

Guilford Human Rights Advocates
April 26, 2018

PROPOSAL

Establish a Human Rights Commission
within the Guilford Town Charter

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I. Summary

Guilford is a beacon of tolerance and acceptance on the Connecticut shoreline, and we, its residents, want to ensure that its welcoming presence is preserved for future generations. We therefore propose that a Human Rights Commission be established within the Guilford Town Charter (see Section III for goals and objectives, and/or Appendix B for the proposed language for the Human Rights Commission).

We envision the Human Rights Commission as being a primarily educational and advocational body, with a secondary function of receiving resident complaints and disseminating them to appropriate Town and/or State agencies, as is necessary.

This proposal has the signed support of nearly three hundred Guilford residents, including many of our community leaders (see Appendix E for statements of support, and Appendix F for our signed petition).

In Appendix A, we have provided relevant demographic information about the Town of Guilford and Guilford Public Schools. Guilford's minority populations are small but significant, and are growing at a substantial rate. It is critical that we take extra steps to ensure a welcoming and supportive environment for them. Individuals may more easily feel excluded when their numbers are small than when they are in the majority.

In researching other communities across Connecticut, we found that other towns have a Human Rights Commission or Commission on Human Relations written into their town charter (see Appendix C). Guilford would, however, be the first town on the shoreline to have such a commission. Residents from Madison and Branford, among others, have already reached out to us for guidance on how they might establish a Human Rights Commission of their own.

The Human Rights Commission will not require funding beyond the basic administrative expenses associated with any Town commission. As the Guilford Human Rights Advocates, we have already offered several educational programs within the community (see Appendix D, Table 1). By collaborating with other organizations, we have demonstrated our ability to be of service to the community at little or no expense.

This Commission will bring opportunities for advocacy and education around human rights issues to the people of Guilford, and will ensure that all of its visitors and residents are able to enjoy equitable treatment, tolerance, and respect.

II. Introduction

We are the Guilford Human Rights Advocates (GHRA), a group of Guilford residents that have come together in response to recent acts of local vandalism targeting vulnerable minorities. These acts include racist graffiti, destruction of the sensory garden at Roses for Autism, and damage to and/or theft of many “Welcome Neighbor” lawn signs.

In response to these incidents, the Guilford Foundation and various town leaders partnered with the Anti-Defamation League to present a workshop for town leaders entitled “Building a Community of Compassion.” This training explored common issues of bias affecting various minorities, and was well received by those in attendance. Though this event was quite successful, it was clearly meant to be a one-time occurrence. Establishing a Human Rights Commission will continue the important work started that day.

We feel that it is important to act now to preserve our town’s role as a beacon of tolerance and acceptance on the Connecticut shoreline. We believe that by creating a Human Rights Commission, Guilford will not only maintain its welcoming presence, but also address the ever-changing needs of Guilford's growing and increasingly diverse population.

We seek to ensure ongoing mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance of all people, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, age, health status, or ability. Our goal is to safeguard Guilford’s well-deserved reputation as a safe, open, receptive, and family-oriented community.

III. Goals/Objectives

A Human Rights Commission would act in a variety of capacities to carry out its mission to promote mutual understanding and respect among all racial, religious, and ethnic groups, as well as among individuals of differing genders, sexual orientations, and abilities, as outlined below. A draft of the articles for the proposed Human Rights Commission is provided in Appendix B.

- A. Advisory Capacity
 - Submit regular reports concerning the activities of the Commission to the Board of Selectmen.
 - Carry out projects and research as is deemed necessary by the Board of Selectman, and/or through soliciting feedback from residents and community leaders.
 - Cooperate with federal, state, and town agencies and businesses, and with private, civic, religious, and other organizations. Recommend to the Board of Selectmen any programs arising therefrom which will help all members of the community to enjoy equality of opportunity in all phases of community life.

- B. Review Capacity
 - Secure equality of treatment of, and opportunity for, all human beings.
 - Receive individual complaints involving human rights violations, and advocate for and refer such complaints to the Board of Selectmen, the Guilford Police Department, and/or other appropriate departments or agencies as necessary.
 - Respond to relevant needs or situations in the community as they arise.

- C. Educational Capacity
 - Provide community-wide education through school programs and public engagement to further understanding, tolerance, and acceptance.
 - Engage in study and research, and publish and/or present reports designed to increase understanding within the community.
 - Expand upon the successful event "Building a Community of Compassion," which was hosted by the Guilford Foundation on November 12, 2017.

