



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Activities of the Human Rights Commission in 2023

This annual report summarizes the Kirkwood Human Rights Commission's main initiatives and accomplishments over the last year highlighting the Commission's community outreach events, partnerships, complaint investigations, policy reviews, and ongoing engagement with the Kirkwood community in 2023.

- I. **First Quarter Meeting with Chief Murphy, Kirkwood PD** On January 13 a Subcommittee met with Police Chief Murphy to review Department demographics, citizen complaints, training and taser deployments for period 10/1-12/31/22.
- II. **Martin Luther King, Jr Day 2022 Event** One of 2022's Annual Essay Contest winners, Jane Dubberke, read her essay "The loss of Human Rights Caused by Climate Change" during the Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association's annual ML King Celebration which was held virtually due to the pandemic.
- III. **Community Member Complaint re: Parks and Recreation Department's Spring/Summer program guide** In February, a complaint was received regarding the Parks and Recreation Department's Spring/Summer program guide for its lack of diversity and inclusion as well as its sponsorship of the "Daddy-Daughter Dance on January 27." An HRC Subcommittee met with Director Kyle Henke on February 28 regarding these concerns.
- IV. **KHRC Annual Presentation to City Council** In March, the 2022 Annual report was presented to the City Council at the March 16 Council Meeting.
- V. **2023 Essay Contest** The Essay Contest this year revolved around the theme "What is the most important Human Rights issue currently? Why?" Out of 75 submissions received, the top four were ranked by the Commission. Congratulations to our winners: 1st place – Emma Hingle; 2nd place – Gus Lauberth; 3rd place – Arul Osburn; and, 4th place – Khadija Khan. These winners were recognized at the City Council Meeting on May 4, 2023. A press release, including a photo of the winners with Mayor Griffin, was submitted to local media for coverage.

Furthermore, due to concerns raised in several essays, such as students feeling unsafe on campus, mental health and drug use, and perceived lack of support from school staff, the Commission decided to send the essays, with author names removed, to the district principals and superintendent. A cover letter was composed by Chairperson Morrison and sent along with the essays.

- VI. **Subcommittee Report of April 7** As per the report included in the Commission's packets, it was revealed that the Police Department is struggling with the shortage of female candidates resulting in only two female officers in the force. The department, however, successfully completed an audit with the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), demonstrating high standards of operation.

- VII. Information Tables at the Kirkwood Farmers' Market in May** Thanks to the volunteers who manned the tables on May 6 and May 20, the event was a success.
- VIII. Denis Hart Award Nominations** For 2022, there were no nominations, thus no award was presented.
- IX. Horizons St. Louis in Kirkwood Presentation** Lakesha Robinson, the Executive Director of Horizons St. Louis in Kirkwood, gave a riveting presentation at the May meeting, highlighting their work and their efforts to counteract the 'summer slide'—the loss of academic skills during the summer break.
- X. Subcommittee for Fall Speaker Event** Beginning in May, a subcommittee of Commissioners Becker, Cole, Hartung, and Webdell began planning the Fall 2023 Speaker Event, and reported on perspective speakers, event format, and tentative dates.
- The subcommittee reached out to several potential speakers including the Executive Director of PROMO. Although PROMO's director initially committed, they ultimately had to withdraw. The subcommittee pivoted to organize a panel of speakers including the St. Louis Queer+ Support Hotline, Trans Housing Initiative STL, and local author Lisa Brennan. The subcommittee also invited community groups to attend and staff information tables at the event.
- XI. May 22 Meeting with Dr. Jeremy Mapp, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director of the Kirkwood School District** Several Commissioners had a productive meeting with Dr. Mapp discussing various issues, such as post-Covid student achievement, diversity in staffing, and recent transgender staffing issues.
- XII. Parks and Recreation Trivia Night Fundraiser for PARC/Schupe Scholarship Program** The KHRC raised over \$325 for this event and also sponsored one round of trivia. Geoff wrote a letter to the editor at the Webster-Kirkwood Times to promote the scholarship program, which was republished as an article about the event, further promoting the scholarship program.
- XIII. Carbs & Guitars Pancake Breakfast** Several Commissioners attended this event at Firehouse #2 on June 10. The event provided an excellent opportunity to share information about the KHRC, housing discrimination, and upcoming events.
- XIV. Election of Officers** At the June meeting, Geoff Morrison was re-elected as the Chairperson, and David Hartung was elected as the Vice-Chair of the Commission.
- XV. Contact with City Prosecutor regarding St. Louis County Mental Health Court** The Commission attempted to connect with the City Prosecutor's Office regarding the potential for the Kirkwood Municipal Court to collaborate with the St. Louis County Mental Health Court, which faces some limitations, including the voluntary nature of the program, limited resources and staffing, and limited consequences in municipal court diminish the impact and make broad implementation of the program difficult. Despite these challenges, the Commission recognizes the importance of this resource for individuals with mental health diagnoses in the justice system.
- XVI. Subcommittee Report of Meeting with Chief Murphy on July 10** The Police Department was operating with three fewer staff members in March, including one open officer

