

MEDIA ADVISORY
**PITTSBURGH JOINS OTHER CITIES RECOGNIZING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY,
HIGHLIGHTS PERSISTENT CHALLENGE OF RACIAL INEQUITIES**

Dec 10, 2019

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Pittsburgh (PA) – December 10: The City of Pittsburgh's Commission on Human Relations, Gender Equity Commission, in cooperation with an alliance of community organizations spotlight **International Human Rights Day**. This day commemorates the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and together with people around the world, residents of this region reflect on the promises and challenges of "bringing human rights home" to all people in our community.

This theme is particularly relevant as the United States undergoes an official human rights assessment under the [United Nation's Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) process. In cooperation with the City's Commissions responsible for protecting residents' human rights, activist groups have filed an official [report to the UN on human rights](#) conditions in Pittsburgh, contributing to the world body's comprehensive **review of the United States human rights record**. This work is part of a multi-city initiative of city and community leaders in Washington DC, Chicago, Grand Rapids, New Orleans, Jackson, among other locales. Pittsburgh's coalition plans to present a detailed report on its investigations of the region's human rights conditions and policy recommendations to local officials this spring.

Pittsburgh can celebrate some important achievements in advancing human rights—including local legislation making Pittsburgh the 5th US Human Rights City (2011) and the 6th US city to adopt (in 2016) the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The City's [Gender Equity Commission](#) is currently conducting a [city-wide Gender Analysis](#) that will include the recent analysis, "[Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race.](#)" along with data and assessments from its *Community Engagement Plan for 2020*. A Five-Year Gender Equity Plan will outline steps to enhance gender and racial equity in the City's operations. The Commission's work points to long-standing and inter-connected racial, gender, and social class disparities as key obstacles to the realization of human rights in Pittsburgh. Some key findings in these two reports include:

- National policies have fueled racial animosities, exacerbating discrimination and conflict and obstructing local work to defend human rights and remedy inequalities. Pittsburgh's immigrant and refugee communities are most affected, with especially worrisome impacts on children and other vulnerable groups.
- Recent data shows a lack of housing choice for low-income residents. Pittsburgh continues to struggle with its affordable housing stock, leaving many Section 8 voucher holders with little to no housing options, especially in neighborhoods of their choosing. Today, Black residents are displaced at an estimated rate of 3 per day.¹ Despite a deficit of nearly 20,000 affordable units, since 2016, Pittsburgh has seen a net loss of affordable housing. Yet, local policies have privileged investors and higher-income residents over long-time residents and vulnerable populations.
- The region's lack of protections for tenant rights contributes to residents' inability to realize their **human right to housing**. In 2018, 14,181 eviction court actions were filed by Allegheny County landlords—the highest figure in a decade. The county saw 40,000 eviction filings from 2014 to 2016. Tenants facing eviction are not provided with legal counsel and lose 98% of all County

filings.² Low-income women of color, women with children, and victims of domestic violence are most likely to face eviction.³

- Housing insecurity is a major factor perpetuating poverty, bringing the greatest harm to our most vulnerable residents. In Pittsburgh 45% of black children live in poverty, compared to 8.7% of white children.⁴
- Racial and gender inequities undermine the **human right to health**. A recent study⁵ revealed a 22 year life expectancy differential between the largely Black Larimer neighborhood and Highland Park, which is predominantly White. Infant mortality rate for Pittsburgh’s Black babies is double that of White babies. Structural racism is indeed a public health crisis.
- Despite international recognition of the **human right to “a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being,”** Black residents face unemployment rates far higher than White residents (16% vs. 6%), and around four times the national average.⁶ Practices of the city’s leading—and tax-subsidized—industries (higher education, medicine, and technology) have exacerbated racial inequities through well-documented patterns of inequitable employment and educational opportunities for Black residents.⁷
- Despite international recognition of the **human right to clean water**, water pollution and lead contamination of Pittsburgh drinking water is a huge crisis, and it disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable groups.

In cooperation with leaders in other cities, we are working to mobilize international pressure through the United Nations to support national policies that enable cities to implement effectively their international human rights obligations. For instance, local leaders point to cuts in federal social welfare budgets as a key impediment to efforts to remedy inequities and protect human rights, and national immigration policies contribute to violence and discrimination in local communities.

This year’s United Nations review of the US human rights record has brought local human rights leaders and city officials together in new ways, and the coming year will see expanded cross-city collaboration to identify best practices and models for overcoming persistent challenges. Pittsburgh’s newly established Gender Equity Commission and Commission on Human Relations are working with residents to find creative solutions and build a broad constituency prepared to help “bring human rights home” to our region.

Human rights must be the foundation for all levels of government. We are proud to stand with our brothers and sisters worldwide to reaffirm our commitment to these values as we continue to work together to promote human rights learning and transform our city into a place where all residents can enjoy these rights. Human rights begin at home, right here in this Human Rights City of Pittsburgh!

***UPR Task Force participants include:** *Alliance for Police Accountability, Casa San Jose, Green Party of Allegheny County, Hill District Consensus Group, Pittsburghers for Public Transit, Pittsburgh for CEDAW, Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance, Just Harvest, Urbankind Institute, and others.*

Notes

¹<https://ncrc.org/gentrification/>

²<https://www.post-gazette.com/news/state/2019/05/14/shorten-eviction-process-legislation-Pennsylvania-greg-rothman-landlords/stories/201905140116>

³<https://www.colorlines.com/articles/study-women-color-living-poverty-face-highest-risk-eviction>

⁴<https://www.wesa.fm/post/city-council-hears-experts-how-address-racial-inequality#stream/0>

⁵ *Live Longer: Empowering and Engaging Pittsburgh Communities*, Pitt Public Health Center for Health Equity and The Community Empowerment Association, March 2019.

⁶ <https://projects.publicsource.org/pittsburgh-race/data.html>

⁷ See, e.g., [Is This for Everyone? Qs About Amazon’s HQ2](#), Urbankind Institute.