

# History

The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter, approved by the electors on April 17, 1951, established the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations (PCHR). The PCHR assumed the powers and duties of the former Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). The FEPC, empowered on March 11, 1948, received, investigated and adjusted charges of discrimination in employment. The FEPC also held Public Hearings, issued *Orders* and instituted educational measures that combated prejudice and discrimination in employment based upon race, color, religion or national origin.

The FEPC was composed of five Commissioners. The Mayor appointed three Commissioners and the President of City Council appointed two. Common Pleas Court Judge Gerald F. Flood was the first Chairman of the FEPC. Serving with him were Louis B. F. Raycroft, Coordinator of the Bureau of Veterans Re-Employment Rights, U.S. Department of Labor; Norman Blumberg, Vice President of the Central Labor Union of Philadelphia (AFL); F. Curtis Davis, County Adjutant of the American Veterans of World War II; and Tanner G. Duckrey, Assistant to the Board of Superintendents of the Philadelphia Public Schools.

The FEPC held its first meeting on May 24, 1948. On October 22, 1948, City Council made an appropriation of \$8,500 for the Commission's use during the last two months of 1948 and an appropriation of \$49,700 for 1949. These appropriations led to the appointment of a staff and the development of an educational program.

The first staff of the FEPC consisted of eight persons. In 1951, staff was composed of 14 employees. The Commission's appropriation totaled approximately \$120,000. The number of Commissioners of the new PCHR expanded from five to nine.

When the powers and duties of the FEPC were taken over by the new PCHR on January 7, 1952, Philadelphia became the first city in the United States to have in its basic charter a provision for an official human relations agency. Robert J. Callaghan, Esq., replaced Judge Flood as Chairman of the FEPC and also served as the first Chairman of the new PCHR. Commissioners that served with him were Nathan L. Edelstein, Sadie T. M. Alexander, Francis J. Coyle, Elizabeth H. Fetter, James H. Jones, Albert J. Nesbitt, Lawrence M. C. Smith, and Leon C. Sunstein, Sr.

Dr. Frank S. Loescher, who served as Executive Director of the FEPC, held the same position with the new PCHR. George Schermer succeeded him in February 1952. In 1953, the PCHR drafted blue prints for its long-range program. The PCHR drew up specifications for staff organization and recruited professional personnel for the most comprehensive program in human relations that was ever attempted by an agency of government.

The initial staff was organized into four divisions: Public Law and Employment, Community Relations, Public Information and Research, and Office Services. A Housing Division was established in 1957. In the ensuing years, the PCHR instituted measures that reduced restrictive housing practices. Extensive studies were also completed on the employment experiences of white and black workers and nonwhite residential patterns. Studies on services to Puerto Rican residents led to the addition of two bilingual persons to staff. In 1961, the PCHR held a seminar for the mass media on the effects of news on inter-group relations. A Public Inquiry was also held that year following an outbreak of incidents involving the movement of black families into all-white neighborhoods.

In 1962, City Council amended the Philadelphia Code, creating the Philadelphia Fair Housing Commission (PFHC). The PFHC enforced the City's Fair Housing Ordinance, which addressed unfair rental practices. City Council passed the Fair Practices Ordinance (FPO) in 1963, replacing the Fair Employment Practices Ordinance.

Civil disturbances erupted in North Philadelphia in the summer of 1964. The PCHR called together community leaders in an emergency meeting. The action shortened the disturbance and eased its effects. After the disturbance, City Council provided funding that established the PCHR's North Philadelphia Field Office.

In 1967, two more amendments were added to the FPO, which made housing discrimination illegal in the sale of owner-occupied, one- and two-family homes. In the same year, the PCHR opened a Field Office in West Philadelphia. Extensive efforts by the PCHR opened-up equal employment opportunities in the insurance and building industries.

In 1968, the PCHR introduced a *Helpmobile*, a City Hall on Wheels. The *Helpmobile* made tours during the summer months of inner city neighborhoods and distributed information on the services of the PCHR. Staff also registered complaints of discrimination and received requests for City services from the vehicle. In 1969, the PCHR added a Rumor Central Telephone System that answered emergencies and squelched inflammatory rumors. Also that year, a new South Philadelphia Field Office opened.

