

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTION IN MINNEAPOLIS

Protection of civil rights within the City of Minneapolis can be traced back a half century, to 1946, when, by executive order, Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey established the Mayor's Fair Employment Practices Commission to assure that equal access to jobs in the City for all citizens.

In the early 1950s, the City Council enacted the Minneapolis Fair Employment Practices Ordinance, creating its own agency -- the Minneapolis Fair Employment Practices Commission. Co-existing until the mid-1950s, each agency pursued slightly different missions, though neither possessed enforcement authority. The Mayor's Fair Employment Practices Commission focused on identifying employers who openly discriminated against non-white persons and religious minorities (primarily Jews), and persuading them to cease such practice. The City Council's Fair Employment Practices Commission investigated individual complaints of discrimination based on race, religion or national organization.

In 1955, the two agencies were merged to form the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). This commission soon gained national recognition for its work. For instance, some members were chosen to serve on a special committee to advise the President of the United States on the formation of the Federal Equal Opportunity Commission under Title VII of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964. The FEPC was instrumental in achieving expansion of the Minneapolis Fair Employment Practices Ordinance, which extended the agency's authority into the areas of housing, education, public services and public accommodations.

Several years later, the development by Mayor Art Naftalin of a "Blueprint for Action" led to the passage of the State Enabling Act, which provided the FEPC with a degree of enforcement authority, and, in August 1967, the passage of the Minneapolis Civil Rights Ordinance, which created the Human Rights Commission (renamed the Commission on Civil Rights in 1975) as an advisory and adjudicative body, and the Department of Civil Rights as an administrative and investigative body.

The Minneapolis Civil Rights Ordinance was strengthened in 1974. The Executive Director of the Department of Civil Rights was given expanded powers to obtain subpoena from the District Court to aid investigations and to petition the same court for Temporary Restraining Orders (TROs) to protect complainants to provide relief for a complainant pending final disposition of a discrimination charge.

Subsequent amendments to the ordinance extended statutory civil rights protections, prohibiting discrimination in employment, labor organization membership, property rental and purchase agreements, lending, access to and use of public accommodations and public services, and membership in professional organizations. In addition, "redlining" - the practice of failing to offer access to mortgages, loans and insurance to residents of certain neighborhoods - and reprisals based on a person's association with individuals of other protected classes, filing a complaint, participating in an investigation or protesting discrimination in the workplace were made illegal. Finally, coercion regarding the exercise of real estate rights and the aiding and abetting of discrimination was proscribed.

In 1991, a new section was added providing for the registration of Domestic Partners with the Office of the City Clerk, and, in 1995, another amendment provided an option for parties to a case to voluntarily enter into mediation prior to the holding of a public hearing on the complaint.

The Minneapolis Civil Rights Ordinance enumerates human rights for all residents of the City of Minneapolis. It is one of the most comprehensive in the nation, prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, gender, age, disability, affectional preference, status with regard to public assistance, and marital status. Equally important, the ordinance establishes mechanisms for implementing and enforcing the strict anti-discrimination provisions.