



The Equal Rights Center 2020 Annual Report

Mission & Strategic Priorities

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.

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

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.

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear ERC members,

Thank you for sticking with us through this past year. The losses we collectively experienced in 2020 have been tremendous, and we will grieve them for years to come. Nothing I write in these ensuing few paragraphs can adequately communicate their impact, but know that our thoughts are with you as we all try to recover. To those of you who personally experienced a loss this past year, we send our deepest condolences and well-wishes as you take time to heal.



When the pandemic first forced us to shut down “business as usual” last March, we put out a call for ideas from you about how we should use civil rights testing to meet the moment. Since then, I’m proud of the work we’ve done to further our mission of identifying and ending discrimination—even in the most difficult of circumstances. ERC staff pivoted immediately to identify critical gaps in access to COVID-19 related information based on English language ability. We acted quickly to ensure that remote work environments wouldn't prevent people with disabilities from accessing public benefits or housing. And we used civil rights testing to support vulnerable renters trying to navigate an increasingly challenging housing market.

As we move on from 2020, we face continued uncertainty, but look forward to the important work that lies ahead of us. We strive to use our core strategy of civil rights testing to continue meeting the urgent needs of the present moment. Thank you, as always, for your enduring support of the ERC.

Onward,

Kate Scott

2020 by the Numbers

Numbers alone can't capture the high quality of work we do to uncover and eliminate discrimination, but they can help illustrate our impact. Here's an overview of what we accomplished in 2020:

- Conducted 517 civil rights tests to identify unlawful and unfair discrimination.
- Responded to 281 individuals reporting discrimination and conducted over 10% more fair housing intakes than in 2019.
- Filed nine administrative complaints with local civil rights enforcement agencies.
- Testified about fair housing issues at two public hearings.
- Provided Know Your Rights information at 90 community-based events.
- Submitted 20 reasonable accommodation and modification requests on behalf of people with disabilities.
- Conducted 71 fair housing and accessibility trainings for corporate clients.



Navigating a Pandemic

Navigating a Pandemic

When COVID-19 hit the U.S. in early 2020, the ERC pivoted quickly to identify critical gaps in access to information about it. In April and May, we used matched-pair testing to investigate whether Limited English Proficient (“LEP”) individuals in the Washington, D.C. region were able to obtain information about COVID-19 testing using resources published by local governments and major media outlets. During each test, an English-speaking tester, a Spanish-speaking tester, and a tester speaking another language (Korean or Amharic) attempted to contact a site until they reached a live employee. Non-English-speaking testers received interpretation in only 65% of calls conducted.

We shared these results in Navigating a Pandemic: When “English Only” Threatens Public Health. The report raised significant concerns about whether the barriers to language access we identified might hinder a successful public health response to the virus, and outlined recommendations to improve access to COVID-19 testing information. Since then, public health experts and language access advocates have contacted us to discuss our findings and raise related concerns.



Navigating a Pandemic

COVID-19 Fair Housing Resources

During the pandemic, there have been significant increases in reports of housing-related harassment against Asian Americans and sexual harassment. Furthermore, researchers have found that evictions cause an increase in COVID-19 cases. In response, the ERC published a series of informative resources addressing some of the most relevant fair housing concerns brought on by the pandemic. The resources address race, color, and national origin discrimination against Asian Americans, sexual harassment, and eviction protections.

Times are tough.

Don't let a leasing agent or landlord make them tougher.

Discrimination against Asian Americans is on the rise due to stereotypes about COVID-19.

Housing discrimination, including refusal to rent to someone, on the basis of race, color, or national origin is illegal.

If you believe you are facing unlawful discrimination, the Equal Rights Center may be able to help.



☎ 202-234-3062
✉ info@equalrightscenter.org
🌐 equalrightscenter.org

Times are tough.

Don't let your landlord make them tougher.

In DC, Maryland, and Virginia, landlords cannot evict tenants for non-payment of rent due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Some landlords are trying to force out tenants by other means, such as threatening them or turning off their utilities.

If you believe you are facing unlawful eviction, the Equal Rights Center may be able to help.



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Times are tough.

Don't let your landlord make them tougher.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment.

During this COVID crisis, we have heard concerning reports of landlords soliciting sex from tenants who can't pay rent.

If you believe you are facing unlawful discrimination, the Equal Rights Center may be able to help.



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Advancing Accessibility

Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson Denies Uber's Motion to Dismiss in ERC's Case Against the Company

In 2017, the ERC filed suit against Uber alleging that the company systematically discriminates against people with disabilities in the District of Columbia who use non-foldable wheelchairs. The case is based on a civil rights testing investigation that revealed higher fares and longer wait times for wheelchair users. On March 15, 2021, United States District Court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson denied Uber's motion to dismiss, finding that the company's ride-sharing application is covered by Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the DC Human Rights Act (DCHRA).