During the 1970's, the PCHR strengthened its service to the City's Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. Staff interpreted the City's rehabilitation programs and prepared Spanish-language literature for residents and the media. Also in 1970, the PCHR developed for the Philadelphia Police Department a comprehensive training program on human relations.

In 1972, prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of sex in all areas were added to the FPO. Housing and Public Accommodation provisions were also expanded, as well as provisions that protected the rights of disabled persons. In 1980, marital status, source of income, any age, and presence of children were added as protected classes to the housing provisions of the FPO.

In 1975, the PCHR discovered that many incidents that were reported as inter-group tensions were in reality a dispute between neighbors. The Dispute Resolution Program (DRP) was thus born, helping residents resolve disputes among themselves. In most cases, parties in the dispute have an ongoing relationship with each other and are usually neighbors. Other municipalities, private and public agencies have emulated the DRP.

Landmark amendments were added to the FPO in 1982. These amendments made discrimination illegal in all areas on the basis of sexual orientation. The amendment also banned discrimination in employment on the bases of age 40 and above, as well as physical and/or mental handicap. In 1985, the PCHR began accepting complaints of discrimination in the delivery of City services. In 1987, the Mayor issued Executive Order 1-87 that formalized the policy. In 1986, the City Solicitor defined AIDS as a disability under the FPO. The Mayor also issued Executive Order 4-86 that prohibited discrimination based on AIDS in the delivery of City services.

In 1984, the PCHR held a Public Hearing on *Asians and their Neighbors*. The Hearing resulted in a better understanding of the human relations impact of federal, state and local policies on refugee resettlement. The Hearing also helped in producing a better climate of understanding citywide. This helped in developing positive programs that assisted the process of creating a peaceful acceptance of diversity. The Mayor implemented some of the findings of the Hearing, including the hiring of bilingual Asian Human Relations Representatives, Police and Fire Dispatchers and Social Workers, and the formation of the Mayor's Commission on Asian/Pacific Islander Affairs.

In 1985, the PCHR held a Public Hearing that looked into allegations that community members were attempting to drive an African-American woman out of Frankford. Subsequently, one man was convicted of vandalism, ethnic intimidation and civil rights violations. Frankford residents, who were appalled by the incident, formed the Frankford Human Relations Coalition. The Coalition became a model community human relations organization.

The PCHR has been using computer and information technology as an aide to accomplishing its mission since the mid-1980s. The agency gradually increased computer usage over the years. In 1987, the PCHR implemented a computerized Centralized Intake and Referral Services Unit. The Unit reduced the amount of time residents spent at the PCHR filing complaints. It also sped the investigation of cases and significantly reduced the number of inaccurate referrals. In addition, the Philadelphia Computing Center (PCC) automated the PCHR case records. This reduced the amount of time necessary to process case records and improved case tracking and management for the CRD.

In 1989, the PCHR began integrating its business and information resource plan. Training was expanded to professional staff, which reduced reliance on clerical support. Selected acquisition of hardware and software extended the benefits of computerization to more staff.

The PCHR conducted a Public Hearing in 1990 that examined allegations of disparate and discriminatory treatment of the City's Latino community in City employment and the delivery of City services. The City subsequently implemented many of the recommendations that came from the Public Hearing. Also in 1990, the PCHR implemented its Local Area Network (LAN), starting with just 25 computers and one printer.

In August 1992, the local office of the EEOC acknowledged the PCHR computer efforts in a letter that commented on the PCHR' HERO case tracking database system: *"The closure report for the month of July also shows that PCHR is timely entering closures into HERO. Because of this timely entering of closures, PCHR, alone among FEPAs (Fair Employment Practices Agencies) reporting to this office, is able to generate closures reports via HERO."* Again in September 1993, the local EEOC stated: *"We commend PCHR for the completeness and accuracy of its data entries."*

City Council adopted Bill No. 412 in 1990, expanding the meaning of Public Accommodation in the FPO. The amendment added health care providers and mortuary services as a Public Accommodation, and protected from discrimination residents who lived with or were perceived as living with HIV and/or AIDS.

