



City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission

2025 Annual Report



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Letter from the 2025 Chair

To the Mayor, City Council, and Residents of the City of Binghamton:

On behalf of the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission, I am pleased to present our 2025 Annual Report. This year marked an important milestone for the Commission, as 2025 represented our first year of operation following its reactivation through a 2024 amendment to the City Charter.

The Commission is grateful for the trust placed in us by the residents of Binghamton and for the opportunity to serve in a role that reflects the City's commitment to dignity, inclusion, and equal opportunity for all. It has been an honor to work alongside a dedicated group of Commissioners who stepped forward with a shared belief that human rights work is essential to the well-being, vitality, and unity of our community. Each of my colleagues brings valuable life experience, professional insight, and a deep love for Binghamton and all that the Valley of Opportunity represents.

As with any newly reestablished body, 2025 served as an important on-ramp year. Much of our work necessarily focused on foundational administrative efforts: establishing internal processes, developing organizational structure, clarifying responsibilities, and ensuring that the Commission is positioned to operate effectively and sustainably moving forward.

While this meant that our outward-facing work was not as extensive as we hope it will be in future years, the Commission made meaningful progress in building the framework required for long-term impact.

This report reflects both the Commission's early work and the foundation laid for future initiatives. We are entering 2026 with momentum, clearer direction, and a strengthened ability to engage the public, advise City leadership, and support efforts that advance fairness and human rights across Binghamton.

Thank you to the City administration, City Council, City Clerk's Office, and community partners who supported the Commission during this formative year. Most importantly, thank you to the residents of Binghamton for your continued engagement and commitment to a city where all people are treated with respect and equity.

Respectfully,



John R. Brunza
Chair, City of Binghamton Human Rights
Commission (2025)

Purpose

City Charter Chapter 45A establishes the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission (hereafter the HRC, or the Commission). Pursuant to Chapter 45A-21, the purpose of the Commission is to condemn discrimination in all its forms, to educate the public, and to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against people as set forth in Chapter 45, Binghamton Human Rights Law, veteran status, or criminal conviction to the extent provided by Correction Law §752.

Land Acknowledgement

The City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission acknowledges that the land politically designated as the City of Binghamton sits on the ancestral land of the Oneida and Onondaga Peoples.

2025

Commissioners

Appointments

- Hussein Adams (January 2025)
- John Brunza (January 2025, 2025 Chair)
- Jason Davis (December 2025)
- Richard Lewis (June 2025)
- Kinya Middleton (January 2025, City Council ex officio)
- Christopher Scott (January 2025)
- Stephanie Wright (December 2025)
- Denise Yull (January 2025, 2025 Secretary)

Resignations

- Jason Davis (Effective December 2025)
- Christopher Scott (Effective December 2025)

Completed terms

- Kinya Middleton (January 2026, City Council ex officio)

2026

Commissioners

As of February 2026



Hussein Adams
Executive Director,
American Civic
Association



John Brunza
2026 Secretary;
Investigator, Federal
Public Defender's Office,
Pennsylvania's Middle
District



Stephen Comency
Customer Relations
Specialist, AVRE, INC.



Nate Hotchkiss
City Council ex officio;
Council Member, 4th
District, City of
Binghamton



Richard Lewis
Special
Counsel, Hinman,
Howard & Kattell



Stephanie Wright
2026 Chair; Program
Associate,
Auschwitz Institute for
the Prevention of
Genocide and Mass
Atrocities



Denise Yull
Department Chair and
Associate Professor of
Human Development,
Binghamton University;
Acting CEO, CARES

Meeting Schedule

Meeting Date	Meeting Status	Members Present
February 20, 2025	Met as scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Adams • John Brunza • Nate Hotchkiss • Christopher Scott • Denise Yull
March 6, 2025	Canceled due to quorum	N/A
March 13, 2025	Met as scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Adams • John Brunza • Nate Hotchkiss • Christopher Scott • Denise Yull
March 20, 2025	Canceled due to quorum	N/A
May 1, 2025	Canceled due to quorum	N/A
June 12, 2025	Canceled due to quorum	N/A
July 10, 2025	Canceled due to quorum	N/A

Meeting Date	Meeting Status	Members Present
July 31, 2025	Met as scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Adams • John Brunza • Nate Hotchkiss • Richard Lewis • Denise Yull
August 14, 2025	Met as scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Adams • John Brunza • Nate Hotchkiss • Denise Yull
September 25, 2025	Canceled due to quorum	N/A
October 9, 2025	Met as scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Adams • John Brunza • Richard Lewis • Denise Yull
November 13, 2025	Met as scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Brunza • Richard Lewis • Denise Yull
December 11, 2025	Met as scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hussein Adams • John Brunza • Jason Davis • Stephanie Wright

Activities

Following the reactivation of the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission in 2024, 2025 marked the first year of activity of the HRC since 2016. In its first year of operation, the Commission has devoted its efforts to revising its bylaws, updating and professionalizing its intake processes, and identifying community-responsive priorities for proactive advocacy.

