



**EQUAL
RIGHTS**
COMMISSION

City of Milwaukee

Equal Rights Commission

2025 Annual Report

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Mission of the Equal Rights Commission

The mission of the ERC is to promote and protect equality, equity and human rights through education, enforcement and community engagement.



About the ERC

Citizen-led commission focused on equity and civil rights issues in city government and in the city as a whole

Eleven members, appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the common council to three-year terms

Independent of the administration, staffed by a city employee from the Department of Equity and Inclusion

Standing Committees:
Governance, Communication

Ad Hoc Committees: Complaints,
International Human Rights Day



Who is the ERC?

Tony Snell Rodriguez, Chair
Nathan Guequierre, Vice-Chair
Jacqueline Cook, former Vice-Chair
William Crowley
Jessica Boling
Paul Smith
Elle Halo
Alexandria Staubach
Rae Johnson

Mary Reed, Chief Equity Officer
Omar Barberena, Equal Rights Specialist
Ramona Ramos, Equal Rights Complaints Liaison
Bernadette Karanja, former Chief Equity Officer

2025 Accomplishment: Commission Build Out

Chapter 109 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances establishes and details the city's civil rights law. The ERC is comprised of 11 members. At the start of 2024, the Commission had five active members. Filling the vacant seats was a priority for the past two years, to bring a deeper set of skills and experience to the Commission and to more broadly represent the city's diverse residents, workers, and visitors.



Four new members joined the commission in 2024 and 2025:

- Paul Smith
- Elle Halo
- Rae Johnson (resigned 2025)
- Alexandria Staubach



2025 Accomplishment: Staff Build Out

City positions supporting the work of the ERC had seen considerable turnover since the pandemic. In 2024 and 2025, vacant positions were filled thanks to the efforts of the city's Chief Equity Officer.

Fully staffed for the first time in years, the ERC is poised to leverage staff expertise to better address issues of equity and civil rights in the city.



The ERC's support staff now includes:

- Omar Barberena, Equal Rights Specialist
- Ramona Ramos, Equal Rights Complaints Liaison

These key staff members report to Mary Reed, Chief Equity Officer and leader of the Department of Equity and Inclusion

2025 Accomplishment: Civil Rights Complaint Process

The ERC is charged with monitoring, investigating, and in some cases adjudicating civil rights complaints lodged in the city of Milwaukee.

For several years, the ERC has been working with DOA and DEI staff, the City Attorney's office, and community members to standardize and formalize the complaints process.

A final set of policies and procedures was finalized in 2025.



The city's Civil Rights Complaints Liaison worked with ERC and city technical experts to develop a complaints intake and evaluation system.

- Confidential, multilingual online civil rights complaint form
- Allows tracking of complaints and referral to other agencies as appropriate





2025 Accomplishment: International Human Rights Day



City staff and the ERC worked with community partners to organize the city's 8th annual International Human Rights Day celebration in December 2025.

Held at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, the event brought together **63** attendees to celebrate accomplishments in civil rights and to highlight ongoing issues and threats.

The event included thoughtfully designed programming such as panel discussions and public Q&A, creating space for dialogue, reflection, and collective learning around democracy, human rights, and equity in Milwaukee and beyond.



2025 Accomplishment: Public Hearings

The ERC held 12 full commission meetings and organized two formal public hearings in 2025 to discuss civil rights issues of importance to city residents.

ERC hearings provide a valuable forum for community members to make their voices heard in city government and are used to set the ERC's agenda so that the Commission can be responsive to community priorities.



Facial recognition technology. To foster informed public dialogue around civil liberties, accountability, technology, and real-world impacts on marginalized communities. The hearing culminated with the passage of a resolution.

Transgender violence and protections. To center lived experiences and reinforce the Commission's commitment to safety, dignity, and equal protection under the law.



2025 Accomplishment: Events and Outreach

The ERC tabled at events throughout the city to engage and educate residents on city efforts to protect civil rights.

Community events, including **PrideFest**, **Juneteenth**, **Bronzeville Cultural & Arts Festival**, **Mexican Fiesta**, **Silver City Festival (VIA-CDC)**, **Puerto Rican Festival of Wisconsin**, **Milwaukee Hmong New Year** and other neighborhood and cultural gatherings throughout the year.

In 2025, the ERC participated in a celebration of the **35th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act** in partnership with Independence First, the City of Milwaukee, and Visit Milwaukee. This work highlighted advancements such as sensory rooms, adult changing tables, and assistive technologies, and included continued collaboration with the Department of Public Works to ensure ongoing support for adaptive bikes within the city's bike share program.



