

Civil Rights Reporter

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Mission Statement

Our mission is to reduce discrimination in employment and housing through education and enforcement of state and federal laws.

Vision

Our vision is to help create an environment in which citizens of the State of Texas may pursue and enjoy the benefits of employment and housing that are free from discrimination.

Texas Workforce Commissioners

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The Housing Crisis Facing America's Aging Population

Nathan Capestany
Housing Investigator

The United States is facing a growing housing crisis specifically impacting its aging population. As the number of seniors continues to rise, the housing infrastructure and support systems struggle to keep pace with their needs.

A Growing Problem with Stark Statistics

According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, the number of Americans aged 65 and over will reach 70 million by 2030, making up 20% of the US population. A significant portion of this demographic lives alone or with a spouse, with over 41% being over 80 years old. While a quarter of all homes are owned by seniors, less than half of these homes have the necessary modifications to accommodate their aging needs.

The Need for Accessible and Affordable Housing

The lack of accessible housing for seniors is a significant contributor to their housing woes. Many homes lack essential features like walk-in showers, grab bars, or lowered countertops, making it challenging for seniors to maintain their independence. This lack of accessibility leads to increased risks of falls and other injuries, potentially requiring costly and limited long-term care.

The current housing assistance programs are struggling to meet the growing demand. The Housing Assistance program has multi-year wait lists, and many eligible seniors are unable to access the support they need. This, coupled with a lack of financial resources, has led to a significant increase in homelessness among older adults.

Addressing the Crisis: A Call for Action

Addressing this housing crisis requires a multi-pronged approach that involves government agencies, housing authorities, landlords, and community organizations. Here are some key steps that can be taken:

- **Increase Accessibility:** Housing authorities need to prioritize updating existing housing stock to include features that promote accessibility. This includes modifications like walk-in showers, wider doorways, and ramps, making homes more livable for seniors with mobility challenges.
- **Promote Affordable Housing:** The government should invest in expanding affordable housing options specifically designed for seniors. This can include senior living communities, assisted living facilities, and supportive housing programs.
- **Enhance Housing Assistance Programs:** Streamlining and expanding housing assistance programs will ensure that more seniors can access the resources they need. This includes expanding eligibility criteria, simplifying application processes, and increasing funding.
- **Educate and Empower Seniors:** Community organizations and housing authorities need to actively educate seniors about their rights and the resources available to them. This includes providing information about housing modifications, assistance programs, and advocacy groups.
- **Increase Awareness among Landlords and Housing Managers:** Landlords and property managers need to be informed about the importance of providing reasonable accommodations and modifications to senior tenants. They should also be encouraged to make accessibility improvements to their properties, making them more attractive to the growing senior population.

The Future of Senior Housing

Addressing the housing crisis facing our aging population is not just a social responsibility; it's an economic necessity. Investing in accessible, affordable housing for seniors will improve their quality of life, reduce healthcare costs, and foster a more inclusive society.

By working together, we can ensure that our senior citizens have access to safe, comfortable, and supportive housing that allows them to age with dignity and independence.

It's that Time of Year Again – Resolutions for 2025

BRYAN SNODDY - DIVISION DIRECTOR

Christmas presents have been unwrapped and put away. The tree has come down, and the lights have been removed from various parts of our homes. The singing of the Scottish hymnal (used affectionately) Auld Lang Syne has occurred, and the lights have been turned out on 2024 with the last blow of the kazoo or party horn. Whether you were overwhelmed by joy, trepidation, longing, or sadness in the past year, a new one ****stands**** before us. It is at this point that many individuals take the opportunity to make some resolutions. The good old New Year's resolutions.

Interestingly, one of the earliest known written English references to a New Year's resolution was penned by a Scottish writer – the diary of Anne Halkett. On January 2, 1671, she made a note of her intentions with a heading of resolutions. It is doubtful that she was the first person to make a resolution at the change of the year, and certainly, she has not been the last. Some historians date the practice all the way back to the Babylonians, but this is not the time for a history lesson.

