



*Advancing Civil Rights
For Over a Quarter Century*

THE EQUAL RIGHTS CENTER **ANNUAL REPORT**

2018

OUR MISSION

The Equal Rights Center (ERC) is a civil rights organization that identifies and seeks to eliminate unlawful and unfair discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations in its home community of Greater Washington, D.C., and nationwide.



Cover photo credit:

"Sunset on rowhouse facades" by [Payton Chung](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

The ERC's core strategy for identifying unlawful and unfair discrimination is civil rights testing. When the ERC identifies discrimination, it seeks to eliminate it through the use of testing data to educate the public and business community, support policy advocacy, conduct compliance testing and training, and, if necessary, take enforcement action.

CIVIL RIGHTS TESTING
IS A VALUABLE TOOL FOR

www.equalrightscenter.org



EDUCATING
THE PUBLIC



SUPPORTING
POLICY
ADVOCACY



TRAINING
BUSINESSES



ENFORCING
THE LAW

ADVANCEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

IN 2018 WE...

TRAINED
65
CIVIL RIGHTS
TESTERS.

REGISTERED **253** HOUSING
PROFESSIONALS FOR FAIR HOUSING
ONLINE TRAININGS ON THE EQUAL
RIGHTS LEARNING CENTER.

RESPONDED TO **259**
INDIVIDUALS REPORTING
DISCRIMINATION.

CONDUCTED
544
CIVIL RIGHTS
TESTS TO IDENTIFY
UNLAWFUL
AND UNFAIR
DISCRIMINATION.

CONDUCTED **70**
FAIR HOUSING AND ACCESSIBILITY
TRAININGS FOR CORPORATE
PARTNERS.

CONDUCTED **37**
HOUSING-RELATED KNOW YOUR
RIGHTS TRAININGS FOR LOCAL
RESIDENTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS.

SUBMITTED **16**
REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION AND
MODIFICATION REQUESTS ON BEHALF
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

OUR PROGRAMS



FAIR HOUSING

There are many things to consider when finding a home; discrimination shouldn't be one of them.



ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY RIGHTS

Creating a world that welcomes everyone means building spaces and technology accessible to all.



EMPLOYMENT

Discrimination should never be part of the job.



PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Ensuring everyone's right to fully and freely participate in society is about opening doors, and propping them open permanently.



COMPLIANCE

Civil rights is the right thing to do, and it's good for business.

MAKING OUR COMMUNITY A FAIRER PLACE TO LIVE



NEXT GENERATION SEGREGATION

In March 2018, the ERC published a report that contributed new insights to the ongoing conversation about racial inequities and gentrification in DC, grounded in a review of complex and interplaying factors such as population shifts, changes in the DC housing market, and racial wealth disparities. Together these factors are pushing African American families into neighborhoods the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development calls “racially or ethnically concentrated areas of poverty,” or out of DC altogether. The tests conducted as part of the investigation indicate that individual level discrimination in the housing market may also be contributing to these trends.

TRACKING DISCRIMINATORY ADS

In 2018, the ERC tracked online housing advertisements for discriminatory language. Staff identified over 120 ads that discriminated on the basis of source of income by using phrases such as “no vouchers”. Through education and outreach efforts, the ERC has informed landlords about their fair housing obligations and encouraged them to affirmatively market properties to housing voucher holders.



A RULING ON SOURCE OF INCOME DISCRIMINATION

In October, DC Superior Court Judge John Campbell granted the ERC’s motion for summary judgment against Belmont Crossing Apartments and Oakmont Management Group, finding Defendants liable for their discriminatory policy of refusing to rent to temporary subsidy holders. The ruling clarified that vouchers, regardless of the source or duration, are to be treated as a source of income for paying rent within the meaning of the DC Human Rights Act, making it easier for more low-income renters to enforce their rights.

LEADING THE WAY FOR JUSTICE

NATION'S LARGEST PRIVATE LANDLORD ADOPTS NEW SCREENING POLICY TO RESOLVE ERC LAWSUIT OVER RACE DISCRIMINATION

In October 2018, the ERC resolved a lawsuit against Mid-America Apartments (MAA) which alleged that MAA maintained and enforced a criminal records screening policy that categorically barred an untold number of individuals with criminal histories from living at their properties in violation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. To resolve the lawsuit, the parties entered into a court enforced agreement that required MAA to immediately adopt a criminal background screening policy that individually assesses applicants with criminal convictions. Under the company's previous policy, African American and Latino housing applicants to MAA properties were up to 12 times as likely to be barred from applying as white applicants.



