



The Equal Rights Center 2019 Annual Report

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: [View from Arlington Cemetery towards the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.](#) by Leonid Andronov. One design use license.

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

By the Numbers

In 2019, the ERC:

Conducted **543**
civil rights tests to
identify unlawful and
unfair discrimination.

Trained **51**
civil rights testers.

Conducted **78**
Fair Housing and
Accessibility trainings
for corporate clients.

Conducted **17** Know Your Rights trainings about housing
discrimination for local residents and service providers.

Responded to **345** individuals
reporting discrimination.

Submitted **19**
reasonable accommodation and
modification requests on behalf of
people with disabilities.

Entered into **32**
voluntary agreements with
housing providers that required
training and/or affirmative
marketing.



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.

Leadership Change

Dear ERC members,

After leading the ERC for over five years, Melvina Ford stepped down as Executive Director at the end of October. Under her leadership, the ERC created its first ever apps, the Fair Housing Checklist App and Access A11y, designed to increase housing accessibility and access to public accommodations for people with disabilities. Melvina also expanded the ERC's online training platform, adding new courses and making those courses available to the general public, effectively increasing the educational resources needed by the business community to comply with civil rights laws. In conjunction with these innovative projects, Melvina exhibited substantial fiscal acumen, leaving the ERC ready and able to continue its critical work advancing civil rights in these remarkable times.



On October 31st, I stepped into the role of Interim Executive Director, and in April 2020, the ERC's Board of Directors appointed me Executive Director. I am truly honored to have the opportunity to lead the organization during these unprecedented times and look forward to updating you frequently about our progress in achieving the ERC's mission.

Sincerely,
Kate Scott
Executive Director

Documenting Discrimination

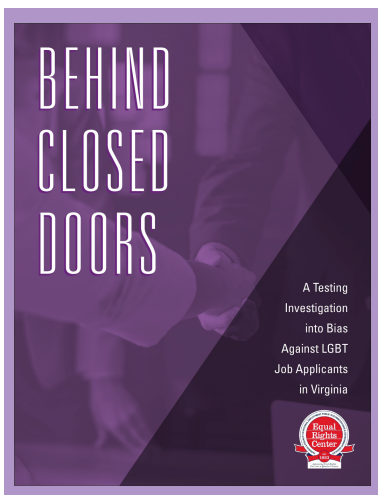
From Click to Visit

In March of 2019, the ERC released a new report based on a civil rights testing investigation into housing accessibility for people with disabilities. The report reveals numerous barriers to access for people with disabilities searching for housing in the Greater Washington, D.C. area, both online and in person. *From Click to Visit* provides important insight into the barriers people with disabilities face when searching for housing. In particular, the report's findings raise major concerns about website inaccessibility.



Behind Closed Doors

In March of 2019, the ERC released *Behind Closed Doors*, a report based on a civil rights testing investigation into bias against LGBT job applicants in Virginia. Using matched pair testing, the ERC compared the experiences of straight job applicants with gay/queer job applicants during the hiring process. The report reveals test results that point to the existence of discrimination against gay and lesbian job applicants, illustrating the need for statewide anti-discrimination protections in Virginia.



Leading the Way for Justice

The ERC continued monitoring online housing advertisements in the District for discriminatory language in 2019. Staff identified 93 ads that discriminated on the basis of source of income by using phrases such as “no vouchers”. As a result of ensuing education and outreach efforts, the ERC entered into voluntary agreements with 32 housing providers that required training and/or affirmative marketing. The ERC was also able to inform the DC Attorney General’s office about the problem, and the DC Office of the Attorney General partnered with [Apartments.com](#) and [Zillow](#) to prevent the posting of ads discriminating against housing voucher holders on their websites.



In April 2019, the ERC released a series of resources designed to educate various stakeholders about the fair housing rights of people with disabilities, help housing providers comply with fair housing best practices, and empower people with disabilities to advocate for themselves. These include a toolkit about reasonable accommodations and modifications, FAQs targeted at housing providers, a template for third parties to use when verifying a person’s disability, a public service announcement about service animal fraud, and a one-pager explaining service and assistance animals under the FHA and ADA.

