

Human and Civil Rights Commission Annual Report

April 15, 2026



King County

Background

The King County's Human and Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) was established by the King County Council in June 2024 by Ordinance 19770 (codified at [KCC 2.31.020](#)). The HCRC is a continuation of the County's work and dedication to equity and justice, dating back to the King County Affirmative Action Committee established in 1976. In the summer of 2025, following an open application process, the County selected and appointed the inaugural HCRC members. The HCRC's mission is to strengthen anti-discrimination ordinances, support equity goals, and ensure that all County residents are treated fairly and justly. The HCRC executes this mission by recommending the implementation of policies that advance human and civil rights to the King County Executive, King County Council, and the public.

Key Duties

1. **Community Engagement:** Gathering input from historically disadvantaged groups to inform County decisions.
2. **Civil Rights Protections Reviews:** Assessing the effectiveness of current laws and recommending improvements. Recommending ways to strengthen anti-discrimination policies and address historical inequities.
3. **Impact Reviews:** Ensuring County policies and programs promote fairness and do not disproportionately harm marginalized communities.
4. **Supporting Equity Efforts:** Providing input on legislation, equity plans, and resource allocations to advance justice.

HCRC Commissioners

Name	Position	Role
Betelhem Mihael	1	Vice-Chair
Emily Huynh	2	Commissioner
Allison Hastings	3	Secretary/Historian
Jacob Joens-Poulton	4	Commissioner
Aneeka Ferrell*	5	Vacant as of January 2026*
Jennifer Karls	6	Chair
Mona Jaber	7	Co-Chair
Steven Sawyer	8	Commissioner
Daisy Wong	9	Co-Chair
Vanessa Sanchez-Mexicano	10	Commissioner
Vacant	11	Vacant

County Executive Staff Liaison: Senayet Negusse, Civil Rights Manager

Purpose of Annual Report

Beginning in 2026, in accordance with [KCC 2.31.030 \(G\)](#), the HCRC must provide an annual report to the County Executive and King County Council that shall include, but not be limited to:

1. a quantitative and qualitative summary of completed and ongoing HCRC activities as required in this chapter,
2. progress on the work program outlined in the prior calendar year annual report, and
3. a work program for the following calendar year.

On behalf of the HCRC, the Executive shall electronically file the report by April 15 of each year with the clerk of the King County Council, who shall retain an electronic copy and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers, the King County Council chief of staff, and the lead staff for the law and justice committee or its successor.

The report should be publicized widely, particularly for historically disadvantaged communities who have lacked power to influence policies for the community. Publicity methods shall include, but not be limited to:

1. the official County newspaper,

2. newspapers of general circulation within each council district,
3. King County civic television,
4. television news outlets,
5. social media platforms,
6. non-English language newspapers and periodicals distributed in the County, and
7. the County's website.

The HCRC should provide annual briefings to media and elected officials representing cities, the County, and the state to ensure that the HCRC's lessons learned and achievements are shared with the public and policy makers. ([Ord. 19770](#)).

Summary of Activities and Work Plan Progress

Time period: September 2025 – March 2026

During this reporting period, the HCRC focused on establishing the governance, operational, and procedural foundations necessary to fulfill its statutory responsibilities under the King County Code. As a newly convened HCRC, early efforts centered on developing clear structures, shared understanding of roles, and processes to support effective advisory engagement and oversight. As of March 31, 2026, the HCRC:

1. Convened its inaugural public meeting in September 2025, formally initiating the HCRC's work and establishing a regular public forum consistent with its charge.
2. Established a Bylaws Committee to draft governing documents clarifying roles, procedures, and decision-making processes. The HCRC approved bylaws in December 2025, creating a formal governance framework to guide HCRC operations.
3. Elected officers to support coordinated leadership and effective execution of its advisory responsibilities to the King County Executive and King County Council.
4. Attended the King County Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration on January 15, 2026, hosted at Seattle University's Pigott Auditorium. The event included remarks from King County Executive Zahilay, members of the King County Council, nonprofit leaders, and elected officials reflecting on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy and the history of local antiracism efforts. [BlackPast.org](#) received the Larry Gossett Service Award for its documentation of Black history in the United States and internationally.
5. Participated in a joint meeting with the King County Immigrant and Refugee Commission ([KCIRC](#)) on December 18, 2025 to strengthen coordination and information-sharing across commissions with related statutory responsibilities. Representatives from community-based organizations, including the Council on American-Islamic Relations ([CAIR](#)), Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network ([WAISN](#)), Muslim Association of Puget Sound ([MAPS](#)), International Rescue Committee ([IRC](#)), Consejo Counseling, and elected officials from City of Tukwila and 46th Legislative District, were also in attendance. The discussion included updates regarding local Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE) activity and funding challenges facing nonprofit organizations serving immigrant and refugee communities. KCIRC members recommended establishing quarterly joint meetings to support ongoing collaboration and alignment across commissions.