1. Governance and Internal Administration

Elections

As a first order of business and to begin to establish a Commission hierarchy through which administrative actions are delegated, the Commission conducted elections in February 2025. John Brunza was unanimously elected to the role of Chair and Denise Yull to the role of Secretary.

Bylaws and Parliamentary Procedures

Throughout 2025, the Commission conducted a thorough review of the founding bylaws and made several changes, updates, and amendments in order to streamline how the Commission operates, clarify roles and advocacy approaches, and create sounder ethical guidelines around conflicts of interest and confidentiality. The alterations and additions made to the bylaws were conducted in consultation with Binghamton's Corporation Counsel. A summary of these changes is below:

- Added Article IV Meetings, p. 6: Parliamentary Procedure, which stipulates that meetings are run in accordance to Roberts Rules of Order per guidance from the Corporation Counsel. These are a standard set of guiding principles for structuring open meetings.
- Clarified in Article IV that quorum is defined as a majority of appointed members.
- Added under Article VI: Intake Officer rotation, that incoming complaints are reviewed on a rotating basis of commissioners each month to ensure an evenly distributed workload. This article also outlines an intake procedure for the officer when reviewing complaints.
- Article VII: Complaint Intake and Review expands on the duties of the individual intake officer covered under Article VI by outlining the review process for the broader Commission.
- Article VIII: Mediation and Conciliation gives the Commission the ability to attempt mediation and conciliation between the complainant and the person they are alleging discrimination before the matter is referred to the NYSDHR.
- Amended Article IX: Referral to State Agencies to include the ability to refer complainants to other local, state, federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations, not solely the NYS Division of Human Rights.
- Article XI: Proactive or Unsolicited Advocacy, p. 7: Representation and Spokesperson Authority adopts the "one voice" model, designating the elected Chair as the Commission's sole spokesperson, unless another commissioner is voted to represent the Commission at an event.
- Added Article XIII: Ethics, Conflicts of Interest, and Confidentiality, which gives complainants the right to confidentiality and provides Commissioners the ability to recuse themselves from a complaint in the event of a conflict of interest.

Complaint process

An important activity of the 2025 calendar year was establishing a thorough and professional complaint process through which complainants feel supported and heard. Currently, the public can submit complaints by emailing our official email address. In order to streamline the complaint process, including to ensure that we are collecting all of the relevant and necessary information from the complainant, we began drafting an official form for complaints which we plan to make available digitally as well as in physical form at the City Clerk's office.

The complaint process established, as outlined in our bylaws, provides for a monthly rotating intake officer who is responsible for:

- 1 Reviewing complaints
- 2 Making initial contact with the complainant
- 3 Assessing whether the complaint falls under the HRC's jurisdiction
- 4 Keeping record of the complaints and actions taken during their month
- 5 Reporting out to the broader Commission on the complaints received during their rotation

Communications

In collaboration with the City Clerk's office, the Commission was able to have an official email for professional correspondence set up, hrc@cityofbinghamton.gov. Commissioners do not have direct access to the email account per city guidelines; however, the City Clerk's office is able to forward email received to this inbox to the Commissioners through their personal emails.

To combat our visibility challenges, the Commission established social media accounts to share relevant information on human rights issues in the Binghamton community, as well as to share the work of the Commission with a wider audience. The Commission created an Instagram (@bing_hrc) and a Facebook account (<https://www.facebook.com/binghrc>).

As a first campaign, the Commission began publishing a series of posts titled "Meet Your Commissioner," which are designed to introduce the Commission's members to the public. Each post displays a carousel of photos of the featured Commissioner accompanied by background information on their profession, hobbies, and what serving on the Human Rights Commission means to them.

The Commission also identified a need for the development of a logo unique to the Commission that aligns with but is distinct from other City of Binghamton branding. This is also essential for visibility purposes, so the public can easily identify Commissioners at public events as well as official statements released by the HRC. With the support of the City Clerk and Binghamton's IT department, we approved the logo present on this report. While the coloring and general design align with other official City logos, the addition of the balanced scales of justice symbolize our commitment to human rights, dignity, and equality under the law.

Lastly, the Commission designated the Chair as the primary public-facing spokesperson who represents the HRC at events and press conferences. The Chair is the only member authorized to speak officially and publicly on behalf of the HRC. The Commission has, however, implemented internal processes to ensure that when the Chair or another approved Commissioner speaks on behalf of the HRC they are aligning with the Commission's mission and values, representative of the Commission as a whole and not the individual member's views.

