. Failure to sign the sheet results in the member being counted as absent and their votes are not counted.

Section 6. The board shall allow citizens to address the board on agenda items and during a period of time set aside for citizen communications. The chair may limit a speaker to three minutes.

Section 7. The board must conduct all meetings in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Section 8. Notice of meetings shall be in accordance with the requirements of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

ARTICLE V - REPORTING

Section 1. A summary of the Commission's activities for the preceding month shall be submitted to the Boards and Commissions Administrator by the first day of each month.

Section 2. An annual report of the Commission's for the preceding year shall be submitted to City no later than December 31st of each year.

Section 3. The following information shall be submitted in writing to the Office of the City Clerk within 15 days after each meeting of the commission:

- (1) The date, time, and location of the last meeting of the commission.
- (2) A copy of the agenda of the last meeting of the commission.
- (3) A copy of any minutes approved at the last meeting of the commission.
- (4) A copy of the draft minutes, if not yet approved, of the last meeting of the commission.
- (5) The date, time, and location of the next scheduled meeting of the commission.

ARTICLE VI - AMENDMENTS

Notice of any proposed change in these Bylaws must be submitted in writing to members thirty (30) days prior to the meeting at which such change will be considered. These Bylaws may be amended at any such meeting by a majority vote of the quorum. The chair may vote on Bylaws amendments.

ARTICLE VII - PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY

Unless procedures are otherwise provided herein, the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order Revised shall govern the business procedures of the Commission.

ARTICLE VIII - NOMINATING COMMITTEE

While the HRC Chair forms the nominating committee, the nominating committee elects its' own chairperson. The chairman and the committee should review requirements for nominees and duties of each elected officer as outlined in the HRC Bylaws. Only those persons who are eligible and who have given their consent to serve, if elected, shall be nominated for office.

The chairperson should ensure that nominating committee meetings are scheduled to provide sufficient time to identify and consider all recommendations and suggestions. Alternates should be advised of these dates and be reminded that, should an elected member be unable to serve at the initial meeting, an alternate will be asked by the Chair to replace that member.

During nominating committee meetings, if a committee member is being considered, the member should be excused from the meeting during the discussion regarding that office but may return for the vote which shall be by ballot.

The nominating committee continues to serve on an as needed basis as convened by the HRC Chair.

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

CITY OF RICHMOND HUMAN RIGHT'S COMISSION



A WORD FROM THE CHAIR



This has been a year of growth for the Human Rights Commission. Since I was named Chair at the beginning of 2025, our Commission has grown tremendously, thanks to the support from the Mayor's Office and City Council, we have now filled all vacancies. I am proud to say that our Commissioners represent individuals from across the city with different backgrounds and various areas of expertise. In a year of uncertainty, I am immensely grateful for the time that our Commissioners take out of their busy lives to further our mission - improving the human rights for all persons living and working in the City of Richmond. I look forward to our Commission's continued growth in 2026.

Samantha R. Galina

SAMANTHA GALINA
CHAIRMAN

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the City of Richmond Human Rights Commission is to safeguard the rights of all its citizens. It seeks to protect individuals from unlawful discrimination because of race; color; religion; sex; pregnancy; childbirth or related medical conditions; national origin; age; marital status; disability; sexual orientation, transgender status or gender identity.

This includes investigating unlawful acts, practices, complaints, issues, and solutions; assimilating policy and recommendations; preparing a multi-platform, comprehensive Resource Guide; and conducting forums for the purpose of educating the public-at-large.



KNOW YOUR
RIGHTS!



UNIVERSAL
HUMAN
RIGHTS

AWARENESS MONTH





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025 the Human Rights Commission's commissioners and staff met 6 times and participated in various other community events including Juneteenth and Pridefest. Commissioners received various trainings and special presentations on Human Rights issues

Included for your review are:

The January 2025 - December 2025 Attendance Report

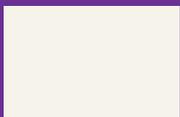
The Strategic Plan

Committee Reports

Budget Proposal for FY2027

Attendance

Commissioner	Jan - 25	Mar - 25	May - 25	Jul - 25	Sep - 25	Nov - 25
Dr. Bre'Auna Beasley		Y	N	Y	N	N
Whitney Brown	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
Luise Farmer	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Samantha Galina	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Matthew LaGarde					Y	Y
Kristina Lloyd					Y	Y
Elle Merkle	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Emily Newsom					N	Y
Christopher Pittman		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Aoife Ryle	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Riqia Taylor	Y	Y				



INDICATES COMMISSONER WAS NOT ACTIVE
(EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER THEIR TERM)

Attendance

Commissioner	Jan - 25	Mar - 25	May - 25	Jul - 25	Sep - 25	Nov - 25
Emily Wolfteich		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Anthony Bastardi					Y	Y
Ismael Romero					Y	Y
Davion Washington	N	Y	Y	N		
Deion Wright, Jr.	Y	Y	Y	N		



INDICATES COMMISSONER WAS NOT ACTIVE
(EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER THEIR TERM)

HISTORY

On November 14, 2016, Richmond City Council adopted ordinance 2016-254 to establish a Human Rights Commission Task Force to evaluate the need for and scope of a Human Rights Commission and to provide the Council with recommendations concerning any necessity to create such a commission.