IV. Financial Commitment

A Human Rights Commission will require some funding to enrich our community by providing educational programming, events, and research. However, this will involve minimal expense to the Town of Guilford. We have looked into a variety of ways to secure funding for our proposed initiatives, and have found several potential avenues of cost sharing by partnering with various agencies within the community itself. Our mission is in alignment with the goals of several funding organizations such as the Guilford Foundation, the Guilford Fund for Education, and the Guilford Savings Bank, among others. In addition, several of our proposed programs correspond with those of other organizations in and around Guilford, and would allow for collaboration and shared funding (see Appendix D). For examples of the ways in which other Connecticut towns fund their Human Rights Commissions, see Appendix C.

We have identified the following areas in which costs to the Town may be incurred:

A. Administrative

It is our understanding that each board and commission in the town is provided with the services of a paid administrative assistant to take the commission's meeting minutes. It is expected that this commission will meet monthly (or more frequently, should the need arise).

B. Annual International Human Rights Day Celebration

We plan to launch our first annual International Human Rights Day Celebration on December 10, 2018. Potential costs for this event would include promotional costs, speakers' fees, and participatory and educational events for the community.

V. Endorsements

Our group (GHRA) has held monthly informational meetings open to all Guilford residents, and has witnessed an increasing level of community support over the past several months.

We have thus far obtained a total of 285 signatures from Guilford residents on our petition to add a Human Rights Commission to the Guilford town charter (see Appendix F).

Please refer to the table below for a list of Guilford’s community leaders who have written statements of support for establishing a Human Rights Commission within the Guilford Town Charter (see Appendix E for their individual letters).

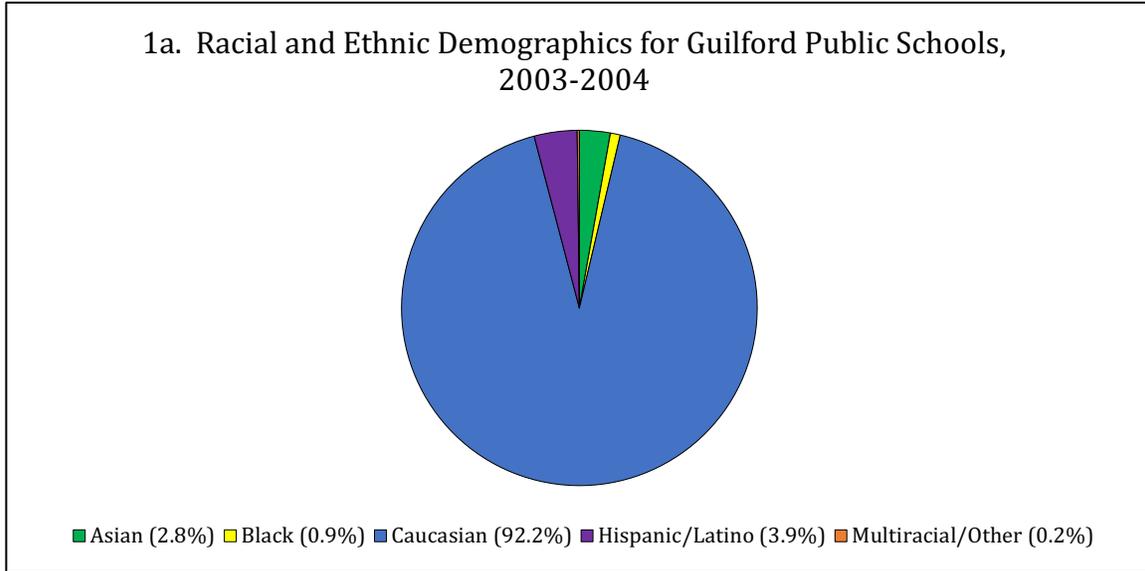
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VI. Appendices

