



# Township of Woodbridge

## Human Rights Commission

Township of Woodbridge

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*"Ten Towns, One Community"*

## Human Rights Commission 2021 Annual Report

The Woodbridge Township Human Rights Commissioners focused on the following areas during 2021. They were:

1. A review of the policies of all Municipal Departments for the possible existence of implicit bias or discrimination conducted by attorneys Daniel Pierre & Sharina Rodriguez, Genova Burns Law Firm.
2. Selection of the winners of the Dr. Martin Luther King Annual Essay Contest sponsored by the Woodbridge Board of Education and Woodbridge Township Municipal Government.
3. A review of recent N.J. State Laws regarding police body cameras, mental health and, domestic violence initiatives, and other current issues was conducted by Senator Vitale, Assemblyman Coughlin and Assemblywoman Lopez with the Commission sub-committee.
4. N.J. State Legislatures' Alternative Route for Police Officers Program.
5. Affordable Housing in Woodbridge with guest speaker Marta Lefsky, Director of Planning and Development

**1. A review of the policies of all Municipal Departments for the possible existence of implicit bias or discrimination conducted by attorneys Daniel Pierre and Sharina Rodriguez, Genova Burns Law Firm.**

Attorneys Daniel Pierre and Sharina Rodriguez explained that their role will be to provide inclusivity training, equal pay audits, affirmative action plans and an overview of policies on topics such as harassment. Their review will start with an examination of the Employee Handbook, union/employee grievances, Township hiring data, and statistics on employee promotions. The Investigation stage will examine equal pay audits, employee rights posters, and personnel related complaints. Upon completion of the review, employees of Genova Burns Law Firm will in-service municipal employees on diversity & inclusivity. Lastly, a survey of Township residents will be conducted by a third-party company, Mercury. The survey will sample 400 residents

### ***How Civil Service affects the hiring of Police officers? (HRC)***

According to an NJ [op-ed](#) the Civil Service Commission impact the hiring of Police officers in many ways (Speaker [Coughlin](#)):

- In NJ most public hiring is guided by the commission which ranks applicants based on their scores in competitive exams. Using this system towns are forced to select from the three highest ranked candidates on a certified list and as such it hampers the town from the ability to hire officers who although performed poorly on their exam might be the best fit for the community.
- It is fair to say that within the current system it is more difficult to differentiate between candidates as their scores by rank and differ by small fractions
- Additionally, the waiting period from the Civil Service Commissions certified list of candidates could be anywhere from four to six months furthered laying communities from expediting hires. The Commission serves a purpose but balanced against diversity could pose a detriment.

Seeking to promote diversity in police hiring recognizing these concerns the Legislature has introduced several bills:

- S3220/A5122 (Sweeney/Spearman) is a permissive bill that allows municipalities and counties to waive Civil Service Exam for entry-level officers. (Passed the legislature in December, signed into law in February, takes effect in 6 months.)

### ***How does Civil Service affects the hiring of Police officers? (HRC) (Speaker Coughlin)***

- A4542/S2765 (Reynolds Jackson/Sweeney) requires the Civil Service Commission to conduct an analysis of law enforcement agencies in New Jersey to determine racial composition, salaries, geographic and socio-economic variances and the impact of residency requirements. This legislation also would create a program that provides

low-cost prep courses for the entry-level exams for residents of low-income communities and possible scholarships for alternate route programs that qualify applicants for law enforcement positions. (Passed the Senate in August 2020, Awaiting Assembly Appropriations Agenda)

- A-4517/S-766 (Reynolds Jackson/Sweeney) requires the Civil Service Commission to establish and maintain a mentoring program for minority civil service law enforcement applicants. The purpose of the mentoring program would be to assist minority law enforcement applicants through the civil service application and selection process, and to help address obstacles unique to their circumstances. -(Passed the Senate August 2020, Awaiting Assembly Appropriations Agenda)

**What are the new rules on Police Department Internal Investigation? (HRC) (Speaker Coughlin)**

- New directives were issued by Attorney General Grewal on Internal Affairs Policy and Procedures, the directives would require all police agencies in the state to publish a synopsis of all complaints in which an officer was terminated, demoted or suspended for more than five days. Further, they require the name of the officer and a summary of the misconduct. The matter is currently in front of the State Supreme Court and police unions are broadly in opposition to the directives.