The important thing is that 2025 has arrived and there ****must be**** a new year's worth of resolutions. Or not. Personally, I discontinued the practice some time ago. The only thing more consistent and maddening than making the resolutions was how quickly they unraveled like shoelaces tied by a kindergartner. In lieu of that annual exercise of disappointment, it was replaced with the simpler process of just making a list of things to do.

The list is not formal. It has no check boxes, nor does it contain time frames. It is simply a written manifestation of deeply held inward beliefs and dreams. And these are not your typical dreams, like when you fall asleep at night or take an afternoon nap. It is dreaming with intent, purpose, and a crystallized vision. It must be something that you can see in your mind. Whether one writes those dreams on paper, in a diary, or on the back of a napkin, it has a surprising result.

The next challenge is not to bird dog the list on a daily or weekly basis. In fact, just stow it away somewhere – like a time capsule or your desktop drawer and let the year pass. As with most things in life, there are no guarantees, yet in multiple, consecutive years the dreams and concepts on the list were accomplished or started in some form or fashion. The vast number of items (north of 90%) were fully realized.

We do this as well in the CRD. Our hopes and dreams became reality in 2024 when we documented that we were dedicated to reducing backlog and increasing the number of satisfied customers and stakeholders. This year the dream continues as we embark on the 2nd Annual Employment Symposium and also hold the 1st Annual Fair Housing Symposium. Whether you create formal New Year's resolutions or just create a simple list, like yours truly, this past year we can see the transformational impact of having a clarifying vision.

With credit to Mr. Fain, "Thoughts become things. If you can see it in your mind, you can hold it in your hand." Our resolution is to simply stay focused and achieve greatness.

The Importance of monitoring Conciliation Agreements

Patrick Williams - Housing Manager

In my previous Civil Rights Report, I discussed the Art of Conciliation Agreements. In this article I will outline the importance of monitoring these agreements:

Fair housing conciliation is a vital, efficient alternative to litigation for resolving housing discrimination complaints. It uses a collaborative, trust-based approach where neutral investigators facilitate mutually agreeable solutions between complainants and respondents. Conciliation doesn't imply wrongdoing but offers quicker, less costly resolutions, benefiting both parties by addressing the complaint while avoiding legal battles. Key to successful conciliations is active listening, creative problem-solving, and a willingness to compromise. TWC prioritizes conciliation by sending investigators to mediation training. Conciliation aims not only to resolve individual complaints but also to effect systemic change through policy adjustments and public interest relief. Although not always successful, conciliation is crucial for achieving equitable housing practices.

Effective conciliation agreements require thorough monitoring to ensure compliance and may prevent future discrimination. Monitoring is mandated by the Texas and Federal Fair Housing Acts (Title VIII of the 1968 Civil Rights Act), it also ensures that agreements reached to resolve complaints are implemented effectively. Without monitoring, agreements risk being ignored, leaving victims of discrimination without recourse.

TWCCRD conciliation agreements contain clear provisions for monitoring, compliance, and breaches. Each agreement specifies monitoring activities, compliance deadlines, and conduct that constitutes a breach. Consequences for breaches are outlined according to Texas Property Code Section 301.151 enforcement procedures.

Monitoring ensures all parties fulfill their obligations under the conciliation agreement. A compliance checklist helps manage these requirements. Successful compliance can prevent future violations and protect potential victims by addressing issues proactively. To assist with monitoring, TWC Investigators follow a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

Investigators schedule a calendar reminder at least 10 days before compliance documents are due. If documents are not received 5 days before the deadline, the investigator will email respondents and their housing supervisor with a copy of the conciliation agreement, a list of missing documents, and the due date. As requirements are met, the investigator will annotate each requirement as complete and upload supporting documentation in HUD's database. Once an agreement is out of compliance, the supervisors and the manager will actively monitor the agreement for compliance.

Upon identifying a potential breach, the Investigator will inform their supervisor. Subsequently, the non-compliant party will be contacted by phone and in writing, detailing the potential breach and granted ten days to come into compliance. If compliance is not achieved, the Investigator will notify management. They Investigator will also document the potential breach in HUD's database, stating that the Respondent has not met the terms of the agreement.

