

AUSTIN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Austin Human Rights Commission was formed in October of 1969. It was initially called the Community Relations Committee and the name was changed to the Human Rights Commission in 1984. The Commission is comprised of nine members appointed by the Mayor and each member serves a three year term. The current members of the Human Rights Commission are: Valentina Gallegos, John Hagen, Jeanne Poppe, Nancy Clark, Liliana Silvestry, Masuka Magambo, Stephanie Haedt, Gabe Garcia and Susan Wagner.

The Commission meets the third Wednesday of the month and community members are invited to attend the meetings.

The mission of the Austin Human Rights Commission is to encourage and support functions and programs which promote citizen awareness and provide citizen education in the area of civil and human rights, advise and make recommendations to the Mayor, the Council and other government agencies within the city of Austin on civil and human rights issues and to enlist the cooperation of other groups, governmental agencies, organizations and individuals in the community concerned with human rights. Some of the activities the Commission sponsors are; an essay contest for middle school children on a topic related to human rights, the annual Martin Luther King march and the ethnic festival. The Austin Human Rights Commission has been meeting with the Albert Lea and Owatonna Human Rights Commissions to coordinate efforts and promote regional educational goals.

The local Human Rights Commission does not have the authority to investigate complaints of human and civil rights violations but can assist in referring the person to the Minnesota Department of Human Rights which does investigate violations. The Minnesota Department of Human Rights can be contacted at 1-800-657-3704 or at their website www.humanrights.state.mn.us. The Human Rights Act addresses the following areas of protection; employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit and business. The classes or characteristics of groups of people who are offered protection under the Human Rights Act are; race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, disability, public assistance, age, sexual orientation, and familiar status, however, not each class has protection under all the areas. Persons wishing more information on the Austin Human Rights Commission can contact Trish Wiechmann the City Liaison person for the Commission at 507/437-9940 or may view additional information on the City of Austin's web page which is www.ci.austin.mn.us.