Partnering for Progress

Washington, D.C. Fair Housing Laws for Housing Providers ERLC Course

In April of 2019, the ERC released a [new online learning course](#) about applicable fair housing laws in Washington, D.C. The interactive course, *Washington, D.C. Fair Housing Laws for Housing Providers*, explains best practices for complying with the many unique local protections and laws in the District. The course is divided into six modules that are interactive and easy to understand and is designed to be completed in approximately 1.5 hours.

Webinar: Fair Housing and Domestic Violence

In October, the ERC hosted a webinar to address issues related to fair housing rights for survivors of domestic violence. In addition to the webinar, the ERC released a [know-your-rights one-pager](#) on the same topic.



MHRP Annual Meeting

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. 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.

Impact on Individual Lives

**Note that all names have been changed.*



"She's definitely African. I don't want her in the group house. Next time give the address as 2312, not 2317." That was the text message Jennifer received from a landlord operating in Northern Virginia. Jennifer found a property listed for rent on Craigslist and reached out to get more information. She ended up in a group chat with the landlord and a current tenant of the home. While she attempted to schedule a viewing of the unit, the tenant asked her if she was a citizen, and she responded affirmatively. Then, the landlord interjected with the above message, likely intending to only send the message to the current tenant, and not this potential renter.

Jennifer continued her search for housing, but she was unable to identify any other affordable units in the area. As a result, she became homeless and has been staying in emergency shelters and transitional housing for over a year now.

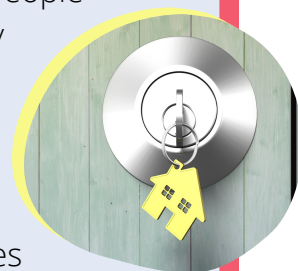
As Jennifer phrased it, "[this landlord] likely spent only a few seconds sending that text message, telling me I couldn't apply at his property because he thought I was African. Yet those few seconds have dramatically impacted my last year. His racist assumptions about my desirability as a tenant resulted in me experiencing homelessness, to leave school before I could complete my associate's degree and it has deeply hurt me emotionally. While he may be able to sleep well at night, I can't."

We helped Jennifer file a complaint with the Virginia Fair Housing Office, supporting her throughout the process, and the Virginia Fair Housing Board found reasonable cause to believe that this landlord had illegally discriminated against Jennifer.

Impact on Individual Lives

In 2019, the ERC submitted 19 reasonable accommodation and modification requests on behalf of people with disabilities. The right to equal housing opportunities for people with disabilities, including reasonable accommodations, is an important priority in the ERC's work.

One of these requests was on behalf of Brenda, who was living in transitional housing and contacted us for assistance. The transitional housing program where Brenda was living required program participants to leave their residences during the day. Due to a disability that can cause her to quickly decompensate and experience panic attacks in public, Brenda was unable to leave her home on weekdays. The ERC submitted a letter on her behalf requesting that she be allowed to remain at home from 9am to 3pm on weekdays, and the organization approved her request.



In December 2018, two sisters, Sarah and Lauren, moved into a rental home in Maryland. Within a week or two of moving in, their landlord began stopping by their home. At first, the sisters assumed he wanted to come by to talk about the apartment, but it quickly became apparent that the landlord had other plans.

After briefly making small talk, the landlord soon started asking whether Lauren would perform sexual favors, and repeatedly making other, inappropriate sexual comments. The landlord continued sending sexually explicit texts to Lauren over the next few months. As a result, Lauren was afraid to be home alone. She would often stay at her boyfriend's house multiple nights in a row to avoid coming home or would turn all the lights off while home to make it appear that she was not home. After Lauren rejected her landlord's advances, he retaliated against the sisters with threats and attempts to evict them from the property.

The ERC helped Lauren and Sarah file a HUD complaint in 2019, and the complaint was forwarded on to the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights.