If a party fails to meet the compliance deadlines, the investigator will initiate the breach of contract process. First, they send a "Breach of Conciliation" letter to the non-compliant party. If compliance is not achieved within 30 days after the deadline, a Breach of Contract letter will be sent to the party that is not in compliance. If the non-complaint party does not come into compliance after receiving the Breach of Contract letter, the Investigator will notify management.

The investigator's final act is to notify the aggrieved person that they have a right to file a civil action in district court no later than two years after the date of the discriminatory housing practice.

Additionally, under Sec 814. [42 U.S.C. 3614]. The Attorney General may commence a civil action in any appropriate United States district court for appropriate relief with respect to breach of a conciliation agreement referred to the Attorney General by the Secretary under section 810(c).

The Importance of Black History Month: A Time for Reflection, Education, and Celebration

Faith N. Penn - Mediator

Black History Month, observed every February in the United States, is a time to celebrate the achievements, contributions, and history of Black Americans. Originally conceived as Negro History Week by historian Carter G. Woodson in 1926, the month-long observance expanded in 1976, during the United States Bicentennial, to include the entire month of February. This expansion acknowledged the need for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the role Black Americans have played in shaping the nation's history.

Why Black History Month Matters

Black History Month is vital for many reasons. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the rich history of African Americans and recognize the immense cultural, political, and economic contributions made by Black Americans. It also serves as an educational tool that helps to combat historical dismissal and the oversimplification of Black Americans' role in U.S. history. More importantly, it highlights the ongoing struggles for racial equality, reminding us that while progress has been made, there is still work to be done.

The observance of Black History Month is not just for African Americans but for all Americans, as it fosters greater understanding, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity. It reminds us that Black history is American history, and its narrative is integral to the collective identity of the nation.

Notable Black Leaders and Figures

Throughout history, numerous Black Americans have made lasting marks on society, breaking barriers in the face of adversity.

Martin Luther King Jr. is perhaps the most iconic figure in the fight for civil rights in America. His leadership during the Civil Rights Movement, particularly his role in organizing the March on Washington and his delivery of the famous "I Have a Dream" speech, made him a pivotal figure in American history.

Harriet Tubman, a former enslaved woman, became a conductor on the Underground Railroad, leading enslaved individuals to freedom. Tubman's courage and determination have made her a symbol of resistance and freedom.

Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott by refusing to give up her seat to a white man, becoming a crucial catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement.

Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States, made history as the first Black man to hold the highest office in the land, inspiring millions worldwide with his leadership and message of hope.

Mae Jemison was the first African American woman to travel into space. She is an inspiring figure in the fields of science and technology, encouraging young people of all races to pursue careers in STEM.

George Washington Carver, an agricultural scientist and inventor, developed methods to improve soil quality and was instrumental in popularizing crop rotation. His innovations revolutionized farming, particularly for Black farmers in the South.

Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress and a pioneering

advocate for social justice, demonstrated that African American women could lead on the national stage. She later ran for president, making history as the first Black woman to seek a major party's nomination.

Ways to Acknowledge Black History Month

Educate Yourself and Others

One of the most impactful ways to participate in Black History Month is by learning more about Black history, culture, and accomplishments. Attend events, read books by Black authors, watch documentaries, or listen to podcasts that explore the lives and achievements of Black individuals. For instance, books like *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois or *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates offer insight into the lived experiences of Black Americans. Documentaries like *13th* by Ava DuVernay examine the legacy of slavery, while *The Black Power Mixtape* explores the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Support Black-Owned Businesses

Supporting Black-owned businesses, whether by shopping or using services, is a powerful way to honor Black entrepreneurs. There are numerous Black-owned businesses across different sectors, from restaurants to fashion, beauty, and tech. By investing in these businesses, you're contributing to the economic empowerment of the Black community.

Attend Events and Participate in Celebrations

Many communities host events during Black History Month, including cultural festivals, performances, panel discussions, and exhibitions that focus on Black culture, history, and contributions. Check out local museums, libraries, or universities for public events. Participation helps spread awareness and engage in meaningful conversations.