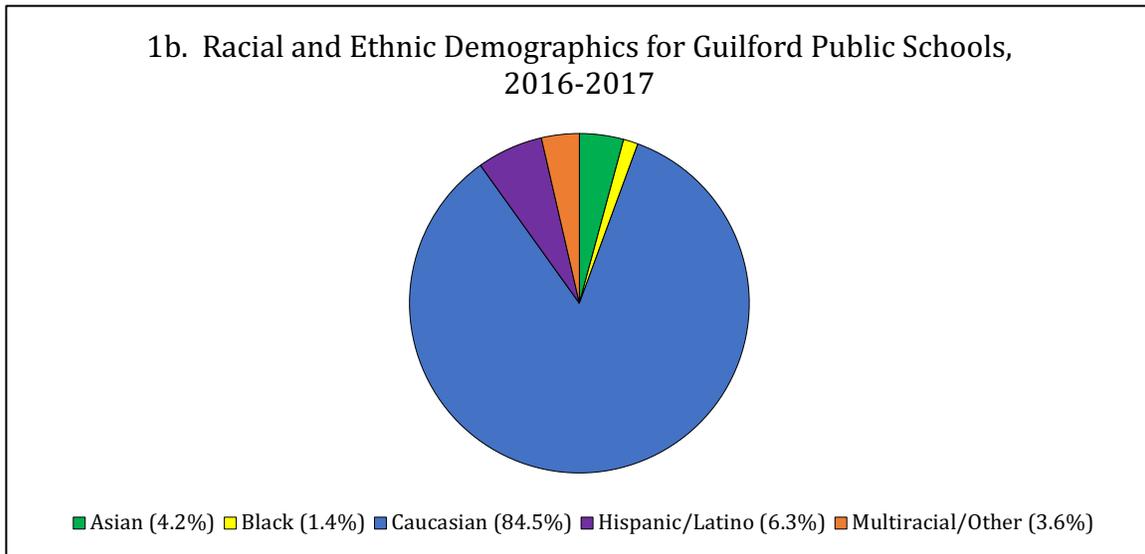
- A Relevant Town Statistics
- B Proposed Articles for the Human Rights Commission
- C Town Comparison Table
- D Past and Potential Collaborations
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Appendix A: Relevant Town Statistics

Racial/ethnic diversity within the Guilford public school system more than doubled between 2004 and 2017. We feel that it is critically important to address the changing needs of our public schools as this trend toward diversity continues.



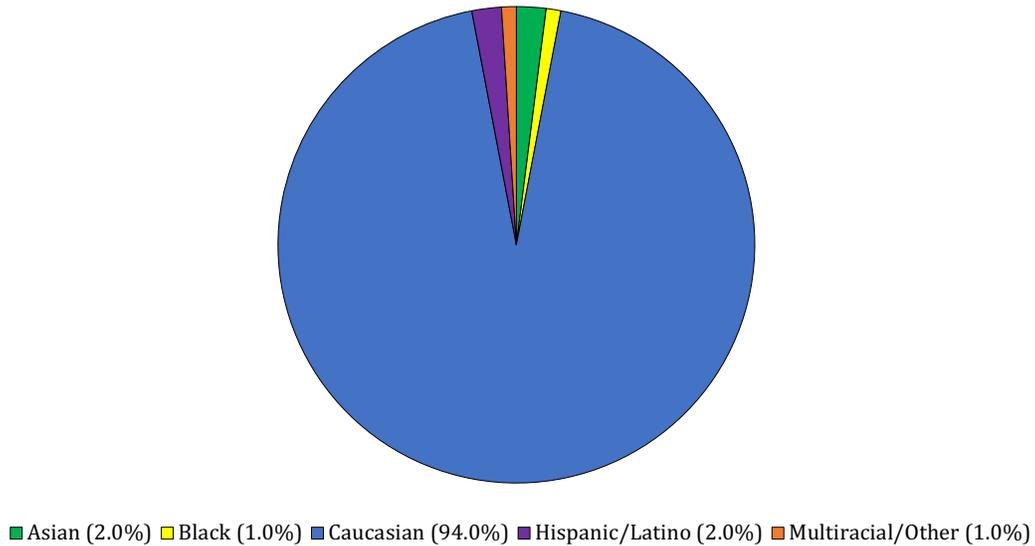
For the 2003-2004 school year, the number of racial and ethnic minority students enrolled in school Guilford schools was small, but significant, representing 7.8% of the student population. *At that time, 91.1% of our educators were Caucasian, mirroring the makeup of the student body.*



