



Staff Report

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TO: Mayor and City Council
THROUGH: Keith Stahley, City Manager
FROM: Scott Archer, Deputy City Manager

SUBJECT:

Human Rights Commission Update

Ward(s): All Wards
Councilor(s): All Councilors
Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods
Result Area(s): Good Governance; Safe Community; Welcoming and Livable Community.

SUMMARY:

Over 500 community members responded to the 2023 Community Belonging Survey conducted in partnership with Western Oregon University. The Human Rights Commission advises City Council on human rights issues. A summary of 2023 activity and a preview of upcoming issues is provided.

ISSUE:

Information only

RECOMMENDATION:

Information only

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

Salem is perceived to be a welcoming community “for someone like me” by most housed respondents but not by not by most people experiencing homelessness who responded to the survey. About a quarter of housed respondents perceive that Salem is more welcoming for them personally than it is for us all.

More than half of respondents have heard about or witnessed discrimination in Salem in the past 12

months. Reports of discrimination may or may not be violations of the human rights code: reports include incidents or experiences of perceiving bias, hate or discrimination which may not be against the law. About one in three of housed respondents reported personally experiencing discrimination in the past 12 months. Among respondents experiencing homelessness, almost all have personally experienced discrimination in Salem. The top three places where people indicate discrimination is in public outdoor spaces, businesses and in healthcare settings.

The overall level of discrimination in Salem is most perceived to be “average” among housed respondents and “poor” among respondents experiencing homelessness. Of note, sub-groups with particularly low average perceptions of Salem on this question include people experiencing homelessness, women, genderqueer/non-binary, trans women, bi-racial or multi-racial, and people with a disability.

About half of housed respondents indicated they would be comfortable reporting a bias crime to the Salem Police Department, while most respondents experiencing homelessness indicated they would be uncomfortable doing so. Of note, sub-groups with particularly low average comfort levels include people experiencing homelessness, intersex, gender queer/non-binary, trans men, trans women, Indigenous Latin American, Latino/a/e, and respondents younger than 39.

Western Oregon University graduate students designed, fielded, and analyzed the Community Belonging Survey. The survey used a non-probability sampling methodology with both convenience and judgement elements. The survey was conducted during May 5 - 16, 2023, available in English and Spanish. 96 respondents experience homelessness and 478 respondents are housed members of the community.

This is the fifth survey. Year by year trend comparisons are not available due to changes in questions and sampling methodology. The Human Rights Commissions’ Community Engagement Task Force, chaired by Commissioner Lara Midkiff, closely collaborates with Western Oregon University to develop the survey. Commission members appreciate the community input shared in the survey as they examine human rights issues in Salem.

As a result of survey feedback, and of other Commission deliberations, Commission members will be examining several areas of focus for the new year:

- 1) Reporting Hate Crime to Law Enforcement: Examining structures and options for improving comfort and increasing trust with reporting hate or bias;
- 2) Sanctuary Policy: Exploring ideas for assisting indigenous Mexican/Latino/a/e and other community members to fully experience feeling safe and welcome;

3) Welcoming Spaces: Seeking solutions to decrease acts of discrimination in places of public trust, such as parks, sidewalks, medical facilities, and restaurants. This may include recommendations about publicly owned places, such as practical ideas to increase access for people with mobility

disabilities at large community events.

The Human Rights Commission continues with several ongoing priorities, such as hosting the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance which recognizes those who lost their lives due to anti-transgender violence or suicide. The Commission also continues to identify better ways of engaging the community, such as by offering educational pieces on human rights topics (see Attachment Five for example regarding Women's Equality Day). Because Commission members want to engage on human rights topics that would be helpful to City Council, Commissioners are interested to learn from City Council their perspective on:

- 1) Other identities. Are there other identities that Council is interested in considering for addition, joining the other protected classes, in Salem Revised Code Chapter 97? For example, in the last two years of the Community Belonging Survey, discrimination due to body size has risen as an issue;
- 2) Council's objective to achieve functional zero for the houseless population, defined as the point in which a community's homeless services system can prevent homelessness whenever possible and ensure that when homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief, and one-time;
- 3) Council's top diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities, and;
- 4) Other locations. In the annual belonging survey this year, the Commission added examples of specific places to learn more about locations at which people may experience bias or hate. This is seen in Attachment Three, Question Seven. Are there other locations or types of detail that City Council would like to understand more fully?

BACKGROUND:

Beginning in 1967, the Human Rights Commission works to advise City Council on human rights issues in Salem. Per Salem Revised Code Chapter 8, the Commission promotes harmonious intergroup relations, examines sources of tension, and makes policy recommendations. Per Salem Revised Code Chapter 97, the Commission receives reports of discrimination and works to assist those with concerns to access available remedies.

The Commission currently meets monthly on the second Wednesday of each month from 6 - 8 pm. The Commission also has two active task forces which also meets monthly. The LGBTQIA+ Intersectional Rights Task Force meets on the fourth Wednesday from 6 - 7 pm. The Community Engagement Task Force meets on the fourth Wednesday from 7 - 8:15 pm. All are welcome.

To report concerns of discrimination, please call 503-540-2371 or email humanrights@cityofsalem.net.

Gretchen Bennett
Homelessness Liaison/Human Rights Manager

Attachments:

1. Community Belonging Survey Executive Summary
2. Community Belonging Survey Presentation
3. Community Belonging Survey Questions
4. Open ended comments to survey
5. Women's Equality Day educational piece