

# Civil Rights Reporter

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JOURNAL OF THE TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION.



**Mission Statement**  
Our mission is to reduce discrimination in employment and housing through education and enforcement of state and federal laws.

**Vision**  
Our vision is to help create an environment in which citizens of the State of Texas may pursue and enjoy the benefits of employment and housing that are free from discrimination.

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Civil Rights Division

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Texas Workforce Commission  
101 E. 15th Street  
Austin, Texas 78778-0001

Phone Number:  
512-463-2642 or 888-452-4778  
Relay Texas:  
800-735-2989 (TTY)  
and 711 (Voice)

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CIVIL RIGHTS REPORTER

For more information or to subscribe to this newsletter, please visit: [www.twc.texas.gov/partners/civil-rights-reporter](http://www.twc.texas.gov/partners/civil-rights-reporter). Auxiliary Aids and Services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

# Strategic Partnerships

**Patrick Williams**

During my thirty years of service in the United States Army, the need for strategic partnerships played an integral role when complex and wicked problems needed to be resolved. The general concept was the more stakeholders involved in solving an issue, the more likely we would be able to successfully resolve the problem. That mindset was instrumental to the success of many of my team members and to my own triumphs whenever faced with a challenge. We decided to do the same for our current mission of ensuring fair housing for all Texans.

After three years as the Manager of Fair Housing Investigations, my team and I realized greater outreach with strategic partners was needed. In the many discussions we had regarding our challenges, we continually recognized the need for relevant stakeholders' involvement in developing solutions to these challenges. In FY 2023, TWC-CRD established a strategic partnership with the Texas Appraisal Licensing and Certification Board (TALCB) to assist with our lack of expertise with appraisal investigations. This was necessary due to a significant increase in appraisal complaints. We concluded it was imperative that our investigators attained greater knowledge of appraisals.

In September 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the Executive Director for each state agency. The partnership paid dividends immediately for both agencies. TWC immediately began receiving referrals from TALCB, and the appraisal board provided much needed training for CRD investigators. Since the MOU was approved, TWC has received approximately two dozen referrals from TALCB. The appraisal board also provides consultation on investigations and has agreed to review appraisal policies agreed to in settlement agreements.

The partnerships established with the state and local apartment associations has received positive feedback from all stakeholders. In FY 2023, CRD Housing team conducted ten outreach events to train and educate housing providers on fair housing. Outreach events will continue in FY 2024 and beyond. We learned that housing providers across the state had no knowledge TWC even had a division focused on civil rights or what our mission is. Most were unaware that CRD provides free training and education, or that they could call if they needed assistance. In some cases, members of these associations considered CRD the enemy.

In FY 2024, our primary objective is to establish a partnership with the Texas Realtor Association. This initiative is progressing well, and we are confident a partnership will be established. We will provide an update on the partnership in a later edition of the CRR. Another objective is to establish a partnership with one of the Fair Housing Incentive Programs (FHIPs) in Texas.

As resources continue to decline, the need for more partnerships at all levels will be necessary to achieve fair housing for all Americans. We hope to be a leader within the state in creating these partnerships.

## PARTNERSHIPS

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Patrice Washington

In the vein of partnerships, recently some of our Housing team attend the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) Annual conference. The objective was to promote equitable housing practices and fostering inclusive communities. The conference brought together housing professionals, policymakers, and community members to address the challenges and opportunities in ensuring fair and equal access to housing for all individuals.

The conference featured informative sessions, panel discussions and workshops that explored key topics such as affordable housing, combating discrimination and creating housing opportunities for marginalized populations. Participants gained valuable insight into innovative strategies best practices and emerging trends in the field of Fair housing.

A good take away from this conference was recognizing that collaborative efforts and proactive policies are essential for creating a society where everyone has access to safe affordable and quality housing regardless of their background or circumstances.



# Community Outreach in Housing Matters

**Nathan Capestany**  
Investigator

Civil Rights Housing Community Outreach training team, led by William “Coop” Cooper, helped break down walls and build bridges in East Texas. For one week in September, Cooper and his partner investigator, Nathan “Nate” Capestany, toured through the east Texas countryside, on a mission to educate Texans on Fair Housing. The team shared investigative insights on reasonable accommodations, reasonable modifications, Assistance Animals, and the challenges commonly voiced by complainants.