Best Practices and Training

The Commission engaged in efforts to research and implement best practices, seeking out a range of guidance from Binghamton's own Corporation Counsel to other New York cities' Human Rights Commissions, and at the state-level the Division of Human Rights. Outreach to other HRCs based in New York State has proved challenging, with few responses to outreach efforts, but a revamped NYSDHR under new leadership has helped facilitate the growth of Binghamton's Human Rights Commission.

Locally, Corporation Counsel provided training materials to the HRC on open meeting structure, which the Commissioners reviewed and implemented in our meetings.

Recognizing the need for more robust training on state-level human rights law, the Commission reached out to the NYSDHR for guidance on what trainings are available to Human Rights Commissions. We were able to welcome Megan Ginsburg from NYSDHR via Zoom to one of our monthly meetings, who provided an overview of New York State discrimination laws, protected classes, and investigative processes.



The logo for the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission. Developing a logo and branding has assisted with our visibility efforts, including on statements and press releases.

2. Priority Areas

To fulfill the Commission's purpose of educating the public on human rights protections (Article XI, p. 2a) and to conduct educational initiatives to raise awareness of discrimination (Article XII, p. 2), we have identified three primary priority areas: housing discrimination and unfair housing practices, hate speech, and immigrant protections.

Housing Discrimination and Unfair Housing Practices

Housing discrimination and other unfair housing practices has been repeatedly brought up as a pressing issue in the Binghamton community. Not only are there a number of blighted properties and a dearth of affordable housing, but Binghamton residents who rent, whether those who live here year round or students who are only renting for the school year, can encounter unfair housing practices or even outright discrimination.

Priority areas identified by the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission

- Housing discrimination and unfair housing practices
- Hate speech
- Immigrant protections

To combat some of these practices, the City of Binghamton passed Good Cause Eviction in early 2025. While this strengthened tenant protections, there is still much work to be done in the Binghamton community to ensure safe and affordable housing for all residents. However, due to quorum issues and capacity, this has remained our least studied and acted upon priority area. Because of this, we plan to strengthen our engagement on fair and affordable housing practices in 2026.

Hate Speech

In September, the Commission received a report that swastikas were graffitied on the Southside Commons. The Commission strongly condemns this deplorable and very public antisemitic act. Following the release of a statement condemning this act, the Commission received a few more reports on other types of hate speech and symbols being graffitied on public property and other areas. From this, the Commission has identified a need for hate speech in the Binghamton community to be studied and tracked more systematically. As a result, the Commission made steps to become a repository for hate speech and other hateful symbols and established contact with Binghamton Police Department to report such matters to the Commission. This will allow us to study patterns of hateful graffiti and raise awareness among the public in order to foster social cohesion and decrease the identity-based tensions that hate speech seeks to heighten.

Immigrant Protections

The City of Binghamton is proud to call itself home to a diverse population. According to July 2024 population estimates from the Census Bureau, approximately 10.6% of our city's population come from other countries, indicative of the support and care our city provides to individuals seeking a better life for themselves and their families. It is with increasing concern that the Commission has watched the events of 2025 unfold, and with alarm that the Commission noted the Broome County Sheriff's Office's opting into the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) 287(g) program. The intensification of the crackdown on immigration throughout 2025, and bearing witness to the impacts on our immigrant population, has raised the importance of immigrant protections to the forefront of our advocacy efforts. The Commission supported City Council's Resolution Resolution R25-73, which prohibits the use of city funds, resources, and personnel for federal immigration purposes, including collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and we made plans to release our own statement on ICE in January 2026.

3. Complaints

In the 2025 calendar year, the Commission received a total two complaints.

Complaint 1

Month received: March 2025

Nature of the complaint: alleged discriminatory police targeting

Resolution status: Resolved; determined to not meet discrimination criteria. No formal complaint was filed, and the individual was referred to relevant local agencies for support.

Month resolved: March 2025

Complaint 2

Month received: December 2025

Nature of the complaint: alleged unfair eviction
Resolution status: Resolved; property was located outside of the Commission's jurisdiction. No formal complaint was filed, and the individual was referred to local organizations for support and the New York State Attorney General's Residential Tenants' Rights Guide.

Month resolved: January 2026

4. Special Meetings and Events

Meeting with NYSDHR

On December 10, three Commissioners met with representatives from the New York State Division of Human Rights (NYSDHR). The purpose of the meeting was to strengthen relationships between the NYSDHR and other Human Rights Commissions around the state, as well as to strengthen communication between HRCs. NYSDHR provided an overview of the different trainings they have available, as well as offered to share promotional materials with us. They offered to come speak at local events, or to arrange locally-based trainings on any of the available topics.