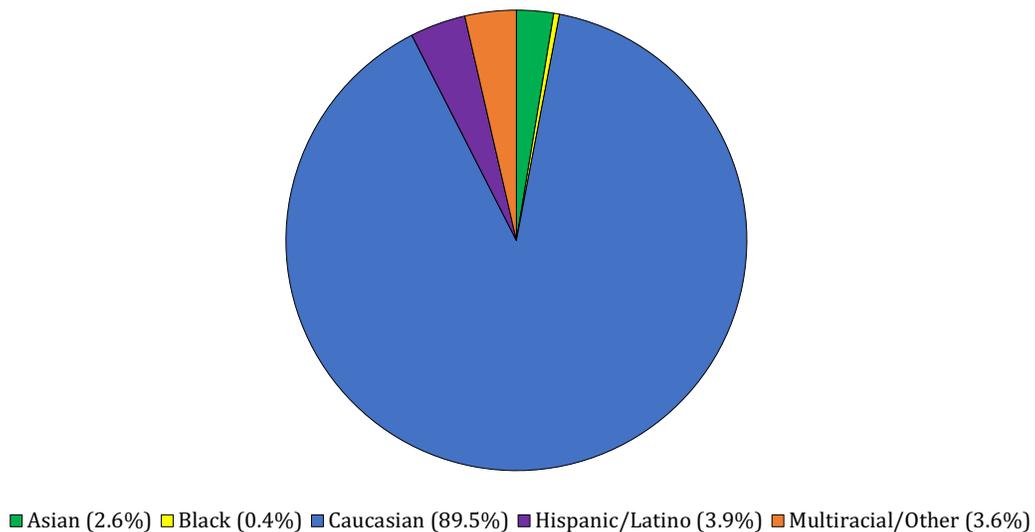
By the 2016-2017 school year, the number of racial and ethnic minority students enrolled in school Guilford schools had doubled relative to 2003-2004, at 15.5%. *Yet during this period, the percentage of Caucasian educators increased to 98.2%.*

Guilford's overall demographic makeup also changed noticeably between 2003 and 2016. The Town's minority populations remain small, but they are growing. It is crucial that we take extra steps to ensure a welcoming and supportive environment for them.

1b. Racial and Ethnic Demographics for the Town of Guilford, 2003

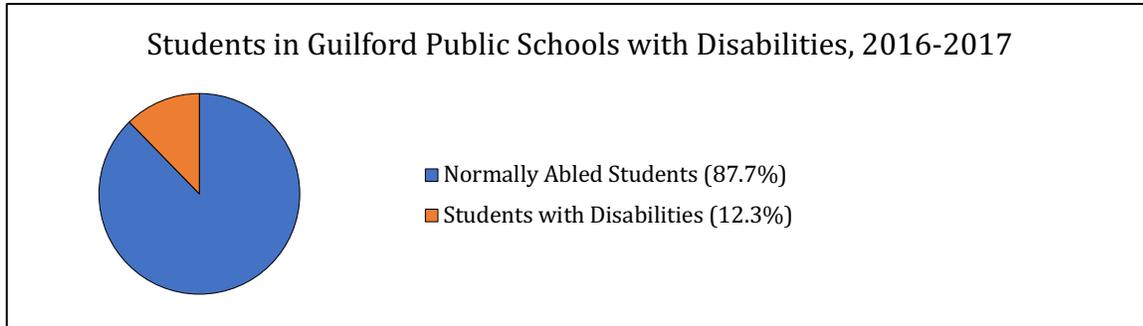


2b. Racial and Ethnic Demographics for the Town of Guilford, 2016

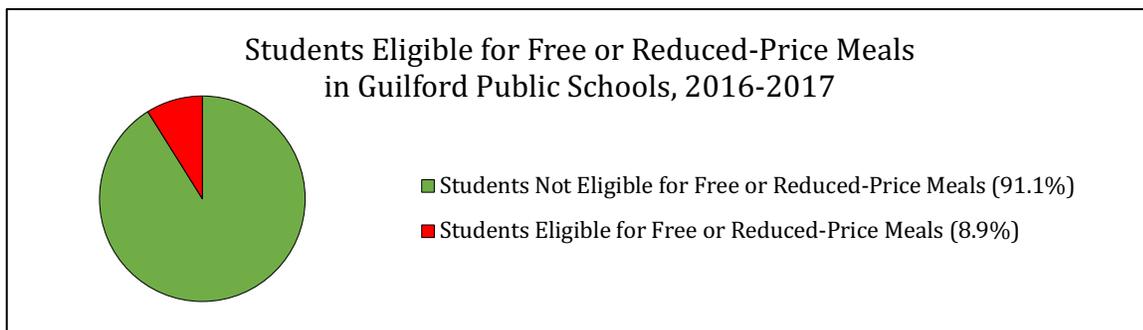


Sources:
Strategic School Profile, 2003-04
Guilford Schools, Connecticut State Department of Education Profile: 2016-17 School Year
Community COMPASS, Greater New Haven Region, Community Indicators Report 2003
Neighborhood Scout

