



**For Immediate Release**

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**Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Announces Launch of New Rural & Civic Engagement Division at State Capitol Reception**

**Harrisburg, PA** —The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) hosted a reception at the State Capitol to officially launch its new *Rural & Civic Engagement Division*, an initiative designed to expand outreach, strengthen partnerships, and advance equitable access to PHRC resources across Pennsylvania's rural communities.

The new division will focus on building relationships with rural civic leaders, community organizations, and residents to increase awareness of civil rights protections, promote inclusive community engagement, and ensure Pennsylvanians in all regions have access to the Commission's services.

The event featured remarks from state and PHRC leaders, highlighting the importance of collaboration and equitable representation across the Commonwealth.

"Our responsibility is to serve all Pennsylvanians," said **PHRC Executive Director Chad Dion Lassiter, MSW**. "The creation of the Rural & Civic Engagement Division reflects our dedication to meeting communities where they are, listening to their experiences, and working collaboratively to protect civil rights and foster unity across the Commonwealth."

"This initiative reflects the Commission's belief that geography should never be a barrier to understanding or exercising one's rights," said **PHRC Chair Joel Bolstein**. "The Rural & Civic Engagement Division will help us strengthen our connection with communities, expand our outreach, and ensure that every Pennsylvanian has the ability to be heard and supported."

**Secretary Cindy Dunn of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources** highlighted the importance of community-centered work across rural regions.

"Rural communities power Pennsylvania, and I applaud PHRC for taking the important step to prioritize serving the needs of these communities," **Dunn said**. "Ensuring that every resident has access to information, protections, and support, regardless of where they live, is key in demonstrating the value of good government in action."

Heidi Secord, Deputy Secretary for Farm, Food and Market Access at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, underscored the importance of supporting rural residents and agricultural communities statewide.

PHRC leadership expressed deep appreciation for the bipartisan and cross-regional support for advancing civil rights protections and ensuring all residents, regardless of geography, have equal access to information, support, and resources.

“This division was created with a simple guiding principle: every community deserves to be heard,” said **Caroline Griffin, PHRC Director of the Rural & Civic Engagement Division**. “We are committed to building trusted partnerships, increasing visibility of PHRC services, and ensuring rural voices remain central to the conversations shaping our Commonwealth’s future.”

The Commission will continue statewide engagement efforts throughout 2026, including listening sessions, community roundtables, and expanded partnerships with civic organizations in rural counties. For more information about the PHRC or the new Rural & Civic Engagement Division, visit [www.pa.gov/PHRC](http://www.pa.gov/PHRC).

**About the PHRC:**

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission enforces state laws that prohibit discrimination and promote equal opportunity for all people. The PHRC investigates complaints of discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public accommodations. Anyone who has experienced discrimination is urged to file a complaint by calling 717-787-4410. Information and resources are also available on the [PHRC website](#). Follow the PHRC on [X](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#), and [subscribe](#) to our monthly newsletter.

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