DEMANDING ACCESSIBLE RESTROOMS FOR SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

In May 2018, the ERC together with an individual member who is a military dependent with disabilities filed a lawsuit against Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and the Navy Exchange for failing to meet a basic need of many of the center's patients – access to restrooms. The filing came after months of unsuccessful negotiations with Walter Reed to commit to actionable and measurable steps to expeditiously address the accessibility barriers raised in the complaint and alleges that the medical facility and shopping center are violating Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Department of Defense's own standards by not providing accessible restrooms for individuals who use wheelchairs.



EXPANDING ADA APPLICABILITY IN PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS

In February 2018, a U.S. District Court judge for the Northern District of Illinois issued a ruling that stated moveable display racks at Kohl's are subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This represented a positive step forward in a series of lawsuits based on ERC testing investigations that found navigating Kohl's stores in a wheelchair was close to physically impossible. This ruling could become an important precedent in the fight for people with disabilities to have equal access to public accommodations.

PARTNERING FOR PROGRESS



REFLECTING ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FAIR HOUSING ACT

During Fair Housing Month in April, the ERC partnered with the Washington Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs, the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law, and the UDC Law Review to host FHA@50: Renewing Our Commitment to Housing Equity. The symposium brought together practitioners, academics, attorneys, and students to reflect on progress made and remaining hurdles to overcome in fair housing.

SPREADING INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICE AND ASSISTANCE ANIMALS

Continuing a partnership forged in 2017, the ERC presented in March to staff and animal control officers at the Humane Rescue Alliance (HRA) about service and assistance animals and the rights of people with disabilities who have such animals. Pleased with the ERC's presentation, the HRA also invited the ERC to speak at the annual Virginia Animal Control Association conference in October 2018, along with presenting to their partners at the SPCA animal shelter in Fredericksburg, VA.



Photo: Virginia Animal Control Association



COLLABORATING WITH HOUSING INDUSTRY LEADERS

In November, the ERC hosted its annual Multifamily Housing Resource Program (MHRP) meeting for housing industry partners. Members discussed housing accessibility and enjoyed a "Battle of the Experts" session with accessibility experts Bill Hecker and Mark Mazz. The MHRP is dedicated to assisting multifamily housing developers to comply with accessibility requirements and increase the number of accessible apartments and condominiums in the U.S.

INNOVATING FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

CROWDSOURCING ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

To mark the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), in July 2018 the ERC launched Access A11y, an app designed to collect information about access for people with mobility disabilities. The Access A11y website allows people to discover, review, and rate the accessibility of stores and restaurants in the Greater Washington, D.C. area and New York City.

Through crowdsourcing this information, people with mobility disabilities no longer have to phone ahead, physically scope out whether spaces are accessible in advance, or take a chance on an employee's understanding of accessibility.

Everybody has a right to inclusive and accessible public places. It's time for businesses to live up to the promise of the ADA.

 **ACCESS A11Y**
OUR INPUT
OUR INDEPENDENCE



FIGHTING FOR ACCESSIBLE RIDE-HAILING APPS

In 2017, the ERC filed a lawsuit against Uber for depriving people with mobility disabilities equal access to their services. In 2018, the ERC continued the fight to ensure Uber is covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A judge granted the case a hearing in the summer and media outlets such as the Washington Post have included the case in their coverage of disability discrimination.

A STORY OF SUCCESS

ERC'S FAIR HOUSING PROGRAM HELPS LOCAL RESIDENT WITH CRIMINAL RECORD ASSERT THEIR RIGHT TO SAFE AND STABLE HOUSING

In August, the ERC received a call from a Housing Choice Voucher holder—"Jane Doe"—in Howard County, Maryland. Jane's application for a home was denied by a local property management company because of her criminal record.

The housing application did not provide Jane with space to explain her record, which involved convictions from between 12 and 25 years ago that didn't imply she would make a bad tenant presently. It also didn't provide space for her to explain how she's remade her life since then. Jane had been volunteering at her local church for over five years and she had recently gone back to school. Jane, a single mother, needed a stable home to raise her two children and live a fulfilling life.

People with criminal records often struggle to find places to live because of overly restrictive criminal records screening policies. Blanket bans that automatically deny housing to people with criminal records without regard for factors like the nature of the crime or its severity, the time passed since the crime, or demonstrated rehabilitation can be discriminatory under the Fair Housing Act due to the racially disparate impact of mass incarceration. They are also inconsistent with guidance issued by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Using the HUD guidance, ERC staff assisted Jane with drafting a letter to explain her record. The property management company then reviewed her application again, and ultimately approved it.

Now, Jane and her children have a home. Both voucher holders and people with criminal records can face difficulty finding a place to live. By helping our clients navigate their civil rights, the ERC is making it easier for them to find safe and stable places to live.