On June 11, 2018, Richmond City Council adopted ordinance 2018-044 establishing the Human Rights Commission.



STRATEGIC PLAN

City of Richmond Human Rights Commission Strategic Plan 2025

Overall Goal	Actions and Initiatives	Measurements/Indicators/Deadlines
Increase effectiveness of committees	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish regular committee meetings with standing committee meeting date (i.e. first Thursday of every month) (Committees) 2. Write work plan; meet with active members; provide updates on what work is being done within committees. (Committee Chairs) 3. Commission members serve on a maximum of one committee to ensure effectiveness and prevent member fatigue and burnout (Commission members) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Committees meet once a month 2. Committees execute work plan tasks and provide a monthly report of their work
Influence state and local human rights policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host policy roundtable discussions that include local legislators and members of the public moderated by the Research and Policy Development Committee. (HRC Staff and Commission Members) 2. Attend City Council meetings. (HRC Staff and Commission members) 3. Create an effective research plan that includes assessment tools to identify trend data (Research and Policy Development Committee) 4. Submit Ordinance proposal to receive enforcement powers. (Intake and Investigation Committee) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Active policy recommendations 2. Facilitated discussions in the community that address policy 3. Increased visibility and active contribution to policy decision-making spaces 4. Investigating complaints with enforceable outcomes
Increase consistency of the Commission	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hire a full-time staff person (Human Services Office) 2. Invite external organizations to speak at meetings each month to inform the commission of their work and trends pertaining to Human Rights in the community. (Community Engagement Committee) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Full-time staff person whose sole responsibility meet the needs of the Human Rights Commission 2. Increased member retention 3. Established relationships with external organizations.

STRATEGIC PLAN (CONT'D)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Reach out to local universities with information on the Commission. <i>(HRC Staff)</i> 4. Recognize heritage and pride months by highlighting individuals of those communities during those months. <i>(HRC Staff)</i> 5. Establish a presence on more social media platforms, post twice weekly on all social media outlets, and begin marketing our commission in public spaces <i>(HRC Staff and Community Engagement Committee)</i> 6. Celebrate Human Rights Awareness Month and Human Rights Awareness Day <i>(HRC Staff and Commission members)</i> 7. Provide a calendar of community events on the website <i>(HRC Staff)</i> 8. Host an annual awards ceremony <i>(HRC Staff and Commission members)</i> 9. Identify executive officers <i>(Commission Members)</i> 10. Conduct an annual training that will inform and guide the commission in its work <i>(Commission members and HRC Staff)</i> 11. Update our website with current information <i>(HRC Staff and Community Engagement Committee)</i> 12. Build a comprehensive community trust-building plan <i>(Community Engagement Committee)</i> 13. Establish Policies and Procedures Manual <i>(Research and Policy Development Committee)</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Increased rapport in the community and other city offices and increased recognition of the commission's name 5. The commission recognizes members and organizations in the community that are dedicated to Human Rights
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MAKEUP OF THE COMMISSION

The Human Rights Commission consists of 13 members who are residents of the city; 6 adult members are appointed by City Council; 5 adult members appointed by the Mayor to three-year terms. The two (2) remaining seats are to be filled by non-voting youth members who shall be students of Richmond public schools administered by the School Board of the City of Richmond, Virginia, enrolled in the tenth, 11th, or 12th grades. Of these two youth members, the Council shall appoint one and the Mayor shall appoint one.

MEET THE STAFF

Brittany Rose, leads efforts to advance equity, inclusion, and respect for all residents through organizational excellence and policy support. She is a collaborative leader and self-professed policy enthusiast, Brittany is deeply committed to building systems that empower communities and strengthen civic trust.

She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Virginia Tech and a Master of Public Policy from William & Mary, blending scientific insight with policy expertise to promote sustainable and inclusive growth.

Beyond her role with the Commission, Brittany is an elected Director of the Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District and a founding member and steering committee leader of a community organization dedicated to creating an equitable, connected, and thriving region.

For more than 20 years, Brittany has volunteered with the VA/DC FIRST LEGO League, inspiring young people to explore science, technology, and teamwork. She is also a certified Virginia Master Naturalist and proud Leadership Metro Richmond alumna, reflecting her lifelong dedication to civic engagement, environmental stewardship, and inclusive leadership.