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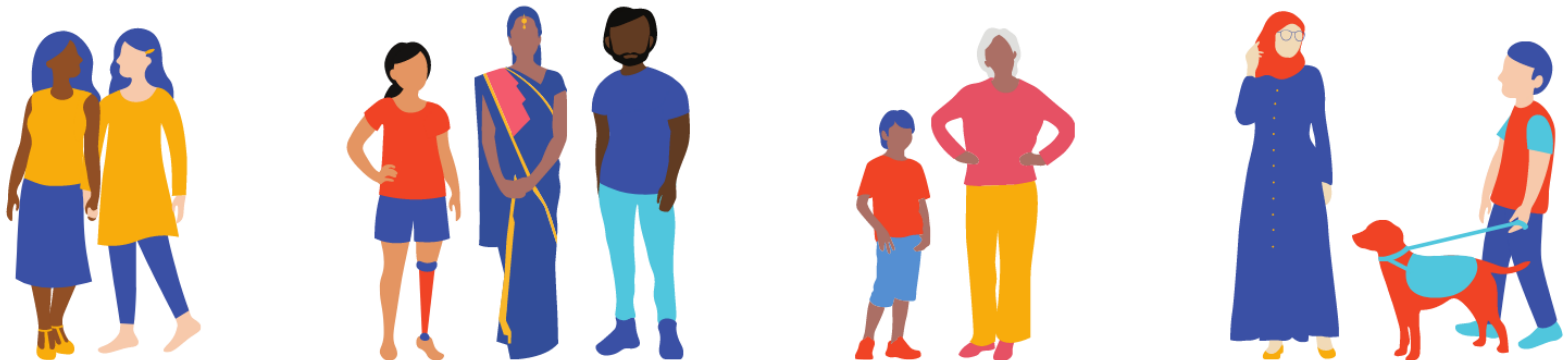
Financial Report

Statements of Financial Position as of December 31, 2019 and 2018

Assets		
	2019	2018
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$393,104	\$607,220
Investments	\$1,138,307	\$1,117,689
Accounts receivable	\$112,280	\$140,399
Prepaid expenses	\$2,820	\$7,360
Total current assets	\$1,646,511	\$1,872,668
Fixed Assets		
Equipment	\$32,586	\$31,273
Furniture	—	—
Leasehold improvements	\$10,272	\$10,272
	\$42,858	\$41,545
Less: Accumulated depreciation and amortization	(\$31,621)	(\$28,623)
Net fixed assets	\$11,237	\$12,922
Other Assets		
Other assets	\$18,311	\$18,311
Accounts receivable, net of current portion	\$42,959	\$76,958
Total other assets	\$61,270	\$95,269
Total assets	\$1,719,018	\$1,980,859
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$9,731	\$14,119
Accrued salaries and related benefits	\$16,511	\$23,939
Deferred rent and leasehold improvement allowance - current portion	—	—
Total current liabilities	\$26,242	\$38,058
Long-Term Liabilities		
Deferred revenue	\$94,000	\$217,000
Deferred rent and leasehold improvement allowance	\$85,333	\$80,702
Total long-term liabilities	\$179,333	\$297,702
Total liabilities	\$205,575	\$335,760
Net Assets		
Without donor restrictions	\$1,480,649	\$1,585,980
With donor restrictions	\$32,794	\$59,119
Total net assets	\$1,513,443	\$1,645,099
Total liabilities and net assets (deficit)	\$1,719,018	\$1,980,859

Financial Report (continued)

	2019	2018
Revenue		
Contributions	\$12,163	\$21,750
Foundation grants	\$35,000	\$130,000
Government grants	\$483,726	\$467,401
Contracts	\$312,484	\$238,472
Interest and dividend income	\$20,683	\$13,536
Membership	\$183,501	\$212,006
Contributed services	\$610,644	\$1,476,306
Settlements and awards	\$132,802	\$620,835
Other revenue	\$2,415	\$430
Net assets released from donor restrictions	—	—
Total revenue	\$1,793,418	\$3,180,736
Expenses		
Program services	\$1,461,859	\$2,427,571
Supporting services:		
General and administrative	\$454,519	\$271,105
Fundraising	\$8,696	\$26,854
Total supporting services	\$463,215	\$297,959
Total expenses	\$1,925,074	\$2,725,530
Changes in net assets	(\$131,656)	\$455,206
Net assets at beginning of year	\$1,645,099	\$1,189,893
Net assets (deficit) at end of year	\$1,513,443	\$1,645,099





The Equal Rights Center

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