A significant percentage of Guilford’s public school students have disabilities. Of these, 48.4% are autistic. It is worth noting that 70.3% of all students with disabilities spend most or all of their school time integrated in class with normally abled peers. (No data on students with disabilities were available for comparison to the 2003-2004 school year.)



The number of students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals more than doubled between the 2003-2004 school year and the 2016-2017 school year.



Students with disabilities and those eligible for free and reduced-price meals had higher rates of chronic absenteeism than the district average during the 2016-2017 school year. They also suffered from higher rates of suspension/expulsion. These students lagged behind their peers with respect to enrollment in college and career readiness courses. We must ensure that neither disability nor economic hardship prevents Guilford’s students from receiving a high-quality and equitable education.

Sources:
 Strategic School Profile, 2003-04
 Guilford Schools, Connecticut State Department of Education Profile: 2016-17 School Year

Appendix B: Proposed Articles for the Commission

Proposed Human Rights Commission for the Town of Guilford, Connecticut

1. Establishment

There is hereby established a Human Rights Commission (hereafter referred to as “the Commission”) for the purposes stated herein, which shall be appointed and organized and shall have the duties and powers as hereafter set forth.

2. Purposes

The purposes of the Commission shall be as follows:

- A. To promote mutual understanding and respect among all racial, religious, ethnic, and other groups, and among individuals of differing genders, sexual orientations, ages, and abilities. It is essential to the health, safety, and welfare of this Town and its inhabitants that these differences serve as sources of individual and community strength, rather than as causes of discrimination.
- B. To secure equality of treatment of, and opportunity for, all human beings.
- C. To cooperate with governmental and nongovernmental agencies and organizations having like or kindred functions to those of the Commission, as it deems necessary or desirable.
- D. To make such studies in the field of human rights as in the judgment of the Commission will aid in effectuating its general purpose.
- E. To demonstrate to federal or state funding agencies or courts that Guilford has an official body which reviews issues or challenges involving compliance with federal and state laws and Town ordinances on human rights, and which can make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen for action.

3. Membership; terms; vacancies

- A. The Commission shall consist of nine electors of the Town who shall be appointed by the Board of Selectmen for terms of three years. Five members shall be appointed for a term expiring on November 30 in an odd-numbered year; four members shall be appointed for a term expiring on November 30 in an even-numbered year.

- B. A reasonable effort shall be made to solicit Commission members so as to represent a broad cross-section of the community, regardless of political affiliation.
- C. Any vacancy on the Commission from whatever cause shall be filled within a reasonable time, by appointment by the Board of Selectmen for the unexpired portion of the term.

4. Organization; meeting; absences

- A. At its initial meeting and at its first meeting on or after December 1 of each year, the Commission shall elect from its membership a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary. The Commission shall be authorized to create such subcommittees and advisory committees as it shall deem helpful to the accomplishment of its responsibilities.
- B. The Commission shall hold monthly meetings. The Chairperson may call a special meeting at any time. Any four members of the Commission may at any time request in writing that the Chairperson call a special meeting. The Chairperson shall, within three days after receipt of such a request, call a special meeting for a time within seven days after the date of the request for such meeting. A quorum at any meeting shall consist of five voting members, and the vote of a majority of the Commission shall be required for any action to be taken.
- C. Any regular member who is absent from three consecutive meetings of the Commission for whatever reason shall advise the Chairperson in open session or in writing of the reason or reasons for such absences. The Commission shall thereupon evaluate the continuation of the membership of such member. If the Commission finds by not less than five affirmative votes that such member has by his or her absences unsatisfactorily performed his or her duty as a member of the Commission, the Chairperson shall so notify the Board of Selectmen. Such a finding shall make such member subject to suspension or removal.

5. Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Commission shall be as follows:

- A. To work with federal, state, and Town agencies, as well as with private, civic, religious, business, industrial, labor, and other organizations, groups, or persons, and to recommend to the Board of Selectmen any programs arising therefrom that will help all members of the community to enjoy equality of opportunity in all phases of community life.
- B. To engage in study and research, and to publish and/or present reports designed to increase understanding within the community. To attend and participate in

trainings relevant to the goals of the Commission. To conduct other appropriate activities in furtherance of its goals and with respect to new or proposed programs or issues involving individual and group human rights and relations.

- C. To seek compliance with all local, state, and federal laws relating to human rights and opportunities, included but not limited to C.G.S. 31-126 (unfair employment practices) and 53-35 (discrimination in public accommodations, rental housing and commercial property, sale of building lots and mobile home parks).
- D. To receive complaints regarding inequality of treatment or of discrimination in the Town, and, when appropriate, to advocate for and refer such complaints to the Board of Selectmen, the Guilford Police Department, the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities and/or to other agencies having jurisdiction in the particular matter.
- E. To carry out such projects in the area of human rights as shall be deemed necessary by the Commission and Board of Selectmen to ensure the safety, dignity, and peace of mind of the Town.
- F. To offer its services to and to cooperate with other agencies and departments in Town in promoting a healthy community.
- G. To submit to the Board of Selectmen annually, or more frequently as the need arises, reports concerning the activities of the Commission.
- H. To promote activities and programs to carry out the purposes of the Commission.
- I. To pursue community-wide education, through both school programs and public engagement, that furthers intergroup understanding, tolerance, and acceptance.
- J. To advise and recommend to the Board of Selectmen appropriate programs to be wholly or partially implemented with federal, state, and Town funds. To recommend to the Board of Selectmen legislation to aid in implementing, improving, or strengthening programs to accomplish equality of opportunity and the elimination of prejudice, intolerance, bigotry, and discrimination.

Appendix C: Town Comparison Table

There are several towns in Connecticut that share similar demographics with Guilford and have an established Human Rights Commission. The language used to describe their missions, memberships, and responsibilities is similar to the proposed articles found in Appendix B. Upon conducting research into all of the active Human Rights Commissions in Connecticut, we found that, in most cases, the commissions are not directly funded by the Town, but rather are included in the Mayor's/First Selectman's discretionary budget as a special request. Alternately, they may make a special request to their Town Council or Board of Selectman as the need arises. In most cases, fundraising and collaboration with town and/or state agencies appear to be the primary ways in which these Human Rights Commissions supplement what is needed for various town events.

Table C. Towns Researched

Town Name	Primary Funding Source	Other Funding	Other Funding
Bloomfield	No funding currently.		
Coventry	No funding currently.		
Farmington	No funding currently.	Fundraising in the community.	
Hamden	Special Requests to Mayor as needed.	Fundraising efforts and donations.	Town recently established a foundation for the Commission to apply to for additional funding.
Middletown	Looking to Common Council for special projects they have been assigned.	Collaboration with other organizations.	Anticipating funding for specific initiatives with which their Council has charged them.
Newington	Commission applies annually through the Mayor's discretionary fund.		
Norwalk	Special requests to the Town, as needed.	Annual funding for Human Rights Day provided by Town.	Human rights officer appointed.
South Windsor	(Not available.)		
West Hartford	No funding currently.	Coordinates with other Town departments.	Works with local VA to hold Memorial Day parade.
Wethersfield	No funding currently.		
Windsor	Town just approved an annual budget of \$3,500 for their Human Rights Commission.	Soliciting local businesses.	

Appendix D: Past and Potential Collaborations

Please note that all of the programs that have been hosted thus far have been free to the public, and have incurred no expense to GHRA. Attendance at these events has increased steadily over the past six months, demonstrating both an interest in and need for continuing educational offerings of this kind.