Over the 4th of July holiday in 1991; the PCHR was the host agency for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA). The IAOHRA is a nonprofit association of federal, state, provincial, county, and municipal human rights/human relation's agencies in the United States and Canada.

In 1991 and 1992, the PCHR received grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and organized two conferences on *Fair Lending Laws*. The conferences began a continuing dialogue between community groups and lenders about mortgage and community development issues. Proceedings were published from these conferences and distributed nationally. The PCHR also, after many years of conducting undercover rental and sales testing that accessed the existence of housing discrimination, received a grant from HUD. With the grant, the PCHR became the first Administrative Agency in the United States to conduct *Pre-Application Mortgage Lending Testing*.

In June 1993, the PCHR began providing staff for the PFHC. The PFHC prohibit landlords from engaging in unfair rental practices, evict a tenant or give a tenant a rent increase while a property contains housing code violations. The PFHC also prohibits a landlord from retaliating against a tenant for reporting code violations to the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L & I). The PCHR automated all records of the PFHC, enabling it to process PFHC cases without hiring additional staff.

The PCHR convened a Public Inquiry in 1994, examining allegations brought by the Women's Law Project that substance abuse centers and programs were not providing services to pregnant women. As a result of the Public Inquiry, substance abuse centers reversed policies and began providing services to pregnant woman.

Also in 1994, the PCHR initiated the Interagency Civil Rights Task Force. The Task Force consisted of two groups. One group was made up of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. This group met periodically, shared information about hate crimes and established closer working relationships within the law enforcement community.

The other group included representatives of non-government agencies. This group strengthened connections among private and public agencies. In part because of these established relationships and the sharing of information among Task Force members, law enforcement successfully prosecuted perpetrators of several hate crimes. The Task Force was considered a model by other regions of the country.

In 1995, the PCHR collaborated with the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies and the Fielding Institute of California in instituting a special grant-funded neighborhood based project that was called *Focus Philadelphia*. The project used video technology that created a better understanding of diverse communities. Teens from Manayunk, Olney, North Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, the Attic (a gay/lesbian teen group of Voyage House) and Kensington identified in a 15-minute video problems facing their communities. In recognition of *Focus Philadelphia* as an innovative program that improved the quality of life in the City, then Mayor Edward G. Rendell was awarded an *Outstanding Achievement Award* by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and Waste Management in the *1997 City Livability Award Program*.

In 1996, City Council passed Bill 960326, which amended the FPO to increase the Ordinance's statute of limitations from 90-days to 300-days. Philadelphians were given additional time to access services of the PCHR. The amended Ordinance also strengthened the PCHR's ability to coordinate services with state and federal agencies.

The PCHR partnered with IBM in 1996, which enhanced the agency's case tracking system. Out of this partnership came the first phase of the Contact Resolution Information System (CRIS), which began deployment in 1999. This system gave management the ability to track a case through each step of the investigative process. The project was completed with the joint efforts of the PCHR, IBM/Lotus and the Mayor's Office of Information Services (MOIS).

Using the CRIS application, record-keeping duplication was eliminated, which reduced the time required to process complaints. Today, the CRIS application is used in managing and tracking cases in the PCHR, the PFHC and the Domestic Partnership Program.

The CRIS became a prototype of a standard business program that was redesigned for public sector use. Since the implementation of the CRIS, the PCHR upgraded all software and hardware that further enhanced case processing efficiency of the agency. In 1997 the PCHR upgraded its LAN, added e-mail and put a computer on each staff person's desk.

Historic Domestic Partnership bills were passed by City Council in 1998. The PCHR became responsible for implementing procedures for the registration of life partners. Amendments were added to the FPO, Bill 970750, which included a definition of Life Partnership and provisions that prohibited discrimination based on marital status in employment, housing, public accommodations, and the delivery of City services. In effect, the bill made Life Partners of City employees eligible for benefits under the City's and municipal union's various employee benefits plans. Bill 970745 amended the Retirement System Ordinance to allow members of the retirement system to name any person designated by the employee as beneficiaries and survivors.