**BRITTANY ROSE,
STAFF
COORDINATOR**

What does human rights mean to you?

I believe human rights are about creating a world where everyone can live as their full, authentic self without fear of discrimination or exclusion. It's about dignity and the right of every person to live freely and securely, with their basic needs met. That means having access to safe housing, nutritious food, quality education, meaningful employment, clean air and water, and dependable health care. Human rights are the foundation for a community where everyone belongs and has the opportunity to thrive and to live fully and confidently as who they are.

MEET THE COMMISSIONERS



**SAMANTHA
GALINA, CHAIR**

Samantha Galina, is an associate attorney with the Employment Law and Civil Rights firm, Butler Curwood PLC. Sam represents employees in matters including discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as wage theft.

Prior to joining the firm, she clerked for the Honorable Phillip L. Hairston and Honorable D. Eugene Cheek in Richmond Circuit Court. During law school, she served under the Governor's Counsel to Governor Ralph Northam where she assisted in the Commission to Examine Racial Inequity in the law. Sam also interned for the Virginia Office of the Attorney General-Solicitor General where she assisted on the Equal Rights Amendment Litigation.

Sam is also on the Board of the Metro Richmond Women's Bar Association and Local Ecotypes Richmond Natives (LERN). In her free time, Sam enjoys gardening, cooking and volunteering.

What does human rights mean to you?

I would say human rights are fundamental rights inherent to all of us human beings, regardless of our race, sex & gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, disability or any other status. Human rights are a powerful tool to protect those who are oppressed, marginalized, or treated unfairly for an immutable characteristic.



**LUISE "CHEEZI"
FARMER, VICE
CHAIR**

Luise "Cheezi" Farmer, serves as the Executive Director of Us Giving Richmond Connections. In this capacity, she represents the LGBTQIA2S+ community, working to cultivate healthy connections and enhance the health and well-being of Black, Indigenous, and people of color within the community. She achieves this through education, empowerment initiatives, and social engagement throughout the greater Richmond area.

With over twenty-five years of experience, Cheezi has dedicated her efforts to improving the health and wellness of Black and LGBTQIA2S+ individuals. Her recent work has focused on expanding knowledge and awareness within communities, fostering relationships through the sharing of cancer survivor stories, disseminating evidence-based information by collaborating with researchers, providers, oncologists, and other experts, and connecting community members with relevant services, programs, and care.

Furthermore, Cheezi is a member of the Cancer Coalition of Virginia, the Center for Black Equity, and also serves on the Board of Diversity Richmond.

What does human rights mean to you?

Human rights encompass equality and fairness, acknowledging our freedom to make choices and realize our potential. They are about living a life free from fear, harassment, or discrimination.



**AOIFE RYLE,
TREASURER**

Aoife Ryle is a Development Manager who works with various direct social-service nonprofits to aid their grant stewardship, program design, and evaluation work. Her work spans elder justice, affordable housing, immigration, rural healthcare, kinship care, disability services, and support for individuals experiencing homelessness.

She has spent the past decade in the nonprofit sphere as both a consultant and program manager. Aoife has co-chaired an organizational DEIA committee and presented about equity at universities and conferences. A study about the impacts of programmatic work she co-led has been published in the Journal of Museum Education.

Aoife holds a BS in Bioengineering and is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Management from the University of Illinois Gies College of Business. Her experience as a first-generation immigrant to the United States helped shape her desire to create opportunity and space for marginalized individuals.

What does human rights mean to you?

Human rights are the inherent freedoms and rights that every individual is entitled to, simply by nature of being. Each person should be afforded the ability to shape and live their life with dignity, respect, and fairness, free of systemic barriers, prejudice, or oppression.

MEET THE COMMISSIONERS



ELLE MERKLE

Elle Merkle is currently the Overdose Prevention Program Coordinator for the Crater Health District of the Virginia Department of Health. She has been with VDH for two years, first contributing to the Richmond Henrico Districts comprehensive guide and directory for substance use disorder, mental health treatment, and resources in the Central Virginia region. She brings decades of community organizing and outreach work in health, racial, and education equity and is a trained trust builder.

Elle has lived in several major cities on the east coast, arriving in Richmond in the late 1980s. Here she chose to take root and raise her family. Over the years, she has been a role player in healthcare, classroom teaching, low-barrier affordable housing, community justice, and a variety of causes such as returning citizen programs, LGBTQIA rights, and fighting stigma against substance use. She also serves on Inspire, the steering committee developing a provision plan for the City of Richmond's Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities. She is the mother of three now college students, and the spouse of an employee at a prominent law firm in the city.

What does human rights mean to you?

Human rights are the basic freedoms every person should have, and many are found spelled out legislatively, be it in jurisdictional charters or global treaties. Not to be taken for granted, vigilance is up to all of us to ensure equitable treatment, barring discrimination against all by individuals and within institutions across societies.