position due to budgetary constraints. Two complaints were filed this quarter; one involved a traffic stop of a Hispanic motorist which was ruled unfounded, and the other concerned an officer's response time to a call, which was not sustained. The quarter saw one unsuccessful taser deployment during the attempted arrest of an individual who was violating parole. Discussions were held concerning the stop disparity index, which reached a record high of 2.93 for non-resident Black drivers. Contributing factors such as the impact of Covid on the frequency of drivers and police interactions were considered. The department received funding for public presentations on opiate abuse, and officers are equipped with Narcan to address overdose.

XVII. Denis Hart Award Guidelines: The Commission approved revised guidelines for the Denis Hart Award. These revisions include expanding eligibility criteria and extending the nomination period from three to five years. It has been noted that there were no nominations for the award in 2022, and the guidelines have been updated accordingly. The deadline for nominations has been set for November 17, 2023. The new guidelines will be communicated to the public through a press release to be published in the Kirkwood-Webster Times and on the Kirkwood website.

XVIII. Ordinance 12-66: The Commission discussed potential changes to Ordinance 12-66, which outlines procedures for handling housing discrimination complaints in Kirkwood.

Several issues with the current ordinance were raised: The processes are outdated, particularly the role of the Commission in investigations; Sections are unenforceable as written, directing complaints to City Council, which lacks jurisdiction; More updated procedures in §§12-80 to 12-84 better reflect current practices.

To address these concerns, the Commission approved proposing revisions to 12-66 to: Update the complaint procedure to match §12-81, clarifying information required and City Attorney's role; and, replace the investigatory procedures with those outlines in §12-82.

The goal is to modernize 12-66 to better match current discrimination complaint handling practices. A motion was made at the August meeting and approved to refer the proposed amendments to the City Administrator for review by City Council.

XIX. Hot Dog Days Events: The Commission supported the Police Department's Hot Dog Days community events by attending and staffing information tables. These casual events aim to foster positive relationships between police officers and Kirkwood residents. Chairperson Morrison attend Hot Dog events on June 16, June 30, and August 18. The June 30 event at Monfort Park was well-attended. While no attendance numbers are available, the strong turnout highlights the popularity of these community-building initiatives. Commission representation at the events provides visibility for the Commission and opportunities to share its role and resources with attendees.

XX. Meacham Park Back-to-School Event on August 12: Commissioners Webdell and Morrison attended the Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association's Back-to-School even on August 12. Staffing an information table at the student and family-focused event allowed engagement with Meacham Park residents. Their participation furthered the Commission's community outreach efforts and relationship building with Meacham Park.

XXI. Housing Discrimination complaint received on August 17 from F. Percich: The

commission received a report of a housing discrimination complaint from Fran Percich concerning her medical assistance dog. The complaint was related to the purchasing of a condo in Kirkwood and involved issues with the condo association's rules regarding the weight of the dog. Guidance was provided to file a complaint with the Missouri Commission on Human Rights and to seek legal counsel, specifically with expertise in disability law.