The PCHR conducted a Public Hearing on *Race and the Criminal Justice System* in 1998. The Hearing elicited testimony from individuals who worked in or are familiar with the Criminal Justice System. The Hearing also examined the impact of race on a defendant's experience in the Criminal Justice System in general, and in particular, with regard to death penalty. Witnesses included representatives of the Philadelphia Police Department, the Public Defender's Office, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a number of public interest organizations, as well as various private attorneys. The PCHR Commissioners issued recommendations that called for establishing a Committee or Commission within the Court System to address racial bias in the courts.

Other recommendations called for the monitoring of forms used by the Philadelphia Police Department that discouraged and exposed racial profiling, the need for addressing racial profiling in jury selection and the need for studying race and gender bias in the Court System. The recommendations also called for the need to institute discussions on racial and cultural diversity. Other recommendations emphasized the need for a campaign to educate all Philadelphians in understanding the importance of voting and serving on juries.

The PCHR engaged in many activities during the Republican National Convention (RNC), which was held in Philadelphia from July 31 to August 4, 2000. The PCHR met regularly with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies through the Interagency Civil Rights Task Force and developed strategies that dealt with demonstrations during the RNC. Special emphasis was given to the impact that protesters had on residential communities. The PCHR operated the City's Rumor Central Hotline during the RNC to maintain a two-way communication link with the public. The Hotline received more than 500 calls during first initial days and weekend following the Convention. The Hotline responded to rumors, provided correct information and assisted callers in gaining access to appropriate public and private services. In addition, the PCHR was an active intermediary during the many protests that took place before, during and after the Convention.

A great deal of the PCHR work in 2001 rose from the shadows of dust and debris that were left behind on September 11, 2001, a day that will forevermore reverberate in our minds and hearts. In the aftermath of this tragic attack on American soil, the PCHR moved forward methodically and established a dialogue with law enforcement, criminal justice and social services systems to promote tolerance-building initiatives and an understanding of the culture, customs and concerns of the Arab/Sikh/Muslim community. Also in 2001, the PCHR added the staff of the Police Advisory Commission (PAC) to its e-mail post office.

Philadelphia once again broke historic ground when City Council passed on May 16, 2002, and the Mayor signed on May 29, 2002, a landmark amendment to the FPO that added Gender Identity as a protected class. Transgendered people who faced discrimination in employment, housing, use of public accommodation or the delivery of City services became eligible to file a complaint.

In 2003, the PCHR and the Center City Proprietors Association (CCPA), with the sponsorship of Citizens Bank, presented *Forging Alliances*, an historic initiative that encouraged the City's small/minority businesses and small business associations "to come together to explore how to support each other in building better businesses, better business associations, and a better, more vital City economy." Approximately 100 representatives from small/minority businesses and business associations participated in roundtable discussions with bank, City and other agency representatives. Facilitated by Human Relations Representatives of the PCHR, the discussions focused on the questions: "What are the biggest obstacles to doing business in general and to your business specifically? Who has been the most and least helpful to you? What kind of support does your business/business association need? What were the most important issues discussed? What should be addressed at future meetings?"

The challenges identified by participants at the roundtable discussions to doing business, both generally and specifically, were similar, and reflected concerns about taxes, banking/loan procedures, parking, appearance of neighborhoods and business district, the quality and delivery of City services, the size of a qualified labor pool, and community relationships.

As a follow-up to *Forging Alliances*, the PCHR cosponsored *Marketing to Minorities* with the Center City Proprietors Association and other organizations to discuss strategies to address and be sensitive to the needs of various cultural groups in marketing products or services. Participants learned about specific strategies and sensitivities to utilize when dealing with individuals and groups from other cultures.

On May 11, 2006, PCHR held a forum at the Pennsylvania Convention Center for providers of services to immigrants and refugees. The purpose of the forum was to convene a meeting to hear from those that provide services to immigrants and refugees concerning who they serve, what parts of the city they provide the services in, whether their clients are encountering inter-group tension in any aspect of their lives and to hear suggestions as to where the continuing needs are.

The forum also provided those that testified an opportunity to hear from one another and network to improve their own delivery of services. PCHR plans to review all the testimony, the recommendations, make appropriate referrals and assist in improving the network of services and communication to the immigrant and refugee communities in Philadelphia.