"I would advise anyone experiencing housing discrimination to reach out to the Equal Rights Center for help."

- Jane Doe



STAFF



MELVINA C. FORD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



KATE SCOTT
DEPUTY DIRECTOR



KATHERINE PEARSON
DIRECTOR OF
ACCESSIBILITY RIGHTS



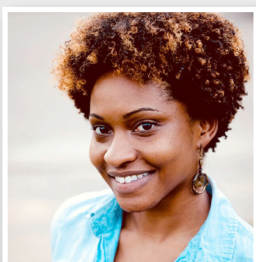
BRIAN MCKENZIE
TRAINING AND
COMPLIANCE MANAGER



ELIAS COHN
MANAGER FOR
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES



DIEGO RIVERA
OPERATIONS MANAGER



CAMILLE BROWN
GREATER WASHINGTON
FAIR HOUSING RIGHTS
PROGRAM MANAGER



**SUSAN
MCCLANNAHAN**
SENIOR FAIR
HOUSING PROGRAM
COORDINATOR



CHELSEA SULLIVAN
PROGRAM ASSISTANT



AASTHA UPRETY
RESEARCH AND
COMMUNICATIONS
ASSISTANT



BRANDON PETKOV
TECHNOLOGY
SOLUTIONS
COORDINATOR



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EMERITUS

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Beatriz “BB” Otero

STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2018 AND 2017

ASSETS		
	2018	2017
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 607,220	\$ 319,735
Investments	\$ 1,117,689	\$ 904,201
Accounts receivable	\$ 140,399	\$ 192,390
Prepaid expenses	\$ 7,360	\$ 16,600
Total current assets	\$ 1,872,668	\$ 1,432,926
FIXED ASSETS		
Equipment	\$ 31,273	\$ 65,087
Furniture	\$ –	\$ 35,518
Leasehold improvements	\$ 10,272	\$ –
	\$ 41,545	\$ 100,605
Less: Accumulated depreciation and amortization	\$ (28,623)	\$ (100,605)
Net fixed assets	\$ 12,922	\$ –
OTHER ASSETS		
Other Assets	\$ 18,311	\$ 18,311
Accounts receivable, net of current portion	\$ 76,958	\$ 196,952
Total other assets	\$ 95,269	\$ 215,263
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 1,980,859	\$ 1,648,189
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 14,119	\$ 9,807
Accrued salaries and related benefits	\$ 23,939	\$ 27,951
Deferred rent and leasehold improvement allowance – current portion	\$ –	\$ 25,538
Total current liabilities	\$ 38,058	\$ 61,296
LONG-TERM LIABILITIES		
Deferred revenue	\$ 217,000	\$ 397,000
Deferred rent and leasehold improvement allowance	\$ 80,702	\$ –
Total long-term liabilities	\$ 297,702	\$ 397,000
Total liabilities	\$ 335,760	\$ 458,296
NET ASSETS		
Without donor restrictions	\$ 1,585,980	\$ 1,189,893
With donor restrictions	\$ 59,119	\$ –
Total net assets	\$ 1,645,099	\$ 1,189,893
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS (DEFICIT)	\$ 1,980,859	\$ 1,648,189

STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS FOR THE YEARS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2018 AND 2017

	2018	2017
	Total	Total
REVENUE		
Contributions	\$ 21,750	\$ 25,937
Foundation grants	\$ 130,000	\$ 20,000
Government grants	\$ 467,401	\$ 410,625
Contracts	\$ 238,472	\$ 373,205
Interest and dividend income	\$ 13,536	\$ 4,333
Membership	\$ 212,006	\$ 272,533
Contributed services	\$ 1,476,306	\$ 1,304,602
Settlements and awards	\$ 620,835	\$ 86,451
Other revenue	\$ 430	\$ 2,561
Net assets released from donor restrictions	\$ –	\$ –
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 3,180,736	\$ 2,500,247
EXPENSES		
Program Services	\$ 2,427,571	\$ 2,259,685
Supporting Services:		
General and Administrative	\$ 271,105	\$ 299,879
Fundraising	\$ 26,854	\$ 13,377
Total supporting services	\$ 297,959	\$ 313,256
Total expenses	\$ 2,725,530	\$ 2,572,941
Changes in net assets	\$ 455,206	\$ (72,694)
Net assets at beginning of year	\$ 1,189,893	\$ 1,262,587
NET ASSETS (DEFICIT) AT END OF YEAR	\$ 1,645,099	\$ 1,189,893



THE EQUAL RIGHTS CENTER

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