- XXII. Subcommittee Meeting with Clayton EECC on August 24:** Members of the Commission attended a subcommittee meeting with the Clayton Community Equity Commission. The discussion included policy changes in Clayton and the role of Arch City Defenders in the selection of Clayton's Municipal Judge. Concerns were raised about the shortage of members on the Missouri Human Rights Commission, and it was suggested to address this by possibly collaborating with the Clayton Human Rights Commission.
- XXIII. Bobby Bostic Book Presentation at KPL on September 7:** The Commission supported an author event at the Kirkwood Public Library on September 7 featuring Bobby Bostic. He was the speaker at the Commission's 2022 annual diversity event. By co-sponsoring this book event, the Commission aimed to further amplify and support Mr. Bostic's story and advocacy work. The event was well attended, and books were sold, contributing to the community's engagement with local St. Louis authors and topics of human rights. The Commission Chair provided an introduction at the event.
- XXIV. Green Tree Festival Booth – September 16 and 17:** The Commission participated in the Green Tree Festival with an information booth. With record attendance, the festival continues to provide an excellent opportunity to engage with Kirkwood residents. For next year's festival, the Commission discussed removing the candy bowl from the booth due to concerns about costs versus benefits. The Commission remains dedicated to interfacing with Kirkwood residents through information booths at local events.
- XXV. Inquiry to MCHR Director Regarding lack of MCHR Commissioners:** The Commission discussed concerns about the effectiveness and funding of the Missouri Commission on Human Rights. An investigative report highlighted these issues, leading to the decision to draft communications to address the shortage of commissioners and the need for adequate support for the MCHR.
- XXVI. Information Table Staffing at Police Open House on October 7:** The Commission staffed an information table at the Police Department Open House event. The recently renovated parking lot provided ample space. Commissioners engaged with community members to share information about the Commission's role and resources.
- XXVII. Subcommittee Meeting with Police Chief Murphy on October 9:** Topics discussed included a taser deployment during the arrest of four suspects, including one juvenile, in the robbery of a pizza delivery driver. The subcommittee learned School Resource Officers do not currently wear body cameras due to school district privacy concerns. Two complaints received during the quarter involving a traffic ticket and stop were ruled as unfounded and unsustainable. Staffing shortages continue with two open positions, though recent hiring includes one female officer and dispatcher. Rising mandated training and video storage costs strain budgets, partially offset by asset forfeiture funds.

XXVIII. Speaker Event on November 8: The Commission's November 8 speaker event featured presentations by the St. Louis Queer+ Support Helpline, Trans Housing Initiative STL, and author Lisa Brennan, as well as a Q&A session with the audience. Event attendance exceeded expectations and attendees engaged with local organizations at information tables.

The Kirkwood Performing Arts Center donated use of their auditorium and audio-visual equipment, contributing to an impactful and successful event celebrated by all participants. The Commission looks forward to planning similar speaker events on emerging human rights topics for the Kirkwood community.

XXIX. Attainable Housing Presentation in November: The Commission received an informative presentation by Kirkwood for Everyone on the City's Attainable Housing Study. Kirkwood faces affordability issues for households across income levels. Recommendations to increase diverse housing options include increasing rowhomes, duplexes, and accessory dwelling units; providing density bonuses for developers; marketing key development sites downtown for multi-family use; and evaluating policies related to housing vouchers.

XXX. Planning for MLK Jr. Celebration Event on January 15: Throughout the quarter, the Commission collaborated with the Meacham Park Neighborhood Improvement Association and the Kirkwood Social Justice Coalition with Kirkwood High School groups in December to plan the January 15th MLK Jr. Celebration event. Judge Robin Ransom will be the keynote speaker and the Community Gospel Choir of St. Louis will perform during the hour-long event. Students will also participate through an essay contest winner speech, pianist performance, and Black Achievement Club speaker.

XXXI. New Member Addition: In December, the Commission welcomed new member Kelley Harris. She is a Kirkwood native with extensive teaching and community volunteer experience related to diversity initiatives.

XXXII. Letter to Governor Addressing MCHR Vacancies: A December letter was sent requesting the Governor fill remaining vacancies on the Missouri Commission on Human Rights to ensure they can effectively conduct business and serve constituents. Twelve other Municipal or County groups were also contacted to petition the Governor to address this issue.

XXXIII. New Denis Hart Award Winner Selected in December: Tom Ptacek was selected in December as the 2023 recipient of the Denis Hart Award for his community service activities with organizations including Kirkwood for Everyone Attainable Housing Group and helping start the Heart-to-Heart Tutoring program.