



**OPEN LETTER FROM PITTSBURGH  
HUMAN RIGHTS CITY ALLIANCE STEERING COMMITTEE  
International Human Rights Day**

December 10, 2021

Dear Mayor-Elect Gainey,

We write to you as community advocates and members of the [Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance](#) Steering Committee to congratulate you on your recent election as Mayor of Pittsburgh, after running as the candidate willing to commit the resources needed to make Pittsburgh a more livable city for everyone. We are eager to work with you to make our city one where *every resident* can reach their full human potential, and where we welcome our immigrant communities.

On this International Human Rights Day, we want to remind you of our City Council's adoption in 2011 of a [Proclamation naming Pittsburgh the Fifth Human Rights City in the United States](#). Since 2013, the Human Rights City Alliance has been working to educate city leaders and the public on the promise and obligations of human rights, encourage public officials to fulfil their commitment through policies that promote human rights, and provide public accountability through appeals to global human rights standards.

Today we also want to be sure you and your team are aware of the important new report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ["Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality"](#) (28 June 2021). Responding to appeals by families of George Floyd and other victims of police killings, the High Commissioner writes that *"There is today a momentous opportunity to achieve a turning point for racial equality and justice." World leaders are calling on governments at all levels to stop denying and start "accelerating the pace of action" to transform systemic racism.* The future we want for our city requires our next mayor to lead us in this direction with courage and conviction, and we are ready to lend our active and whole-hearted support.

As you prepare to take office, we want to lift up initiatives and analyses that have emerged from past work by City and administration officials to respond to community needs and demands. Several of these contain excellent guidance for how we can "bring human rights home" to Pittsburgh, and we are eager to work with your administration to realize this promise.

- **Racial Equity & Justice:** [Pittsburgh's Inequality across Gender and Race](#), issued by the City of Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission in 2019, was a wake-up call to city leaders to take more meaningful steps to address our city's deep and long-standing racial disparities. The Commission's April 2020 report, [Building an Equitable New Normal](#) outlines numerous policy actions awaiting action by the City.
  - In January 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the City Council declared racism a public health crisis; the County followed in May. Yet our region's Black population has suffered disproportionately during this pandemic. We encourage you to work with the County and the [Black COVID-19 Equity Coalition](#) to create a regional process to address this crisis, including meaningful substantive benchmarks and monitoring.

- The current administration established the [Welcoming Pittsburgh](#) initiative as a space where immigrant leaders can discuss concerns and policies with administrative officials. We urge you to continue this initiative.
- **Affordable, Equitable Housing:** The [Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Task Force Recommendations](#) were issued in April of 2019, following extensive work by dedicated leaders seeking to address our city's urgent housing crisis. *These recommendations have not yet been incorporated into City planning and policy.* The City must do better to meet its clear legal obligations linked to federal development funding.
  - Pittsburgh Planning Commission's [Resolution of Concern-Re: Penn Plaza](#) (May 15, 2018): Here the Commission "requested a 'framework or index to evaluate social, economic, and environmental benefit, comprehensive citywide data and trends, neighborhood profiles and ultimately neighborhood plans, a public process policy, and a housing strategy index' for their review of proposals for new development..." *No action has yet been taken on this resolution.* Penn Plaza Support and Action Coalition issued [this statement](#) on the City Planning Commission's Resolution of Concern (June 2018).

In the areas of police reform and climate, the current administration took some small steps forward, but we and others who supported your campaign know that we must see far more courageous leadership to address the immense challenges our society now faces.

- Mayor Peduto's [Community Taskforce for Police Reform](#) expresses some ideals, but it failed to lay out concrete steps to address racism and its effects on Pittsburgh's policing practices. Ending racial disparities and police violence demands that we go much further to incorporate community perspectives and [international best practices](#). The 2021 report, [Reimagining Public Safety in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County](#), outlines a strategy to fundamentally re-think how we allocate public resources to ensure *human security* in our city, starting with residents' basic needs.
- The [City of Pittsburgh Climate Action Plan 3.0](#) likewise offers some general guidance, *but it must go much further.* We need truly bold actions to meet international emissions targets for minimal warming. This will require a focus on the most polluting sectors alongside equitable and meaningful participation in decision-making by residents, maximized community control over implementation, integrated planning between programs and departments, and appropriate and accountable technology for a just transition to a low-carbon city.

These recommendations provide practical, constructive policies to repair longstanding conditions of inequity and end ongoing harms for groups that have long suffered systemic discrimination in our city. By attending to the needs of the most vulnerable, they will help build a better future for us all. We urge your administration to learn from these ideas and from the work of many dedicated people across our community as you envision Pittsburgh's future and build alliances to realize this vision. We look forward to working with you on these and other efforts to reverse long-standing disparities, improve our democracy, and make Pittsburgh most livable for all. We look forward to meeting with you and your transition team to discuss these ideas further.

Sincerely,

[Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance](#) Steering Committee members:

Marcia Bandes, [Cities for CEDAW Coalition Pittsburgh](#)  
 Brandi Fisher, President/CEO, [Alliance for Police Accountability](#)  
 Michael Goodhart, Professor of Political Science, University of Pittsburgh  
 Helen Gerhardt, [Pittsburghers for Public Transit](#)  
 Monica Ruiz, [Casa San Jose](#)  
 Jackie Smith, Professor of Sociology (Pitt) & Co-Coordinator, [Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance](#)  
 Randall Taylor [Penn Plaza Support and Action Coalition](#)  
 Jay Ting Walker, Vice-Chair, [Green Party of Allegheny County](#)