City Council Press Conference on Resolution R25-73

On December 15, the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission was proud to be in attendance to support the announcement of the City Council's resolution prohibiting city resources from being used in civil immigration efforts.



City Council votes to reappoint the seat appointments for the Human Rights Commission in November 2024.

5. Statements

On October 14, the Commission released their first statement on local human rights issues. The statement addressed the painting of swastikas in the Southside Commons following receipt of a report from Councilmember Mativetsky. The statement condemned the act as antisemitic, as well as reinforced the Commission's stance against all forms of discrimination and bigotry. The statement also urged the public to contact us regarding any concerns in order to help us build a community built on mutual respect, dignity, and justice for all.

Commissioners Hussein Adams, John Brunza (2025 Chair), and Stephanie Wright attended the December 15 press conference on Resolution R25-73, led by Councilmember Rebecca Rathmell. City Council unanimously passed the resolution two days later.



Challenges and Opportunities



Challenges in the first year of operation are to be expected, but the Commissioners have met each new operational challenge head on, motivated by our belief in the Commission's importance in protecting and raising awareness of human rights-related issues in the Binghamton community. The three primary challenges experienced in 2025 relate to reaching quorum, visibility, and budget.

Quorum

While essential to ensuring Commission decisions are made based on a consensus among Commissioners, meeting quorum proved challenging in the first year of operation. Six meetings were either adjourned with no official business conducted, cancelled, or rescheduled. Until the July 2025 meeting, only the four City Council appointments were filled, which meant that three members were required to attend in order for a meeting to meet quorum. Five of the six meeting cancellations took place prior to the Commission's fifth appointment, and first mayoral appointment. Three members were still required to meet quorum requirements, but it became easier to schedule meetings with more people available.

Visibility

Many of our proactive advocacy efforts were delayed while we made efforts to improve our visibility and public profile. Improving visibility and awareness of the Commission has also helped increase recognition of the Commission as a recourse for discrimination complaints. Before we were able to productively engage with local organizations and on local issues, we needed to ensure we had a thorough, professional, and confidential process by which Binghamton residents are able to submit complaints, as well as consistent branding to identify City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission resources. With updated bylaws, a public-facing complaint form, social media, and our own logo, we are set up for more robust public outreach in 2026.

Budget

The lack of a budget constrains the actions we are able to take to fulfill our purpose and listed duties. Throughout 2025, we discussed the possibility of organizing listening sessions and conversations with subject matter experts, but ultimately we would not be able to provide them with an honorarium for their time or provide light refreshments for the attendees. Budgetary constraints have also hampered our visibility efforts, as we have wanted to purchase branded lanyards or other identifying markers for press conferences and other events, but the Commissioners would have to pay for these personally. We have made exploring grant opportunities and other funding options a priority for 2026.

Letter from the 2026 Chair

Dear Mayor, City Council, and City of Binghamton Residents,

I am proud and humbled to be selected as the Chair of the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission for the 2026 calendar year. It's been an honor to work alongside my fellow Commissioners to serve the residents of the City of Binghamton, and I look forward to continuing this work as Chair.

Each of the activities outlined in this report have served an important strategic purpose, laying an essential foundation for which we can hereafter progress the purpose and fulfill the duties of the Commission: to condemn discrimination, to alleviate any tensions and conflict among community members, and to foster mutual understanding and respect among the valued and diverse groups who make Binghamton a community.

I deeply believe in the value the Commission brings to Binghamton. By being locally established and based, the Commission has the power to meet the unique needs of our city by addressing community-responsive issues.

Building on the work the Commission conducted in 2025 to update and professionalize our bylaws based on expert advice and best practices, to streamline our complaint process to help residents feel supported, protected, and heard, and to identify priority areas for educational and advocacy focus, the Commission is well-positioned to expand our community impact in the coming year.

In 2026, I look forward to furthering the important role that the Commission has to play in Binghamton: protecting the human rights of each of the city's residents, and meeting the City's commitment to dignity, inclusion, and respect for all. At the core of this work is the belief that human rights must be actively protected and meaningfully promoted by remaining attentive to the lived experiences of our community members. With increased community visibility from our 2025 outreach efforts, I look forward to expanding our local partnerships to both build on the great work already being done, and identify new areas that could benefit from our attention.

On behalf of my fellow Commissioners, the City of Binghamton Human Rights Commission is grateful for the trust placed in us by the City administration, City Council, and Binghamton residents to meet these goals.

Respectfully,



Stephanie Wright
Chair, City of Binghamton Human Rights
Commission (2026)



BINGHAMTON
Human Rights Commission