Investigator Cooper’s energetic and impassioned briefs captured the attention of over 350 housing and food industry professionals. The team projected the spirit of their past career experience in law enforcement and military operations. Housing Associations from East Texas, including New Boston, Kilgore, Tyler, Lufkin, and Longview, converged at area complexes to receive the two-hour sessions.

The team defined the problem and channeled the conversation between the rules and guidance published by HUD and DOJ. Audience members were personally engaged by the team, through out the sessions, to teach current standards while opening the floor for Executives, Managers, leasing agents, staff and maintenance personnel. The sessions were concluded with audience members sharing stories and presenting hypothetical situations, that tested the validity of their own policies. Local businesses sponsored several of the hosted venues and sent representatives to partake in the sharing and learning of fair housing information.

The Housing team has taken the first steps to increase understanding of fair housing rules and regulations in our communities. These efforts will help stave off future complaints and empower housing industry professionals to implement updated policies while teaching their staff how to ensure a non-discriminatory living and work environment for their tenants.



# They're Not Just Customers

**BRYAN SNODDY - DIVISION DIRECTOR**

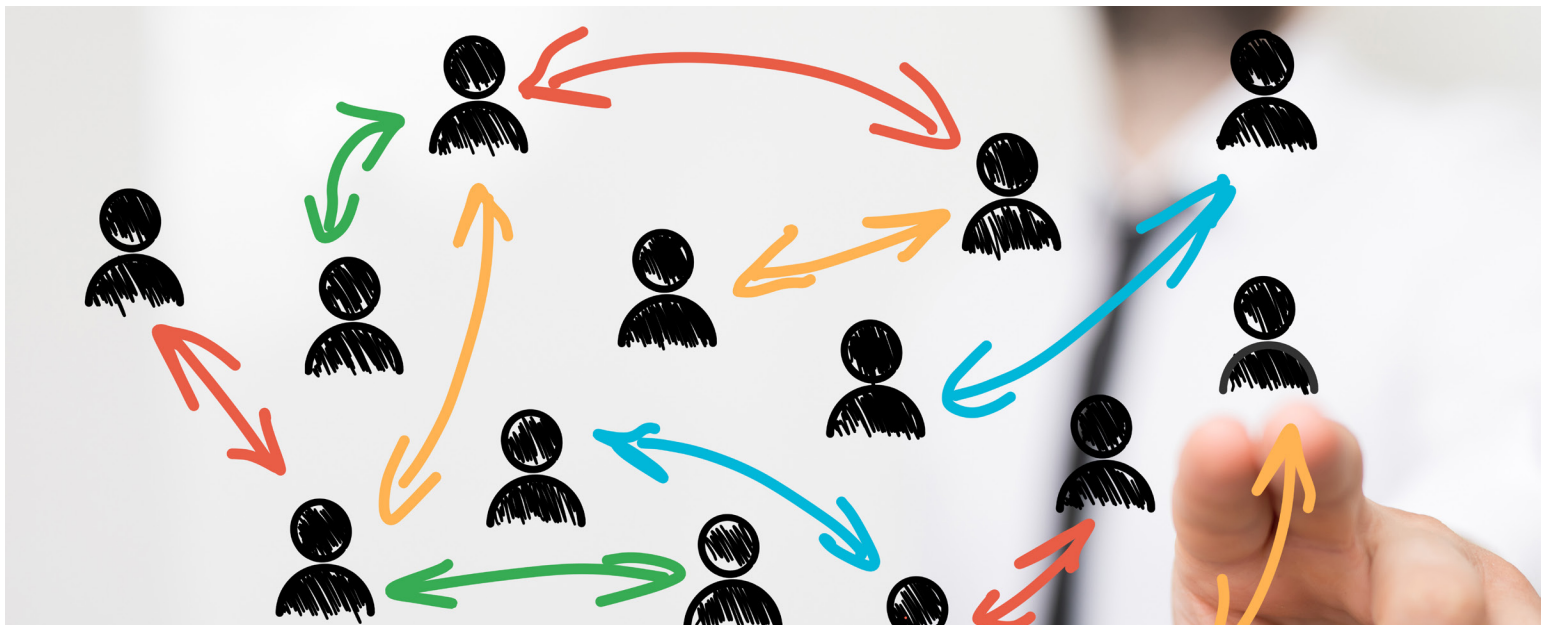
It's been a long summer of travel and making connections. The CRD Team has spent many hours traversing airports, the rental car counter (or rideshare) lines, and quite a few of the states in the nation. We have been as far east as Maryland for an EEOC conference and as far west as Nevada for an appraisal valuation expo. Through this effort, we have fostered partnerships with other fair housing organizations and civil rights units across the country. We have also been fortunate to be invited to collaborate and share with others such as mortgage brokers, appraisal associations, and many other companies and entities seeking EEO and advanced training and technical assistance.