EMILY WOLFTEICH

Emily Wolfeich is a Lead Analyst in the Insights and Research division at GovExec, writing about the nexus of technology and public service with a particular focus on AI. Previously, she spent seven years in the international development sphere, with a concentration on community-driven solutions to gender-based violence and discrimination. She has worked with communities across the world, including serving as a Community Health volunteer in the Peace Corps in eSwatini, working with women and girls at rural clinics in Senegal, and supporting a network of community organizations across the Balkans and Turkey through UN Women. She holds a MSc in Development Practice from Trinity College in Dublin, and a BA in French from the College of William and Mary, where she also led social justice alternative breaks focusing on homelessness and environmental racial justice.

Both Emily's career and her passions focus on building and supporting community. She served for two years on the Associate's Board of the Richmond YWCA and trained as IPV/DV response volunteer. In her spare time she enjoys volunteering with Richmond Community Fridges, proudly supporting the vibrant Richmond music and arts scene, and having coffee on the porch with her neighbors.

What does human rights mean to you?

Human rights are the most inalienable of rights. We have them simply because we exist. This means that all of us, regardless of our race, religion, gender, class, or other characteristic, are equally deserving of dignity, respect, and equal opportunity to live our lives freely. Protecting human rights is not just good policy or the law; it is the hallmark of a society that respects its people.

MEET THE COMMISSIONERS

Chris Pittman is an educator and investigative researcher who works to build communities seeking to enact social and environmental justice across the public and political spectrum with a background in small business and logistics management.



**CHRISTOPHER
PITTMAN,
SECRETARY**

A 20 year Richmonder and VCU alumnus, Chris has taught courses and lectured in both public and non-profit settings. Shaped and informed at a young age by the symbiotic cultural effects of public/private works projects on both the environment and the citizenry living within it; Chris pursued volunteer work with the Sierra Club and various other political and educational organizations. In the southern counties of West Virginia Chris dedicated years of his life to the work of documenting and organizing anti-mountain top removal efforts and education. Centering his curriculum on the sometimes-radical tenets of "intention", "purpose" and "free will" in lieu of established educational methodologies; like the "pass/fail" dynamics of standardized tests, always seeking a more enlightened and empathic path towards progress and truth, chartering a somewhat altruistic self doctrine of comportment that he hopes to share with the body during his first serving term.

Chris holds a BFA in Fine Arts, a minor in Political Science and is currently administrating private servers for multiple clandestine independent research groups involved in war crime evidence gathering as well as research/education into alternate physics and energy production that if implemented correctly/responsibly could both reduce scarcity and proliferate abundance for all.

What does human rights mean to you?

Human Rights are inherent but not given. It is the work of a healthy and just society to collectively define, revise and uphold these interminable and agreed upon values for itself as it's populous progresses and evolves. This has not been, and may never be a linear path towards true peace and equality in our society. So it is the duty of those willing, to continually question and strive to better ourselves and those connected to us.

Whitney Brown, M.P.A. is a public service and government relations professional born and raised in Richmond, VA. She has a heart for public service and transforms her passion for social and racial equity into action. Whitney holds a Bachelor of Science in Science (Legal Studies, Government Services, and Public Policy option) from The Pennsylvania State University (University Park), a certificate in African-American Studies, and a Master of Public Administration from the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University.



**WHITNEY
BROWN**

Whitney's career and research interests lie primarily in the areas of public management, criminal justice, and social/racial equity. Most recently, Whitney served as an appointed member of the Governor Ralph S. Northam Administration under the Secretary of Administration, Grindly Johnson, as Special Assistant and Programs Coordinator in the Commonwealth of Virginia. During her appointment, she helped prioritize Menstrual Equity on Capitol Square, restore voting rights, and pardon over 112,000 Virginians during the Northam Administration.

Today, Whitney currently serves as Chief-of-Staff for the First Voter District of Richmond City Council (VA), where she helps shape the city budget, legislation, and constituent services. In her free time, she enjoys officiating high school and college-level sports, powerlifting, and traveling.

What does human rights mean to you?

To me, human rights encompass the fundamental protections designed to safeguard individuals from oppression and discrimination to ensure they can lead their lives with dignity and respect.

MEET THE COMMISSIONERS



MATTHEW LAGARDE

Matthew LaGarde is a partner at Katz Banks Kumin LLP, where he focuses his practice on the representation of whistleblowers who have experienced workplace retaliation or wish to report wrongdoing to the government. In addition to his work on behalf of whistleblowers, Matt has represented numerous clients in claims involving violations of Title VII and other anti-discrimination laws in federal and state court and before administrative agencies. Matt also served two years as a judicial clerk for Judge George L. Russell, III, at the United States District Court for the District of Maryland.

