



**CITY OF ALBANY
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

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**KATHY M. SHEEHAN
MAYOR**

**City of Albany Commission on Human Rights
2023 Annual Report to the Mayor and Common Council**

(Submitted pursuant to Albany City Code §42-367)

INTRODUCTION:

The City of Albany Commission on Human Rights was established in accordance with Chapter 42 of the Code of the City of Albany with the primary objective to:

- Foster mutual respect and understanding among all persons and racial, religious, and nationality groups in our community; and
- To seek to assure that the residents of our city are safeguarded against all forms of discrimination in violation of state and local law.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the activities of the Commission for the calendar year 2023.

HIGHLIGHTS:

During the course of the year the Commission held nine in person meetings at City Hall where various issues, community events, organizational issues and policies were discussed and acted upon. In addition to those meetings, the Commission's Annual Awards Ceremony was held in June in lieu of an in person meeting for that month. Among the highlights of the year were the following:

Community Police Review Board (CPRB): On March 16 the Commission met with members of the CPRB and received a presentation from Nairobi Vives mission and goals and the development of a police disciplinary matrix. The presentation was followed by discussion and how the CPRB and CHR can work together on mutual policy objectives and goals.

Albany Water Fluoridation: On May 18 the Commission met with Albany County Health Commissioner Dr. Elizabeth Whalen on proposals to fluoridate the Albany water supply and the dental health benefits that would ensue particularly for children in low-income families. Fifteenth Ward Council Member Thomas Hoey, sponsor of a proposal for Albany water fluoridation, joined the meeting. Following discussion, the Commission adopted a resolution supporting efforts within the Common Council fluoridate Albany's water system, noting the documented dental health benefits that would ensue.

Annual Awards Ceremony: On June 14 the Commission hosted its Annual Awards Ceremony recognizing individuals and organizations for their efforts to advance human rights in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Commission. The event included a reception at the Hollow Bar and Grill in Albany at which the following honorees were recognized:

Acción y Compromiso Award -- MICKY JIMENEZ

Humanity Hero: Student, Family & Community Advocate Award -- AKIRA MARSHALL

Defender of the Dream Award -- IVY MORRIS

Champion of LGBTQ Inclusive Education -- GLSEN UPSTATE NY

Stonewall Heritage Defender Award -- IN OUR OWN VOICES, INC.

Fair Housing Forum: On June 28 the Commission co-hosted a forum on Fair Housing protections under the law with the NYS Division of Human Rights and US Department of Housing and Urban Development at 200 Henry Johnson Boulevard. The event was well attended and received positive feedback.

Equity Agenda Report: Pursuant to §183-3(D) the Commission on Human Rights in partnership with the Department of Administrative Services is required to track outcomes and progress with regard to implementation of the Equity Agenda Ordinance (Chapter 183 of the Albany City Code) and submit an annual report to the Common Council no later than December 21. The Commission began reviewing a draft of the report with compiled data and appendices in September and after review and discussion submitted the final report with the following recommendations on December 21:

- The measurement and assessment of equity in terms of capital investments should be based on established neighborhood lines as on file with the Department of Development and planning rather than ward lines;
- Departmental data on capital investments needs to be presented on a comparative and analytical basis which demonstrates progress toward equity and parity in capital investments and improvements;
- Recognized progress in achieving equity and parity in public parks, recommended that data presentation be merged to better reflect comparisons by neighborhood;
- Meetings of the Violence Prevention Task Force need to be broadcast and available, that there should be an increase in the number of youth representatives and development of partnerships with community-based organizations; and
- The Commission also noted that investments in community-based programming on a participatory budgeting process had yet to be implemented.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES:

As we entered the year 2023 the Commission continued to transition from prior year challenges related to COVID and its impact on activities. We began the year with new staffing through Jasmine Higgins, the city's Chief Equity Officer, and began to focus on organizational issues and long-term planning. Two new members to the Commission were appointed in 2023 to fill vacancies: Richard Conti by the Common Council and Valerie Alexander-Moseley by the Mayor, bringing our membership to a full complement of nine. In October, Jasmine Higgins left city government and we closed the year with new staffing through the leadership of Administrative Services Commissioner Ann Marie Salmon.

In order facilitate its mission, the Commission has also established the following three subcommittees to help guide its work:

- ***Community and Non-Profit Engagement and events:*** Tasked with developing greater partnerships with community and non-profit organizations and will work to better coordinate and support community partnerships, outreach and engagement activities;
- ***Investigations:*** Per §42-366 of the Albany City Code, this committee is tasked with creating policies and procedures coordinating investigations into complaints filed in accordance with the Human Rights Law; and
- ***Communications and Social Media:*** Responsible for establishing policies for use of social media, issuance of statements such as press releases and other communications.

With an eye toward greater visibility, the Commission has also begun work on development of an informational brochure which outlines the role and mission of the Commission in advancing issues of human rights and mutual respect. It is the intent this this brochure would be available at community events in which the Commission hopes to establish greater visibility.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINTS:

Pursuant to §42-357 of the Albany City Code, the Commission shall file a biannual report summarizing complaints filed in accordance with Article III of the Chapter 48 of the Albany City Code and the status thereof. In 2023, the Commission received 20 complaints which are outlined in the separate biannual complaints report.

CONCLUSION:

Cognizant of the challenges ahead, the Commission is committed to moving into 2024 with greater visibility as we continue to work to create an environment respectful of all.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the Albany Commission on Human Rights:

Aaron Moore, Chair
Thomas Mueller, Vice Chair
Kate Shelly, Secretary
Rosie Love

Natisha M. Alexander
Kimberly Young Wilkins
Richard Conti
Celia Evers
Valerie Alexander-Moseley

January 31, 2024