**What are the new rules for police on the Use of Force? (HRC) (Speaker Coughlin)**

Guidelines regarding the Use of Force are tremendously important and in December 2020 Attorney General Grewal released new state-wide guidelines on the “Use of Force” placing an emphasis on the de-escalation of situations. The report also gave additional guidance on the use of Tasers and the circumstances under which law enforcement can conduct vehicular pursuits. Additionally, the legislature addressed this subject through two separate piece of legislation.

- **A-4263/S-2562 (Sumter/Turner)** clarifies that a police officer that knowingly puts a suspect in chokehold is engaging in the use of deadly force. Meaning police officers can only use chokeholds as an absolute last resort to prevent death or serious bodily injury to themselves or the public (**Passed the Assembly in June 2020, Awaiting Vote in Senate Law & Public Safety Committee**)
- **A-4271/S-1163 (Tucker/Turner)** requires all uniformed officers to wear body cams. Less than half of the state’s 537 police departments had officers wearing body cameras. The bill made a significant investment to get body cameras rolled out. The bill appropriated \$58M (**Signed into law November 2020, Effective June 1, 2021**).

**How will the use of body cameras Body Cameras affect the Woodbridge Police? (HRC)(Speaker Coughlin)**

Woodbridge PD Bodycam Rollout

- Under A4312/S101 the usage of body cams takes effect 7 months after enactment, June 1st, 2021 would be the required date under the statute.
- Woodbridge PD is still waiting on specific directions from the AG’s Office
- Director Hubner is a part of County working group on bodycams

### **Regulations for Body Cameras**

- A4312/S1010 Regulates the use of body worn cameras. Under the bill, officers would be required to keep the camera activated when responding to a call for service or when initiating a law enforcement or investigative encounter.
- When immediate activation of the camera is impossible or dangerous, an officer would be required to activate the camera at the first reasonable opportunity to do so. Officers would be required to notify subjects that the camera is activated and, under certain conditions, may deactivate a camera upon the subject's request.
- To protect the privacy of civilians in sensitive situations, the bill limits the use of body worn cameras while officers are on school property, in medical facilities, and in houses of worship.
- Only uniformed officers are required to wear cameras, this is meant to protect or carve out officers doing undercover work.
- Again the AG hasn't given specific direction yet to departments on the rollout

### **Explain Bias training for a law enforcement effective March 1, 2021(A3641/S2689)? (HRC)(Assemblywoman Lopez)**

- **A3641/S2689 (Reynolds Jackson/Greenstein)** requires the Division of Law and Public Safety to incorporate implicit bias in cultural diversity training materials for law enforcement officers; makes mandatory cultural diversity and implicit bias training for law enforcement officers. The major change as a result of this legislation which was signed into law in August of 2020 was a mandate to address implicit bias in training materials. A social identify theory, implicit bias is defined as the pre-reflective attribution of particular qualities by an individual to a member of some social out group. The added section on implicit bias covers the employment of strategies to eliminate unconscious biases that shape behavior and produce disparate treatment of individuals based on their race, ethnicity, religious belief, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics.”( Signed into law effective March 1, 2020)
- **.S1322/A4058 (Turner/Wirths)** prohibits law enforcement agencies from considering number of arrests made and citations issued when evaluating police officer's professional performance. The bill will put an end to unnecessary arrests and citations that are driven by professional performance and not necessity. (Passed the Senate, Awaiting vote in Assembly Law & Public Safety)

## Other Topics:

### *Transgender Name Change (Senator Vitale)*

- To obtain a legal name change in New Jersey, an applicant must submit a petition to the court, including information about any convictions or pending charges
- The New Jersey Supreme Court amended a rule in December 2020 that required residents to publish court-ordered name changes in newspapers.
- The Babs Siperstein Law, named for New Jersey transgender activist Barbra “Babs” Siperstein, was signed into law by Governor Philip Murphy in July 2018 and went into effect on February 1, 2019. The law allows for gender to be changed on a birth certificate

### *Mental Health (Senator Vitale)*

Note: None of these pieces of legislation have been acted into law.

On Mental Health the Legislature placed forward several pieces of legislation to improve mental health in educational settings.