Matt is an editor for *Whistleblower Law: A Practitioner’s Guide*, a treatise first published in 2016 by American Legal Media (ALM) that is updated annually. In 2024 and 2025, Lawdragon, a leading legal media organization, recognized Matt in its annual list of “500 Leading Civil Rights & Plaintiff Employment Lawyers.” Matt was also selected by the Best Lawyers publication in 2024 and 2025 as “One to Watch” for his work in Civil Rights Law, Labor and Employment Law, and Labor and Employment Litigation.

What does human rights mean to you?

There are many basic human rights, but I view the primary human right driving the work of this Commission as the right to live and work free from mistreatment on the basis of your identity. That human right is critical because a violation of that right shakes the foundational trust you place in society to be fair. Our work is designed to build toward that still-aspirational promise of fairness.



KRISTINA LLOYD

Kristina Lloyd graduated from Virginia Union University in 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Political Science. She also earned an Associate of Applied Science in Deaf Studies from J. Sargent Reynolds. She grew up in the Richmond area, attending Richmond Public Schools, where many people supported her along the way. As someone who is deaf, she uses a cochlear implant and communicates through American Sign Language and incorporates verbal communication.

She took part in the 2023–2024 Partners in Policymaking program, sponsored by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities. In the program, she strengthened her ability to advocate for herself and grew as a leader.

Drawing on her experience in the deaf and hard of hearing community, she understands the challenges faced by people with disabilities and works to create safe spaces and empower others. She has volunteered with Richmond Virginia Black Deaf Advocates, served as a panelist for the Partners in Policymaking program, and worked with Virginia Organizing.

What does human rights mean to you?

Every human being is entitled to certain rights or freedoms that enable them to enjoy life. People with a disability are part of humanity too. Sometimes people ignore or limit what a person with a disability can achieve by creating barriers that affect their quality of life. When this happens, it is up to the society to create an environment where all people are treated fairly and given the opportunity to succeed and live their best life.

MEET THE COMMISSIONERS



**ANTHONY
BASTARDI,
STUDENT**

Anthony Bastardi is a senior at Maggie L. Walker Governor's School who has lived in Richmond's Northside for twelve years. Anthony has interned with the City of Richmond's Office of Sustainability and the Department of Public Utilities Water Treatment Lab. He has also served on the city's Youth Engagement Services Youth Empowerment Council, working alongside other council members to raise awareness about youth gun violence and advocate for youth mentoring organizations.

Anthony is now a member of the Regional Youth Advisory Council, where he collaborates with students across the metro area to plan Teen Summit RVA 2026. Additionally, through the Sports Backers Active Living Leadership (ALL) Stars program, he promotes active living throughout the Richmond region.

Anthony has competed in mathematical modeling competitions, including HiMCM, Modeling the Future Challenge, and SABR's Diamond Dollars Case Competition, where he gained skills in data analysis and statistical modeling. He is now applying these skills as he works with professors at the University of Richmond, applying risk science to model disaster impacts on food insecurity. His interests in mathematical reasoning, modeling, physics, and problem solving have led him to pursue a degree in industrial and systems engineering.

What does human rights mean to you?

To me, human rights are the necessary conditions people need to function and prosper within a community. They apply to everyone at all times because they are derived from the dignity and reason we share as human beings. Thus, these rights cannot be issued, defined, or limited by any specific government, country, culture, custom, tradition, religion, or social status.



**ISMAEL ROMERO,
STUDENT**

Ismael Romero is a dedicated high school student who is passionate about technology and helping his community. He is an active member of his school's Robotics Team, where he collaborates with his peers to design, build, and program robots for competitions. In addition to his involvement in STEM, Ismael serves on the Community Engagement Committee, helping to plan and lead initiatives that connect students with local service opportunities. Outside of school, he volunteers regularly at Bless Cookies Food Pantry and the Broad Rock Community Center, where he assists with organizing food drives and supporting families in need. Ismael is committed to using his skills and time to make a positive impact both in and outside the classroom.

What does Human Rights mean to you?

Human rights mean helping others and making sure everyone in my community feels valued and supported. When I volunteer at places like the food pantry and community center, I see how important it is for people to have access to basic needs like food and care. For me, protecting human rights starts with small actions that show compassion and equality.

MEET THE COMMISSIONERS



EMILY NEWSOM

Emily Newsom spent the past seven years, working to advance fair housing and combat discrimination across three states, ensuring that all people have access to safe and equitable housing. Her work has deepened my understanding of how race, disability, income, and gender intersect to shape access and opportunity. She is looking forward to bringing this experience to the Richmond City Human Rights Commission to help strengthen the city's commitment to equity and justice for all residents.

What does human rights mean to you?

Human rights mean ensuring that every person is treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, not as a privilege, but as a guarantee. They are the foundation of a just community where all people can live safely, freely, and with equal opportunity to thrive.