Volunteer or Get Involved in Social Justice Work

Another meaningful way to acknowledge Black History Month is by actively contributing to the ongoing fight for racial justice. Whether by volunteering with organizations that support Black communities, advocating for policy changes, or joining discussions on equity, your involvement can help amplify voices that have long been marginalized.

Black History Month is not just a time for reflection but also a call to action. It's an opportunity to acknowledge the struggles and triumphs of Black Americans and to learn about the countless individuals who have shaped the course of history. Whether through education, support, or active participation in social justice movements, there are many ways to engage in Black History Month. Most importantly, it's a time to honor those who have come before us, inspire those who will follow, and continue the fight for equality and justice.

Improving our Services with EDISS

Sabrina Peña, Employment Investigator

In October 2024, the Texas Workforce Commission Civil Rights Division (TWCCRD) launched a new platform for complainants to submit employment discrimination complaints, the Employment Discrimination Inquiry Submission System (EDISS). The development of EDISS was a year-long process that required significant collaboration between the TWCCRD Employment Section and TWC Information Technology (IT).

EDISS is an efficient and cost-effective platform that replaced DocuSign as the method used to submit employment discrimination complaints. EDISS has not only simplified the process for complainants, but it also provides significantly more space for them to describe how they believe they were subjected to discrimination in the workplace.

An Employment Investigator led the development within TWCCRD. The Investigator consistently engaged with the Employment Manager and Employment Intake Section to ensure EDISS contained the important components of the DocuSign complaint form. Any feedback received was then analyzed and discussed with IT throughout the year-long collaboration process. The EDISS development process is an ongoing project, and Phase II will implement lessons learned after the initial launch.

EDISS has not had a negative impact on the number of discrimination complaint submissions. Currently, FY 25 submissions are within 3% of FY 24 employment discrimination complaint submissions. According to the Pew Research Center, this is an acceptable margin of error. [1]

[1] Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/09/08/understanding-the-margin-of-error-in-election-polls/>

WORLD BRAILLE DAY: CELEBRATING LOUIS BRAILLE'S LEGACY

Faith N. Penn - Mediator

World Braille Day, celebrated annually on January 4th, marks the birth of Louis Braille, the French inventor who revolutionized the way blind and vision impaired individuals access written language. Born in 1809, Braille became blind at a young age after a childhood accident. Despite his disability, he excelled in his studies and later attended the Royal Institute for Blind Youth in Paris.

While at the institute, Braille developed the system that would carry his name. At the age of 15, inspired by a military code called “night writing,” which allowed soldiers to read messages in the dark without light, he created a tactile writing system using raised dots. Each combination of dots represented letters, numbers, and even musical notations. This system made reading and writing accessible to blind individuals, offering them greater independence and opportunities for education and employment.

Before Braille’s invention, blind individuals had no efficient way of reading and writing independently. Books and texts were often laboriously transcribed by hand into large print or cumbersome systems such as Moon Type, raised lettering. Braille’s system, however, was not only much more compact but also easily learned, offering a new world of literacy and self-expression to millions.

World Braille Day serves as a reminder of the importance of literacy, accessibility, and inclusivity. It encourages awareness about the needs and challenges faced by the blind and vision impaired community. Celebrating this day highlights the ongoing need for Braille education, technology that supports Braille use, and the advancement of accessibility in all areas of life, including education, employment, and public services.

This day also honors Louis Braille’s lasting impact on the world, ensuring that his legacy continues to empower individuals worldwide to read, write, and navigate their lives with greater independence.

Equal Employment Training

If you didn't already know and are still reading, our training is provided at no cost to the employer. Take advantage of having our training team do the training for you.

Are you a private employer looking to develop your company on the basics of Equal Employment Opportunity or for a better understanding of how to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace?

The Civil Rights Division's Training team can help. We offer numerous EEO training presentations and can tailor training to your needs. Reach out to our training team at CRDTraining@twc.texas.gov to discuss and schedule your training!

[Register Here.](#)

Fair Housing Training

Join us on every first and third Tuesday from 10:00 - 11:00 (CST) where we discuss Fair Housing and Housing Accommodations.

This is a great webinar for those interested in their rights or those that manage or own properties. Did we mention it is free!

[Register Here.](#)

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