"This case is so important because having equal access to on-demand transportation options is a major quality of life issue for me and other wheelchair users in the D.C. region," said ERC member Heidi Case.



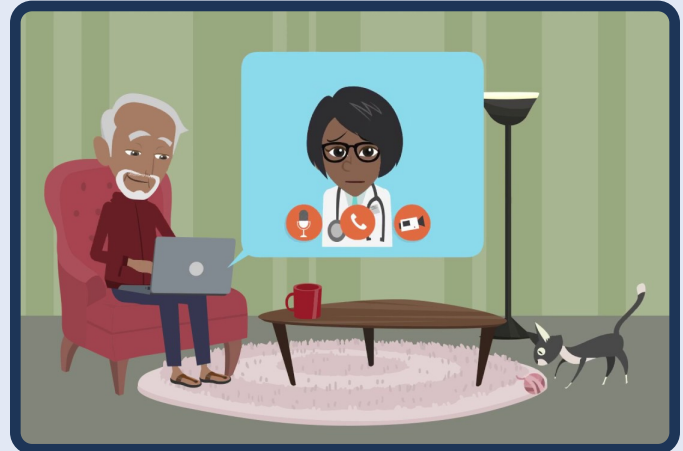
ADA 30th Anniversary Commemoration

July 26, 2020 marked 30 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law. To celebrate the anniversary, the ERC launched a video series featuring organization stakeholders reflecting on the progress that has been made since 1990, and charting a course forward in the continued fight to fulfill the ADA's promise of eliminating discrimination against people with disabilities.

Raising Awareness

New Resources about Assistance Animals in Housing

Less than three months after the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released new guidance regarding assistance animals in housing, the ERC released a video, blog, and one-page flow chart to explain the guidance, help housing providers to understand their fair housing obligations, and help consumers to understand their rights.



Know Your Rights Postcard

With the majority of Americans hunkered down at home, the ERC created and distributed an educational postcard designed to deliver fair housing knowledge straight to our neighbors' mailboxes. The postcards cover nationally and locally protected classes and prohibited activities, and were distributed via multiple channels helping everyone to know their fair housing rights.

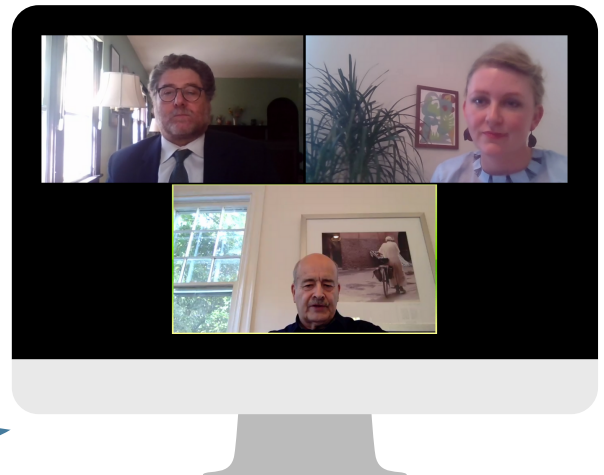


Partnering for Progress

Annual Members Meeting

In October, the ERC held its first ever virtual annual meeting. We invited our members to participate in a conversation between Kate Scott, Executive Director of the ERC, and Jonathan Smith, Executive Director of the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. They discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the civil rights climate and the work each organization has been doing to respond to the moment.

"Another type of testing investigation that we've been focused on is using Video and IP Relay systems to contact housing providers and inquire about housing. In fifty percent of those tests the Deaf tester was treated less favorably than the hearing tester. There's no excuse for entities that haven't figured out how to serve people with disabilities," said Kate Scott at the members meeting.



MHRP Annual Meeting

In October, the ERC hosted its annual Multifamily Housing Resource Program (MHRP) meeting for housing industry partners. Because of the pandemic, members met in a completely virtual format for the first time ever to discuss housing accessibility, and enjoyed a "Battle of the Experts" session with accessibility experts Bill Hecker, Dominic Marinelli, and Mark Mazz. MHRP is dedicated to helping multifamily housing developers to comply with accessibility requirements and increase the number of accessible apartments and condominiums in the U.S.

Partnering for Progress

Fairfax County Fair Housing Video

The ERC collaborated with the Fairfax County Department of Human Rights & Equity Programs to produce a video about some of the most pressing fair housing issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The video empowers Fairfax residents to know and assert their fair housing rights.