HONORING RIQIA TAYLOR

The Human Rights Commission would like to recognize and thank former Commissioner and Chairwoman, **Riqia Taylor**, for her contributions to the creation and development of this body. Riqia reports that one of her greatest accomplishments was her role as a leading force in establishing a Human Rights Commission in Richmond. With the help of Richmond's City Council in creating a Task Force and the subsequent passing of a bona fide ordinance, Riqia's persistence led to the former capital of the Confederacy and one of Virginia's largest cities without a Human Rights Commission finally receiving one in June of 2018.

Riqia is motivated by her faith and a quote by theologian Howard Thurman, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Her long-standing history of leadership and support to the community helps her toward her goal of making her community a place that exemplifies unity, humanity, and respect for all. Riqia's leadership saw the Human Rights Commission born from an idea and develop into a reality. We are grateful for the vision, time, and effort she poured into our work.



Thank you 

COMMITTEE WORK

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In 2025, the Richmond Human Rights Commission increased social media presence and attended community events including Juneteenth and RVA Pridefest to engage and educate the community about the HRC's goals and how it can provide resources to the community.

In 2026, the Richmond Human Rights Commission Community Engagement committee will focus on increasing social media presence, consistent social media posting, and community engagement within our community. Our top goals include improving community knowledge of our commission and working to implement best practices for community engagement for Human Rights Commissions. Our commission will work collaboratively with all commissioners to engage with community members so the Richmond Human Rights Commission becomes a known entity.

PRESENTED BY *Out* RVA

PRIDEFEST

VIRGINIA PRIDE



DIVERSITY RICHMOND



TABLING AT PRIDEFEST 2025

INTAKE AND INVESTIGATION



The Intake and Investigation Committee started drafting an enforcement ordinance this year so that the Commission will eventually be able to enforce anti-discrimination laws as provided by the Virginia Code. In order to do so, the Committee met with Human Rights' Commission staff, Directors and City Attorneys in Charlottesville, Alexandria and Fairfax in order to inform their work. The Committee reviewed enforcement ordinances from those jurisdictions and others in order to craft Richmond HRC's enforcement ordinance. The Committee spent time working with the Commission as a whole in order to determine which areas the Commission would like to enforce anti-discrimination provisions, the Virginia Code provides that HRCs "may enact an ordinance, not inconsistent with nor more stringent than any applicable state law, prohibiting discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, credit, and education". The Commission decided to incorporate all of those areas into its ordinance. The Committee also raised the discussion to the full commission on federal and state workshare agreements and the Commission's appetite for developing workshares in the future. The Commission signaled an interest. The Committee then invited former HUD and Office of Civil Rights Attorney Helen Hardiman who shared with the Commission as a whole how federal and state workshare agreements could potentially work. Additionally, the Committee worked to refine the proposed intake process and presented that process to the Commission. The Committee also drafted flowcharts and visual aids to describe the proposed intake and enforcement processes.

In 2026, the Committee hopes to bring their enforcement ordinance before City Council and hopes that it will be adopted, which would enable the Commission to carry out its enforcement of anti-discrimination laws as prescribed in the Virginia Code.

RESEARCH AND POLICY



In 2025, the Research and Policy Committee made significant progress in strengthening its foundation and expanding its capacity. The Committee gathered valuable insights from more established Human Rights Commissions in cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York to inform its own research and policy methodologies. It also developed a series of self-paced training resources to support Commissioners' ongoing learning and initiated the creation of internal Protocol and Procedure documentation to formalize the internal mechanisms of the Human Rights Commission. Additional accomplishments included the development of a partner organization survey, compilation of a list of partner organizations, and the expansion of the Committee from one to four members.

In 2026, the Committee aims to build on this groundwork by developing and disseminating a community member survey to complement the partner organization survey, creating a methodology for presenting community-informed policy recommendations, tracking human rights-related trends, and producing data summaries for the City Council, the Mayor's Office, and/or other key stakeholders. The Committee also plans to finalize the Human Rights Commission's Protocol and Procedures documentation.



VIRGINIA CENTER FOR
INCLUSIVE
COMMUNITIES



**63RD ANNUAL RICHMOND
HUMANITARIAN AWARDS
DINNER SPONSOR**

Special Presentations & Trainings

Virginia's Office of Civil Rights- Virginia Human Right's Act

Presentation by Helen Hardiman

Instructed the Commissioners on Fair Housing law basics and provided real life examples

Office of Aging and Disability

Presentation by Monika Huddleston

Instructed the Commissioners on her Office's work, how critical it is for this community and discussed how we can work together in the future.