6. In alignment with its statutory responsibilities, in March 2026, the HCRC established two (2) standing subcommittees:
 - a. **External Engagement:** Created to support community outreach, research, public forums, and educational activities related to human and civil rights issues.
 - b. **Internal Engagement:** Created to facilitate engagement and coordination with relevant County entities to support informed recommendations from the HCRC about how to strengthen human and civil rights work in the County.
7. Participated in structured briefings and discussions to develop a clearer understanding of the King County Civil Rights Program and associated processes for investigating discrimination claims. This work supports the HCRC’s ability to provide informed recommendations about how to strengthen and position the program to be most effective.
8. Initiated a review of reports and materials related to the structure and administration of the Civil Rights Program to inform future advisory input.
9. Preliminary discussions regarding work plan development began to guide priorities for 2027.

Preamble

The HCRC is established to advance the human rights, including civil rights, of all County residents by representing the residents' interests and ensuring the principles of the [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) are applied in all the County does to achieve equity and protect County residents from discrimination.

In carrying out this mandate, the HCRC aligns its work with the County’s strategic priorities, including key elements of the “4 Bs” of Executive Girmay Zahilay’s **framework**. This includes supporting efforts for “Breaking the Cycle” of homelessness, addiction, crime, and incarceration, recognizing that these issues intersect with systemic inequities and human rights protections. The HCRC also supports initiatives focused on “**Building for Affordability**”, including increasing access to housing, childcare, and transportation, critical foundations for equitable opportunity and community stability. Consistent with the priority of “Be in the Community”, the HCRC is committed to maintaining strong connections with communities across the County, particularly those historically underserved or disproportionately impacted by discrimination. This includes engaging residents directly, supporting community-led solutions, and ensuring that lived experience informs policy recommendations and accountability. Finally, the HCRC’s work contributes to the goal of “**Better Government**” by advancing transparency, accountability, and

equitable decision-making. Through policy review, community engagement, and recommendations to County leadership, the HCRC works to ensure that County actions uphold human rights standards and deliver fair and effective services for all residents.

2026 HCRC Work Plan

Time Period: March 2026 – December 2026

The HCRC outlined the following five (5) action steps to uphold and carry out its responsibilities as defined in [KCC 2.31.030](#):

Establish Robust Community Connections

Status: In Progress

1. Build and maintain relationships with internal and external stakeholders including community partners, groups, advocates, and County departments, boards and commissions.
2. Create regular opportunities to hear directly from communities, especially those historically left out of decision-making (i.e., town halls, public forums, community meetings).

Review the Civil Rights Program

Status: In Progress

1. Identify County's programs and services aimed to support civil rights, including ADA and Section 504 compliance.
2. Conduct Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis to identify what's working well, where gaps exist, and where improvements are needed.
3. Recommend placement of Civil Rights Program functions to best serve the public.
4. Suggest updates to the Civil Rights Program scope and responsibilities based on findings from SWOT analysis.

Review Protected Classes and Recommend Legal Updates

Status: Not Started

1. Review the County's current list of protected classes in the Charter and Code.
2. If needed, recommend expanding protections to address the needs of diverse communities with lived experiences.

Review Policies and Recommend Implementation Improvements

Status: Not Started

1. Advise the executive, King County Council, and public on HCRC Issues and legislation implementation.
2. Review the effectiveness of current civil rights protections and recommend improvements.
3. Monitor how County policies impact different communities and identify inequities.
4. Provide input on legislation, plans, and resource decisions to advance fairness and justice.

Strengthen Local Partnerships to Enhance Civil Rights Law

Enforcement

Status: Not Started

1. Identify cities within the County that lack capacity to enforce civil rights laws.
2. Research interlocal agreements and explore feasibility of entering into agreements which can help ensure consistent protection across the County.