Impact on Individual Lives

In December of 2018, sisters Sarah and Lauren, began renting a home in Maryland. They had previously been at risk of homelessness, so finding this house seemed like a dream come true. That dream quickly turned into a nightmare. Soon after they moved in, their landlord began stopping by the house uninvited. During those visits he asked whether Lauren would perform sexual favors, and repeatedly made other, inappropriate sexual comments. Over the next few months, he repeatedly sent Lauren sexually explicit text messages.

"I should feel safe in my own home," Lauren said. "But I was scared to be alone because of him."

Lauren would often turn off all the lights while she was home to make it appear that she was not there, or would stay at her boyfriend's house multiple nights in a row. After Lauren rejected her landlord's advances, he retaliated against her and Sarah. He threatened to bulldoze the house, contacted their employers in an effort to get them fired, and eventually evicted them from the property.

In 2019, the ERC helped Lauren and Sarah file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which was forwarded on to the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR). In summer of 2020, MCCR investigated the claim and found "probable cause" that the landlord had discriminated: sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination in housing. As the matter headed to trial, the landlord eventually agreed to settle the claim. Lauren and Sarah each received a substantial financial compensation from the landlord, who also paid a fine to MCCR and attended fair housing training.

Lauren commented, "We can't get those years of our life back, but at least now we can have a fresh start."



Impact on Individual Lives

Cora reached out to the ERC in early 2020 for assistance with submitting a reasonable accommodation request to her housing provider. Due to her disability, Cora was at high risk of contracting a severe case of COVID-19 and needed to self-isolate long-term to protect her health. In a large, multi-family apartment building, that would be impossible. The ERC assisted Cora with requesting an early lease termination as a reasonable accommodation to the provider's usual policy, whereby such a termination would incur a fee. The housing provider responded promptly and Cora was able to move out free of charge. In total, the ERC helped submit 20 reasonable accommodation requests for people with disabilities in 2020, many of which were related to the challenges imposed by COVID-19.

**All names have been changed.*



Current Board of Directors

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Financial Report

STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2020 AND 2019

ASSETS		2020	2019
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$	1,258,159	\$ 1,531,411
Accounts receivable		213,537	112,280
Prepaid expenses		15,686	2,820
Total current assets		<u>1,487,382</u>	<u>1,646,511</u>
FIXED ASSETS			
Equipment		38,431	32,586
Leasehold improvements		10,272	10,272
Less: Accumulated depreciation and amortization		(36,134)	(31,621)
Net fixed assets		<u>12,569</u>	<u>11,237</u>
OTHER ASSETS			
Deposits		18,311	18,311
Accounts receivable, net of current portion		21,792	42,959
Total other assets		<u>40,103</u>	<u>61,270</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	\$	<u>1,540,054</u>	<u>\$ 1,719,018</u>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Loan payable	\$	122,464	\$ -
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities		32,098	9,731
Accrued salaries and related benefits		33,366	16,511
Total current liabilities		<u>187,928</u>	<u>26,242</u>
LONG-TERM LIABILITIES			
Loan payable, net of current portion		51,027	-
Deferred revenue		69,000	94,000
Deferred rent and leasehold improvement allowance		87,160	85,333
Total long-term liabilities		<u>207,187</u>	<u>179,333</u>
Total liabilities		<u>395,115</u>	<u>205,575</u>
NET ASSETS			
Without donor restrictions		1,144,939	1,480,649
With donor restrictions		-	32,794
Total net assets		<u>1,144,939</u>	<u>1,513,443</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$	<u>1,540,054</u>	<u>\$ 1,719,018</u>



Financial Report (continued)

STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS FOR THE YEARS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2020 AND 2019

	2020	2019
REVENUE AND SUPPORT		
Government grants	\$ 505,691	\$ 483,726
Contracts	281,310	312,484
Membership	75,000	183,501
Contributed services	611,503	610,644
Grants and contributions	50,590	47,163
Settlements and awards	26,483	132,802
Interest income	2,986	20,683
Other revenue	1,540	2,415
Net assets released from donor restrictions	-	-
Total revenue and support	1,555,103	1,793,418
EXPENSES		
Program Services	1,686,851	1,473,119
Supporting Services:		
General and Administrative	202,738	443,233
Fundraising	34,018	8,722
Total supporting services	236,756	451,955
Total expenses	1,923,607	1,925,074
Changes in net assets	(368,504)	(131,656)
Net assets at beginning of year	1,513,443	1,645,099
NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR	\$ 1,144,939	\$ 1,513,443





The Equal Rights Center

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