

Tennessee Civil Rights Advisory Committee

Chair's Corner

Katherine Brewer, compliance coordinator/state resource inventory coordinator, Nashville

As the new chair of the Tennessee Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC), I would like to first welcome our newest members, which include Kristen Stigger and Steven Morris who are joining us as associate members, as well as Vivica Miller as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning, Emily Leonard, emphasis program manager, as the women's program manager, and M. Cody Brown as the American Indian/Alaska native emphasis program manager. I want to thank those willing to serve and encourage anyone else out there interested in joining the committee to let a current member know so that we can make you aware of upcoming opportunities.

During our first quarter meeting we discussed our goals for fiscal year 2022. We began by laying the groundwork to finalize the state's new Affirmative Employment Program Plan and the committee's business plan. Our goals for this year include developing a program to pair Pathway's summer interns with affordable housing options, adapting our recruitment efforts to current conditions (COVID restrictions, direct hire opportunities, etc.), and monitoring employee and customer demographics. The Affirmative Employment Program Plan is a new approach for us, and we are excited that it will provide us with a more streamlined approach for monitoring our workforce parity and setting goals for areas where we want to improve.

It has been a busy first quarter not only with preparing for the new fiscal year but also for our Special Emphasis Program observances. Already this year we've had Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept 15 – Oct 15), Disability Employment Awareness Month (October), American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month (November), and Veteran's Day (November 11). Even though we are all busy, I would like to encourage everyone to take a little time to check out the materials provided by our Special Emphasis Program managers as they are released. These observances provide us with the unique opportunity to learn about another community's experience and contributions. This knowledge is invaluable as it allows us to broaden our own perspectives which can improve our understanding of each other.

While we can all personally benefit from a deeper understand of civil rights, keep in mind that it is also part of your job. As you may have noted when signing your most recent performance plan, we are all required to act in accordance with the USDA civil rights statement and all related laws, regulations, and policies related to anti-discrimination. If there are resources, you need from the CRAC to help you be successful in this area or if you would just like to be more involved in civil rights, please reach out to us. For more news from the CRAC, check out the quarterly Tennessee civil rights newsletter.

Happy holidays and I hope to hear from you in the new year!