- **A-4433/S-2715 (Greenwald/Beach)** creates grant program to encourage school districts to partner with institutions of higher education in training school-based mental health services providers.
- **A-4434/S-2716 (Greenwald/Beach)** establishes Student Wellness Grant Program in DOE.
- **A-4435/S-2717: (Verelli/Beach)** requires DCF to give priority to certain school districts with student mental health counseling centers in awarding grants under School Based Youth Services Program.
- **A-4436/S-2718 (Mosquera/Beach)** establishes “Student Mental Health Task Force” to study resources available to schools and parents to address student mental health needs.
- **A-4437/S-2719 (Lampitt/Beach)** permits certain mental health professionals working in school districts to refer or help facilitate referral of students to private professional counselors.
- **A-3158/S508 (Murphy/Vitale)** requires public and nonpublic secondary schools to annually conduct written or verbal substance use screening on all students using a particular screening program.

### **Domestic Violence (Assemblywoman. Lopez)**

I am proud to report that the Legislature recognizes that the issue of domestic violence is of paramount importance and that several bills have been introduced to address domestic violence.

#### **Efforts include:**

- Expanding the definition of domestic violence to include psychological abuse and economic abuse
- Requiring obstetrical providers to perform domestic violence screenings and all healthcare professionals to take certain actions to prevent perpetrators of domestic violence from obtaining copies of a victim's medical record.
- Expanding eligibility under New Jersey earned income tax credit program to allow taxpayers who are victims of domestic abuse to claim credit with filing status of married filing separately.
- Requiring family members, household members and victims to be notified when firearms are returned to a person charged with domestic violence
- Requiring full coverage of mental health treatment and therapy received by a victim of Domestic violence recognizing that it is medically necessary.

These efforts which are still making their way through the Legislature act to bolster the strong laws already in existence to both protect victims of domestic violence and to additionally ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

#### **Domestic Violence Laws for Reference**

***The legislation noted below already exists.***

- **S-3147/A-4919 (Gopal/Downey)** expands definition of domestic violence to include psychological abuse and economic abuse
- **S-3103/A-4923 (Gopal/Downey)** requires seizure of ammunition and certain firearm components in response to domestic violence restraining order or conviction.
- **S-3112/A-4920 (Gopal/Downey)** requires obstetrical providers to perform domestic violence screenings and all healthcare professionals to take certain actions to prevent perpetrator of domestic violence from obtaining copies of a victim's medical record.
- **S-3113/A-4922 (Gopal/Downey)** expands eligibility under New Jersey earned

income tax credit program to allow taxpayers who are victims of domestic abuse to claim credit with filing status of married filing separately.

- **S-3105/A-3687 (Gopal/Vainieri Huttle)** requires certain family or household members and victims be notified when firearms are returned to persons charged with domestic violence or subject to extreme risk protection order.
- **S-3111/A-4645 (Gopal/Swain)** requires health insurance carriers to categorize mental health treatment and therapy received by victim of Domestic Violence as medically necessary treatment and provide full benefits coverage therefore.
- **S-3120/A-4921(Gopal/Downey)** requires public entities that operate websites or web pages pertaining to domestic violence to utilize certain electronic tools and security measures to protect online visitors who may be victims of domestic violence.

#### 4. **N.J. State Legislatures' Alternative Route for Police Officers Program.**

Mayor John McCormick presented a video on how Woodbridge Municipal Government would implement the Alternative route for Police Officers. The video can be viewed on TV 35. The Woodbridge Town Council approved a Resolution supporting this program.

#### 5. **Affordable Housing in Woodbridge with guest speaker Marta Lefsky, Director of Planning and Development (Sub-Committee Chairman, John Papagiannakis)**

##### Affordable Housing Questions

1. What is the difference between affordable housing & low-income housing?

Two types of housing are considered government subsidized and low-income housing. These programs are Public and Section 8 housing and both programs are overseen by HUD. Public housing is managed by local housing authorities and is available to renters with low income that meet the criteria of the program. Section 8 housing gives low-income families a voucher that makes up the difference in what they can afford to pay and the actual cost of the apartments for rent that are available to them.

2. Who qualifies for these services?

Housing for low-income renters are deemed, low, very low, and extremely low by HUD. These limits are at 30, 50, and 80 percent of the median income for the area in which the renter lives. Most low-income housing is rented through public housing authorities.

3. Do you have to be a resident of Woodbridge to apply?

No.

4. Are residents of Woodbridge given priority?

Residents of Woodbridge are encouraged to apply for Affordable Housing.

