

Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission 2023 Annual Report – Part I¹

The duties of the Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission (HRC) detailed in the City’s Code of Ordinances, require that the Commission report to City Council annually on two of its functions: a) receiving and acting on complaints of alleged violations of Chapter 112: Non-Discrimination and b) monitoring compliance by City Contractors with the provisions of that ordinance for 2023. This report fulfills the first of those requirements and, in addition describes the complaints the HRC received alleging violations of Chapter 122: Fair Chance Access to Housing and provides a broad summary of the rest of HRC’s activity in 2023. A separate report, written jointly with the City’s Purchasing Department, focusing on contractor compliance in FY23-24, will be submitted to Council in a separate document in the near future.

Commission Activity

The role of the Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission has evolved since Council updated Chapter 112: Non-Discrimination (NDO) in 2014 and charged the HRC with its enforcement. The Commission continues to address complaints alleging violations of that ordinance and now also handles complaints alleging violations of the Chapter 122: Fair Chance Access to Housing (FCH), passed by City Council in 2021. The summary of Commission activity involving complaints alleging violations of these two ordinances is documented in Part II of this Annual Report.

In addition to enforcing these two ordinances, the Human Rights Commission has addressed the need for additional protections. One of these was to secure the acceptance of government-issued identification cards in the City of Ann Arbor. An estimated 11% of all Americans lack the ability to get either State or Federal identification cards and some of them reside in the City of Ann Arbor. Washtenaw County and some other local governmental entities have addressed this problem by adopting a process that allows nearly everyone – even those who cannot provide the documents required to get a State ID, driver’s license, or passport – to acquire authenticated identification using other verifiable ways of establishing identity. While this service has been in use for nearly a decade, the Washtenaw-County-issued IDs have not always been accepted by Ann Arbor businesses and service providers. The HRC, with the help of Deputy City Attorney Margaret Radabaugh, drafted an amendment to the NDO that prohibits the denial of acceptance of government-issued ID cards (like those issued through Washtenaw County) as valid IDs. The amendment was passed by Council in 2023. The need for this protection was highlighted by a complaint received by someone who was denied the right to purchase alcohol in Ann Arbor without a driver’s license, even with proof-of-age shown on their Washtenaw ID card. Local-government-issued cards have been important in securing access to many fundamental services – from libraries and banks to food pantries and housing, but an amendment to the NDO was still needed to ensure and normalize their acceptance in the City.

¹ This report was formally accepted by the members of the Human Rights Commission on a unanimous vote of all present at the November 13, 2024 meeting of the HRC.

The HRC has also

- Worked with AAPD leadership to finalize changes the HRC (with input from ICPOC) recommended to that department’s Trespass Notice and policies and practices regarding “reading trespass”. The Trespass Notice is now much easier to understand, provides the property owner with the option of allowing the trespassed person to return to the property in less than a year, and includes appeals process information for the trespassed person. The HRC has followed up to determine what impacts the changes have made so far and judged the initial results to be favorable.
- Partnered with two sections of University of Michigan’s School of Social Work’s SW509 class, helping students to explore selected human rights issues that Ann Arbor residents are facing, read what professionals have written and recommended to address them, and, where possible, identify best practices.
- Explored barriers that slow efforts to increase the availability of gender-inclusive bathrooms in the City. This is an on-going project that involves the monitoring of State polices, building codes, etc. that make requiring the expansion of options in Ann Arbor difficult.
- Attended and tabled at Ann Arbor’s NAACP Juneteenth celebration to meet, talk, and share information with attendees about human rights in Ann Arbor, what the HRC does, including how we receive and address complaints from residents.
- Sent email message to those on our mailing list, alerting them to changes having to do with the HRC and human rights issues that could affect them and opportunities that might be of interest.
- Hosted presentations with and/or gave presentations to:
 - Heather Seyfarth, Engagement Initiative and Findings
 - Milton Dohoney, Introduction to our new City Administrator and Q & A
 - Zach Farrah and members of the Ann Arbor Renters Commission
 - Tracy Byrd, Ann Arbor ADA Coordinator
- Welcomed Kennedi Cummings as our new Office Manager

Facilitation of Contractor Compliance Under Chapter 112: Non-Discrimination

A separate report, jointly prepared by the Human Rights Commission and Purchasing Manager Colin Spencer, for FY 22-23 and FY23-24 will be submitted to City Council for its approval in the near future (pursuant to section 9:158 of the Ann Arbor Non-Discrimination Ordinance).

Handling Complaints Under the Non-Discrimination Ordinance and Fair Chance Access to Housing Ordinance

- In addition to the complaints that are summarized in the following portion of this report, the HRC receives calls and answers questions about human rights and discrimination in Ann Arbor. Simple requests for information were not tracked in 2023, although a number

of requests were taken from Ann Arbor residents that required considerable attention yet did not become formal complaints – and some “formal” complaints were not issues we were able to address. The HRC will continue its efforts to increase awareness in the community that this complaint process is available.

- It should also be noted that the HRC has begun to receive an increasing number of complaints about alleged human rights violations that took place beyond City limits (usually in neighboring townships) – and some of these had been filed as formal complaints. While this Commission must explain that the complaint involves situations we have no power to address, we do our best to refer the complainants to other resources that can be of help to them.