FOIA Council

“Attending the VA Freedom of Information Advisory Council's overview of FOIA certification standards and protocols, instructed by the knowledgeable Joe Underwood; was very informative and helped me as a first-year commissioner better understand the parameters by-which under FOIA; it is my responsibility, and all of our duty as public officials to respond to any properly submitted public requests in the manners, practices, and exemptions outlined in the Advisory Council's presentation.”

-Feedback by Commissioner, Chris Pittman

Meeting Highlights

JANUARY 23, 2025

- 2024 Annual Report and 2025 Strategic Plan presented and approved
- Proposed bylaw updates reviewed for March vote
- Update provided on hiring a part-time staff person and next steps discussed
- **Community Engagement Committee:** Next meeting scheduled later in the week
- **Intake & Investigation Committee:** Enforcement ordinance finalized and sent to City Attorney for review
- **Research & Policy Development Committee:** Chair and staff met with City Attorney to review proposed electronic meeting attendance policy

MARCH 13, 2025

- Final meeting for Chairwoman Riqia Taylor
- New officers elected:
 - Chair: Samantha Galina
 - Vice Chair: Luise Farmer
 - Treasurer: Aoife Ryle
 - Secretary: Christopher Pittman
- Leadership transition and engagement plans with City leadership and community discussed
- Update on hiring a part-time staff person provided
- Bylaw updates approved
- **Community Engagement Committee:**
 - Shared strategic plan, internal roles, and Women's Day social media outreach
 - Discussed updating community contacts, event tabling, and school partnerships
- **Intake & Investigation Committee:**
 - Reported on meeting with Deputy City Attorney about enforcement ordinance
 - Conducted outreach to other commissions regarding their ordinances
- **Research & Policy Development Committee:** Reviewed policy and procedure examples from other Human Rights Commissions

Meeting Highlights

MAY 8, 2025

- Update on hiring a part-time staff person provided
- Announcement of new DCAO for Human Services, Amy Popovich
- FOIA compliance discussed; electronic meeting policy approved
- Presentation delivered on human rights law and related federal/state codes
- **Community Engagement Committee:**
 - Planned tabling and regular social media updates
 - Proposed using videos, infographics, and local business highlights to educate the community
- **Intake & Investigation Committee:**
 - Presented overview of intake and investigation process
 - Reviewed intake flow chart and form questionnaire
- **Research & Policy Development Committee:**
 - Shared insights from other commissions to inform short-term goals
 - Discussed community partner and broader community surveys

JULY 24, 2025

- Special presentation on Federal Fair Housing Act by Helen Hardiman, former Assistant Attorney General
- Introduction of new part-time staff member, Brittany Rose
- Discussion of proposed bylaw updates for September vote
- **Community Engagement Committee:**
 - Reported on Juneteenth tabling activities
- **Intake & Investigation Committee:**
 - Provided update on enforcement ordinance discussions
- **Research & Policy Development Committee:**
 - Shared drafts of community partner and individual/community surveys

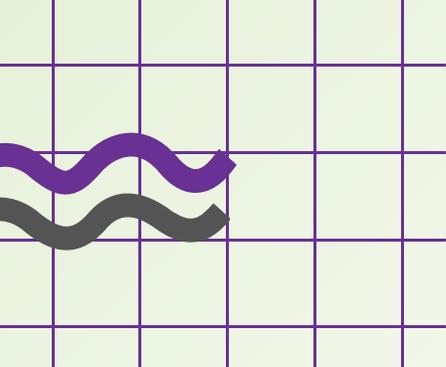
Meeting Highlights

SEPTEMBER 11, 2025

- Cultural communication training held for Commissioners on engaging with ASL interpreters
- **Welcomed four new Commissioners:** Kristina Lloyd, Matthew LaGarde, Anthony Bastardi (student), and Ismael Romero (student)
- Introduced Aneesah Smith, City Equity & Inclusion Advisor; HRC now under the Office of Equity & Inclusion
- Discussion of FY2027 budget request during Treasurer's report
- Presentation from Monika Huddleston, Office of Aging & Disability Services, on service coordination and disability programs
- Bylaw vote postponed to November for new Commissioner review
- Commissioners shared learnings from July FOIA training; additional FOIA guidance provided
- Discussion held regarding appointment of a parliamentarian in 2026
- **Community Engagement Committee:**
 - Reviewed goals, ongoing work, and announced need for new Chair
- **Intake & Investigation Committee:**
 - Reviewed Virginia Code on HRC powers and local authority
- **Research & Policy Development Committee:**
 - Reported progress on community partner survey and next steps with City staff

NOVEMBER 13, 2025

- Welcomed new Commissioner Emily Newsom, Whitney Brown's last meeting
- Update of FY2027 budget request during Treasurer's report
- 2026 Strategic Planning led by Aneesah Smith
- Bylaws updates and annual report approved
- Special election in January for Vice Chair
- **Community Engagement Committee:** International Human Rights Day
- **Intake & Investigation Committee:** New Chair, ordinance update
- **Research & Policy Development Committee:** Reported progress on community partner survey



Sources

Inquiries, complaints, and requests for assistance are received through three channels:

- 1 - HRC phone hotline
- 2 - Complaint submission online
- 3 - Email to HRC email address

Jurisdiction

70% of inquiries were made by residents in the City of Richmond or were regarding institutions in the City of Richmond.