The beauty of travel is that we can connect with others and learn from different perspectives and new experiences. For many, this bonding experience is over food and drinks. But this bond is also formed over shared experience and common struggle through the notion of intersectionality. What is this you ask?

Intersectionality is the ability to see and reveal the connections between the efforts, struggles and uniqueness of what may at first appear to be different missions and visions. But there is a very real and tangible effect and affect that each entity has on customers and other entities. Let's take the CRD's employment investigation team as an example. When the CRD performs an investigation and uncovers discrimination, this is not only an opportunity to correct a situation for a complainant, but it is also a space to aid an employer that might struggle with implementation of some aspect of personnel policy. The stabilization of employment however also ensures stability in housing. There are additional second and third order effects in creating stability in the housing market for appraisers or mortgage bankers or owners of rental units who conduct business when employees have stable employment.

The crossover extends to efforts by state and federal agencies that ensure clean drinking water, sufficient transportation pathways and basic standards of health care are available. Many of these efforts are complimentary and result in cost savings and wealth creation for both business and customers. We often don't see how doing what we do well can help achieve a more prosperous, sustaining, and bountiful society.

Now that the program year has come to conclusion for our various programs in fair housing, equal employment and EEO compliance monitoring, it is appropriate to take stock of our efforts. We are excited and proud that we were able to respond successfully to a large increase in demand for investigations and training services without impact to timeliness or customer service. But our hearts and minds always remain focused on our customers and stakeholders because they're not just our customers and stakeholders but they're Texans.



# Reasonable Accommodation Considerations

Jeffrey Riddle, Editor and Trainer

Here we are in October, which means everywhere is gearing up for Christmas already. But I want to look at this month, not the exuberant loads of candy, but that it's Disability Awareness Month. I thought I would share my "story" of an employer's responsibilities when working on a reasonable accommodations request.

I'm a small-town realtor who leases out a two-story home in downtown as my office. The home is a converted commercial property, with the first floor being the office and the second floor remaining original. The only bathrooms are on the second floor. My employee cannot easily navigate the stairs to go the bathroom due to a mobility related disability. One day that employee comes up to me and tells me that I need to install a residential elevator. This way they can use the bathroom (let's face it they probably got the idea from tik tok or IG). I cannot afford to install an elevator because of the cost and my leasing of the home. According to the law that sounds to me as an undue hardship which allows me to deny an accommodation.

This is where typical conversations on reasonable accommodations usually ends. I cannot do that, so you'll need to figure something else out. That will lead to complaints for failure to accommodate. An employer still needs to look for an accommodation that works for both. No, sorry, this does not mean having a port-a-potty placed in the (hopefully) backyard. I know this allows for a bathroom but if anyone has ever had to use one of those in the mid-day of a Texas summer knows this is a miserable option. I could have a bathroom reinstalled on the first floor, a stair chair lift installed, or give my employee breaks to go home and use the bathroom. There are plenty of options that allow me to accommodate for my employee around their disability.

The important thing to remember is the process does not end when I cannot provide what they want or ask for. I still have a responsibility to work with that employee to find an accommodation that works for all. In turn, employee's need to understand that what they want cannot always be granted. Sometimes they need to be open to other options. Remember reasonable accommodations is a process of give and take, not an all or none. A great resource to help with this process is askjan.org, the Job Accommodation Network. Here anyone can look up disabilities and accommodations by work-related function. This helps both employer and employee find the accommodation that works best for that disability.



## Civil Right Laws Update

New laws went into effect on September 1st following the 88th Legislative Session. Out of the many changes and additions, a few affected Texans within the scope of civil rights.

### The Crown Act

The Crown Act provides protection for Texans against race discrimination based on their hairstyles. This law is the same for both employment and housing, both areas the Civil Rights Division covers.

The Crown Act states that an employee or housing consumer cannot discriminate against a person due to the hairstyle or textures that are commonly or historically associated with race. The law mentions these hairstyles include braids, locks, and twist.

