

The Commission is authorized to make such surveys and studies concerning human relations, conditions, and problems as it may determine, and to promote in every possible way the betterment of human and community relations. The agency also is responsible for submitting legislative recommendations to the Governor, and overseeing compliance with the Code of Fair Practices as promulgated by the Governor.

The 1974 General Assembly made major amendments to the law. By Chapter 848, Acts of 1974, discrimination in housing on the basis of marital status and sex is prohibited, and exceptions are provided with respect to the application of certain provisions in the Discrimination in Housing subtitle. By Chapter 601, Acts of 1974, it is unlawful for persons and organizations to discriminate in certain employment practices against mentally and/or physically handicapped people. The same law prohibits certain discriminatory activities against the physically or mentally handicapped in housing or obtaining loans on dwellings. A parallel act prohibits discriminatory activities in public accommodations, employment, and housing because of marital status or physical or mental handicaps (Chapter 875, Acts of 1974).

By Chapter 419, Acts of 1975, the Commission may seek injunctive relief if it believes that such action is necessary to preserve the status of the parties or to prevent irreparable harm.

Chapter 333, Acts of 1975, provides that it is not an unlawful employment practice for an employer to establish standards concerning an employee's dress and grooming if the standards are directly related to the nature of the employment.

By Chapters 937, 907, and 706, Acts of 1977, a number of important changes in the law were enacted. The law authorizes the appointment of hearing examiners to hear cases under the Human Relations law, and provides for an appeal from the decisions of the hearing examiner to the Commissioners. This new legislation also expanded the Commission's power to order appropriate relief for victims of discrimination by authorizing it to award monetary relief, limited to two years back pay.

In addition to these changes in Commission structure, procedures, and authority, by Chapter 907, Acts of 1977, employers are required to treat disabilities caused or contributed to by pregnancy or childbirth in the same manner as they treat other disabilities.

By Chapter 684, Acts of 1978, the Commission was given jurisdiction over sex and age discrimination in public accommodations. Chapter 629, Acts of 1978, made it an unlawful housing practice to refuse to consider both incomes of husband and wife who seek to buy or lease a dwelling; to refuse to consider alimony or child support as a valid source of income; and to request information about birth control devices in evaluating any prospective buyer or lessee of a dwelling.

In 1980 the General Assembly made it unlawful to aid and abet in violation of Article 49B, or to obstruct the Commission from enforcing the provision of the law (Chapter 505, Acts of 1980).

By Chapter 291, Acts of 1981, the standard for judicial review of cases before the Commission was made the same as that for all other agencies under the Administrative Procedures Act. A second 1981 act authorized a panel of Commission members to serve as an appeal board for review of hearing examiners' decisions (Chapter 336, Acts of 1981). A third law mandated that the Commission forward to the Real Estate Commission complaints of housing discrimination lodged against a real estate agent or broker, when probable cause is found (Chapter 356, Acts of 1981).

In 1982 the General Assembly provided the right of appeal from a Commission finding of no probable cause (Chapter 129, Acts of 1982). Under certain circumstances, a complainant may make such appeal to a Circuit Court. In the same year, the Legislature did away with discrimination against women in the application of employee pregnancy or childbirth disability benefits. This was accomplished by Chapter 271, Acts of 1982, which removes the opportunity for an employer or impose a maximum time limit in which normal pregnancy or childbirth benefits must be paid.

Efforts in Fair Employment Practices are supplemented by a deferral relationship and funding as provided by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Similarly, the Commission's efforts in fair housing are funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through Cooperative Agreements which fund case processing as well as community education activities.

The Commission reports annually to the Governor and General Assembly (Code 1957, Art. 49B).