5. How do you apply for these services?

#### Section 8 Vouchers

Section 8 or the housing choice voucher program is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments. Vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs). The PHAs receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer the voucher program.

Eligibility for a housing voucher is determined by the PHA based on the total annual gross income and family size and is limited to US citizens and specified categories of non-citizens who have eligible immigration status. In general, the family's income may not exceed 50% of the median income for the county or metropolitan area in which the family chooses to live. By law, a PHA must provide 75 percent of its voucher to applicants whose incomes do not exceed 30 percent of the area median income. Median income levels are published by HUD and vary by location. The PHA serving your community can provide you with the income limits for your area and family size.

Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available to HUD and the local housing agencies, long waiting periods are common. In fact, a PHA may close its waiting list when it has more families on the list than can be assisted in the near future.

PHAs may establish local preferences for selecting applicants from its waiting list. For example, PHAs may give a preference to a family who is (1) homeless or living in substandard housing, (2) paying more than 50% of its income for rent, or (3) involuntarily displaced. Families who qualify

For or any such local preferences move ahead of other families on the list who do not qualify for any preference. Each PHA has the discretion to establish local preferences to reflect the housing needs and priorities of its particular community.

#### Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing renters are selected via a lottery system. Renters must submit an application at [www.AffordableHomesNewJersey.com](http://www.AffordableHomesNewJersey.com) and join the Woodbridge Rental Waiting list to be included in the random lottery number drawing to determine priority order.



6. How is rent affordability calculated

7.

Affordable Homes New Jersey provides a chart that lists maximum gross income by household size. (See Chart found in #19.)

8. Is there a waiting list? If so, how long is the waiting list?

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Usually there is a waiting list for Section 8 which is administered by the Woodbridge Housing Authority.

#### Affordable Housing

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9. How do you prevent housing fraud?

Annual inspections or as a need arises

10. Who monitors how many people are residing in a unit?

Landlord or housing authority

11. Who subsidizes the rent?

Federal government and the State of New Jersey.

12. Are background checks performed on applicants?

Yes, and it is so noted on the applications.

13. How often are residences monitored for upkeep?

Annually or on an at need basis.

14. What percentage of new housing development is allocated to low income?

15%

15. Are there separate services for seniors / disabled / homeless?

Yes, there are separate applications for Seniors and the Disabled.

16. Are there any services available to the homeless population?

Woodbridge Township provides Perth Amboy YMCA with \$300,000 annually from the Community Block Grant to provide services for the homeless.

17. About how many homeless reside in Woodbridge?

Not known

18. According to the latest Census, how many Woodbridge residents are living at the poverty level?

3 to 4 %

19. What are the qualifying incomes for individuals or families seeking affordable housing in Woodbridge Township?

2021 Income Limits Region 3 Somerset, Hunterdon and Middlesex County (C OAH)

Family size	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person
Median 100%	\$86,240	\$98,560	\$110,880	\$123,200	\$133,056	\$142,912
Moderate 80%*	\$68,992	\$78,848	\$88,704	\$98,560	\$106,445	\$114,330
Low 50%	\$43,120	\$49,280	\$55,440	\$61,600	\$66,528	\$71,456
Very Low 30%	\$25,872					
*Income cutoff						

Eligibility for the New Jersey Fair Share Housing (Mt. Laurel) Program is determined by gross annual household income. To qualify for NJ Fair Share Housing, your income must be no more than 80% of median for moderate income or 50% of median for low income and 30% for very low income. For most NJ Fair Share Housing projects, an income of at least 35% of median is required to meet housing costs.

20. Does the State of New Jersey have affordable housing quotas for each town? If it does, how many affordable housing units does Woodbridge Township currently have? Has the township met its quota?

Calculations are based on open or vacant land. The number of affordable units is determined on new development. The plan is to meet this number every 10 years.

21. Are the Senior Towers and Jacob's Landing owned by the Federal Government or Woodbridge Township?

Since 2015, they are regulated by the Woodbridge Housing Authority independent of Woodbridge municipality.

The members of the Human Rights Commission will continue to review and evaluate the Township's Departments as well as major community stakeholders in 2021 and, if necessary, make recommendations to the Mayor.

Respectively Submitted,

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Glenn Morgan  
Chairman

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Patricia Osborne  
Vice-Chairwoman