Civil Rights Complaint Summary 2025

Total Complaints in 2025: 45

Top 3 types of Complaints

Employment	19
Housing	13
Public Accommodations	10

Top Bases for Discrimination

Disability	20%
Race	19%
Color	10%

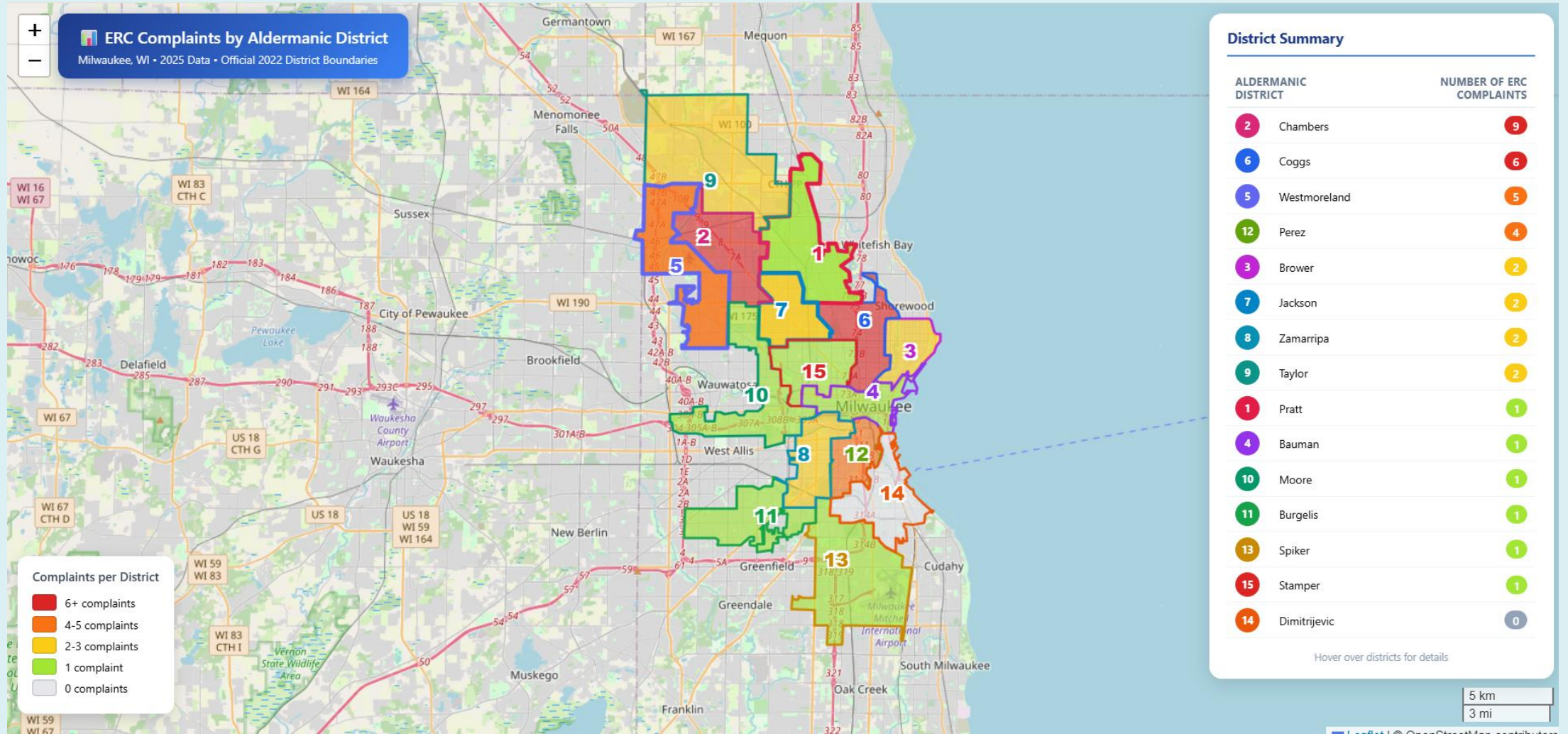
Most Active Zip Codes

53209
53206
53225
53215

Total Communications

Calls	203
Emails	263
Walk-ins	16
Total	482

ERC Complaints Heat MAP 2025



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ERC Updates and Next Steps 2026

- Fill three vacant commissioner seats
 - Two filled in January 2026
 - 1 candidate pending
- 9th Annual International Human Rights Day 2026 is scheduled for December 2026
- Establish LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee
- Develop targeted materials on workplace discrimination and tenant rights
- Expand outreach to high-complaint zip codes (53209, 53206, 53225)
- Continue participation in major cultural festivals
- Implement a unified case-management system (ERC web-based app)
- Analyze data, determine gaps and amend Chapter 109
- Increase interdepartmental collaborations across City departments to streamline processes and ensure equity and civil rights are applied consistently across all operations
- Commissioner training on complaint investigation and adjudication procedures





Thank you

City of Milwaukee
Equal Rights Commission
2026