Complaint Type

30% of complaints were related to employment concerns and 30% were related to law enforcement. Additional complaints involved hospital, service agency, university, housing, and public accommodation concerns.



HRC INQUIRIES

Basis of Discrimination

35% of complaints were made on the basis of disability or medical discrimination. 24% were made on the basis of sex. 24% were made on the basis of race.

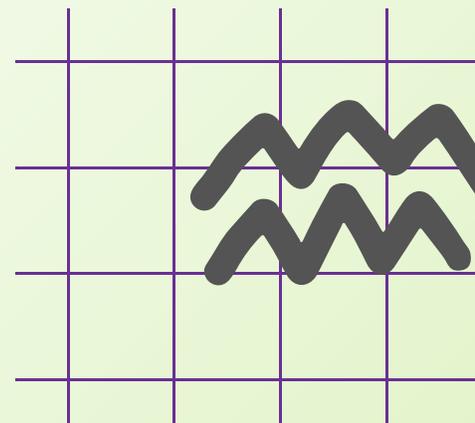
Investigations

When appropriate, complainants were referred for investigation to state and federal agencies.



Resources

When ineligible for state or federal investigation, complainants were referred to local resources including government agencies, non-profits, and legal support.



FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET PROPOSAL

Line Item	Amount
Mediation Review, Training & Conferences	\$9,500
Website	\$300
Marketing/Advertising	\$5,000
Event Materials/ Tabling Fees	\$2,500
Language Access / ASL Services/ Translation	\$7,000
Printed and Education Materials	\$2,500
Food & Beverage	\$2,250
Full Time Staff Salary	\$81,120
Association Membership	\$250
Commissioner Recognition	\$500
Total	\$110,920.00

Justification:

As the Human Rights Commission (HRC) prepares for the passage of its ordinance, additional resources are essential to effectively manage complaints, strengthen outreach, and expand accessibility. Funding will support mediation services for 2-3 cases annually, maintenance of the HRC website as a key complaint and education portal, and strategic marketing to raise awareness of the Commission's role and offerings. Printed materials and event participation will expand visibility, ensuring residents can easily access information and engage with the HRC across the city.

Accessibility and inclusion remain central to the HRC's mission. Funding for professional translation and interpretation will ensure all residents and Commissioners, including those who are Deaf or have limited English proficiency, can engage equitably. Printed resources will reach residents without internet access, and community participation at events like Juneteenth and PrideFest will strengthen trust and visibility. Modest funds for meals and recognition will support and honor volunteer Commissioners, including student members, for their ongoing service and contributions.

To meet growing responsibilities, a full-time HRC Coordinator is critical to manage complaint processing, mediation, and community engagement while coordinating policy efforts across City departments. Membership in the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA) will provide access to national best practices, while continued training and professional development will ensure Commissioners remain informed and effective. Collectively, these investments will enhance the HRC's operational capacity, increase community trust, and advance human rights and equity throughout the City of Richmond.



The future is bright...

In the Year Ahead...

In 2026, the Human Rights Commission will focus on strengthening its visibility, deepening community trust, and expanding its operational capacity. These goals emphasize outreach, partnership-building, education, and continued growth to ensure all Richmond residents can access and benefit from the HRC's mission of equity and inclusion.



2026 Goal Projections

Goal 1: Strengthen public awareness and recognition of the HRC as a trusted community resource.

- Expand the HRC's presence at local festivals, cultural celebrations, and community meetings (e.g., Juneteenth, PrideFest, Folk Festival).
- Refresh the HRC website with updated content, photos, and accessible materials to better reflect current initiatives and Commissioner engagement.

Goal 2: Create a centralized database of local and regional partners to strengthen coordination and referrals for residents seeking assistance.

- Identify and catalog community-based organizations, legal aid providers, advocacy groups, and City departments aligned with HRC focus areas.
- Develop a standardized referral process for connecting residents to appropriate resources.
- Review and update the database annually to ensure accuracy and inclusion of emerging community partners.

Goal 3: Deepen collaboration with new and existing partners to advance human rights and equity across Richmond.

- Deepen collaboration with new and existing partners to advance human rights and equity across Richmond.

Goal 4: Ensure Commissioners and community members are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to advance the HRC's mission.

- Provide ongoing training for Commissioners on mediation, cultural competence, accessibility, and human rights law.
- Facilitate at least two community workshops or educational sessions annually focused on civil rights, equity, or discrimination prevention.

