



International Human Rights Day Statement

Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance

Tuesday December 10, 9:00 AM, 5th Floor, City-County Building, 414 Grant St. PGH

As we join the world community in recognizing international human rights day, it would be easy to feel demoralized about how far we remain from realizing the vision set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 76 years ago, of a world where all people live in equal dignity and enjoy their human rights. We live in a moment when massive and growing inequality benefits a small few and leaves far too many struggling to get by. The political classes encourage us to blame each other; scapegoating and fear-mongering dominate our politics and pit neighbor against neighbor.

This is a moment for a new kind of politics. We need to build solidarity and compassion and demand real solutions to problems that the political class has created or ignored. This work begins at home. Together we can find ways to make sure that everyone has quality, stable housing. We can end hunger and poverty and remedy long-standing racial injustices in our city. Doing so requires a new set of political values that prioritizes community and the well-being of everyone, present and future.

Human rights embody those values in a simple, straightforward way that can provide the basis for the new politics we need. The political classes provide no real leadership; they preside over a system that works for them. In the absence of leadership from above, we need to lead the way in finding viable, humane, and just solutions to the urgent economic, social and environmental threats we face.

In place of the hate-filled rhetoric and fear-mongering of national politicians, we need to promote a culture of human rights that recognizes the humanity of all our neighbors. On that basis, we can work towards building a city together in which everyone can thrive and live with dignity.

The authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights understood that there is no peace without justice and no prosperity without equity. They recognized the power of human rights as a tool for social transformation. We in the Human Rights Cities Movement work to translate that global vision into a local program for transforming our own communities, working with other cities to encourage and support our elected officials in this work.

Pittsburgh's Human Rights City Alliance is committed to working with our many community partners and with city leaders to make ours a city where everyone can thrive. This requires, as a first step, rejecting divisive rhetoric and standing up for those facing threats of all kinds, including immigrants, the unhoused population, LGBTQIA+ folks, and other minoritized populations.

Today our public officials will discuss zoning changes that address the urgent problem of housing insecurity. We call on city leaders to embrace policies that center the needs of people

and communities for affordable housing, not the profit expectations of developers. Our public resources can and should be used for the good of the community, not for some abstract notion of “the economy” that is code for aiding the rich. Housing is a fundamental human right, and our leaders must do far more to make sure that everyone has a safe place to live and the support they need to obtain and maintain housing. We support Mayor Gainey’s efforts to promote inclusionary zoning and other regulations to make housing more affordable for working families, and we urge City leaders to make ending homelessness a priority. As we work toward that achievable goal, we must ensure that unhoused residents are included in the conversation and treated with dignity rather than alienated or criminalized.

As new leadership in Washington brings new challenges, we call on city officials to govern with compassion and to do everything they can to protect our vulnerable neighbors. As community leaders and activists, we are prepared to support a local government that defends human rights and puts people first. We recommit ourselves on this human rights day to the work of nurturing a culture of human rights in our city.