This law prevents the differential treatment of a person due to their hairstyle. Employers should look to dress-code standards that could run afoul of the new law. Again, the law does mention braids, locks, and twist, but as examples, which means those are not the only protected hairstyles.





## BLIND AWARENESS MONTH

# October is a busy and exciting month for the blind and vision impaired community!

This month we highlight the accomplishments and the countless ongoing efforts of people who are blind or vision impaired and living life to the fullest! The following is a brief overview of some of the different observances acknowledging blind or vision impaired folks throughout this month.

### Blind Equality Achievement Month

Blind Equality Achievement Month, formally known as Blindness Awareness Month, or Meet the Blind Month is recognized and observed throughout the month of October. This specified time serves as an opportunity to increase public awareness about blindness, vision impairments, and the challenges faced by individuals who are blind or vision impaired. Through various events, initiatives, and informational campaigns, Blind Equality Achievement Month's purpose is to promote and focus on the importance of acceptance, inclusiveness, accessibility, advancements in assistive technologies, and the on going need for continued research and support in the field of vision impairment.

Today, as societal attitudes and misconceptions continue to evolved and developments in assistive technologies and accessibility are made, the focus of what was called "Blindness Awareness Month" extends beyond simply acknowledging the challenges to celebrating the successes, skills, adaptability, and durability of those who are blind or vision impaired. Blind Equality Achievement Month serves as a source to educate the public, advocate for accessibility and social inclusion, and bring attention to the ongoing need for ongoing support, research, and equal rights for the blind and vision impaired community.

### National Blind Sports Month

The blind community is kicking off October with National Blind Sports Month, an event which initially began with a blind sports day, and has evolved into an entire month. Created by the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) to draw attention to the numerous sports and recreational activities accessible to individuals who are blind or vision impaired.



## BLIND AWARENESS MONTH

### National Braille Week

The week of October 10 through 16 is National Braille Week. National Braille Week aims to bring awareness and recognition of the importance of Braille. The Braille Code is over 200 years old and is a code created to allow blind individuals to read and be literate. This code is a key literacy tool for blind and vision impaired children. Most importantly, Braille allows blind and vision impaired individuals to remain independent and involved in their social environments, jobs, and communities.

### White Cane Safety Day

White canes were introduced in the 1930s as a tool to assist blind or vision impaired pedestrians to travel independently. This long white tool also helped motorists identify and yield to individuals using the white cane, and the use of the white cane has been protected by US federal and state laws since that time. White Cane Safety Day, October 15, was established in 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson in an effort to raise awareness of people who carry a white cane. Today, we observe and celebrate White Cane Safety Day or "White Cane Day" by participating in walks, parades, social events, field day activities, and conducting informational presentations. You may often see white cane users traveling confidently and independently throughout their communities, in airports, and in restaurants. For the blind and vision impaired community, the white cane is not just a stick, it is a symbol of blindness and a tool for independence.

### National Disability Employment Awareness Month

The unemployment rate for blind and vision impaired individuals remains at an astoundingly high 70%. Too often, blind and vision impaired individuals are passed over for employment opportunities that they qualify to fill because they cannot see. For these reasons and more, we should inform and encourage employers to observe Disability Employment Awareness Month. National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is an observance recognized and celebrated annually in October. This campaign celebrates the contributions of America's workers with disabilities past and present and showcases diverse, supportive, equal, inclusive employment policies and practices. Many Americans acknowledge NDEAM by honoring the accomplishments of those men and women with disabilities whose labor assists in keeping the economy strong and by reaffirming their commitment to guarantee equal opportunity for all citizens.

## EQUAL EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

If you didn't already know and are still reading, our training is provided at no cost to the employer. Take advantage of having our training team do the training for you.

Are you a private employer looking to develop your company on the basics of Equal Employment Opportunity or for a better understanding of how to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace? The Civil Rights Division's Training team can help. We offer numerous EEO training presentations and can tailor training to your needs. Reach out to our training team at [CRDTraining@twc.texas.gov](mailto:CRDTraining@twc.texas.gov) to discuss and schedule your training!

Our complete our form found here. <https://forms.office.com/g/2hRSC8xqVU>

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## FAIR HOUSING TRAINING

Join us on every first and third Tuesday from 10:00 - 11:00 (CST) where we discuss Fair Housing and Housing Accommodations. This is a great webinar for those interested in their rights or those that manage or own properties. Did we mention it is free!

Register Here. <https://forms.office.com/g/ZBm7gtJLjg>

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