Table D-1. Programs Hosted by the Guilford Human Rights Advocates (GHRA), 2017-2018

Date	Program/Contribution	Community Collaborators
09/21/2017	International Day of Peace Celebration on the Guilford Green	First Congregational Church
12/07/2017	National <i>I Am Jazz</i> Day of Reading Storytime Reading of <i>I Am Jazz</i> for Children	Women & Family Life Center
12/10/2017	International Human Rights Day Social Media Campaign	None
01/18/2018	Martin Luther King Jr. Day Showing of the movie <i>Selma</i>	Witness Stones Project
03/08/2018	International Women's Day #PressForProgress Social Media Campaign	Women & Family Life Center
03/15/2018	Women's History Month Community Conversation on Sex Trafficking in Connecticut	Women & Family Life Center Guilford Police Department
03/22/2018	Women's History Month Postpartum Depression Support Group	Women & Family Life Center
03/29/2018	Women's History Month Community Conversation on Women in Islam	Women & Family Life Center
04/12/2018	Holocaust Remembrance Day Community Conversation with a Holocaust Survivor	Women & Family Life Center

Table D-2. Planned Programs Hosted by the Human Rights Commission

Date	Program/Contribution	Potential Community Collaborators
05/12/2018	Autism Awareness Month Getting to know Roses for Autism	Roses for Autism
05/21/2018	World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development Community Conversation around Diversity	Women & Family Life Center Community Faith Leaders
06/27/2018	National PTSD Awareness Day Panel Discussion about PTSD	Community Therapists and Experts in PTSD Treatment
07/12/2018	Celebrating Malala Day Storytime Reading of <i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i>	Women & Family Life Center Guilford Free Library
07/12/2018	Celebrating Malala Day Adult Book Club Reading of <i>I Am Malala</i>	Women & Family Life Center Guilford Free Library
09/10/2018	World Suicide Prevention Day Community Conversation on Mental Health	National Alliance on Mental Illness, CT
09/21/2018	International Day of Peace Celebration on the Guilford Green	First Congregational Church
10/11/2018	National Coming Out Day Community Conversation on LGBT+ Issues	New Haven Pride Center
12/7/2018	National <i>I Am Jazz</i> Day of Reading Storytime Reading of <i>I Am Jazz</i> for Children	Women & Family Life Center
12/10/2018	International Human Rights Day Full Day of Community Events and Talks	Women & Family Life Center Guilford Public Library Guilford Foundation

Appendix E: Statements of Support

The following are letters of support from community leaders in Guilford.

Appendix F: Signed Petition

The following are pages of a resident-signed Petition to Establish a Human Rights Commission in Guilford. These include 285 distinct signatures.

Appendix G: Additional Evidence of Community Support

The following article about Guilford's "Building a Community of Compassion" event appeared in the *Guilford Courier* on November 30, 2017.

Building a Community of Compassion in Guilford

Continued from page 3

70 members of the community showed up to listen and participate in the program. The day included listening to people who had experienced some level of oppression in Guilford or surrounding towns and a look at how hate grows in a community.

Lipshez-Shapiro used a tool known as the Pyramid of Hate, which shows how discriminatory jokes and bullying can lead up the pyramid to something more horrific.

"The most important thing it helps people understand is why the bottom of the pyramid is important," she said, noting that people might ask, "What is the big deal with jokes or stereotypes?" It is the seeds that are planted and grow. They grow in the fertile soil of silence and apathy."

Lipshez-Shapiro said the presentation addressed what residents can do in their everyday lives to understand their neighbors and make all people feel welcome.

"There was not a focus on specific incidents; the focus was on how the seeds of bias and hate are planted every day in our communities, schools, and neighborhoods through stereotyping, jokes, and insensitive remarks," she said. "When left unchallenged, these seeds can grow into prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, and even violence. The stated goal was to nurture a climate in Guilford that fosters trust, understanding, and respect across the broad spectrum of racial, ethnic, religious, political, and other differences."

Program participants were broken into five "action step" small groups supporting the Witness Stones initiative, creating a human rights commission, expanding Interfaith programming, promoting youth/education programs related to respect for all, and "allyship," teaching and

encouraging community members to stand up when there are incidents of bias in the community. Lipshez-Shapiro said this was a good way for people to talk about the small things they can do in their own lives to make a difference.

"I told people to commit to something and a lot of people said they were going to commit to not being silent, having conversations with their kids, and their families," she said. "...Go out and meet a neighbor that you don't know, build a bridge with someone from a different age, a different background, a different profession. Get to know your neighbors and Guilford is the perfect place to do that."

Guilford Foundation Executive

Director Liza Janssen Petra said the program was a great success and a good way to bring together different sections of the community that might not interact on a regular basis.

"I think it was very powerful for me to see those group conversations and the learning and the sharing," she said. "We had 65 people there and the idea was establish these connections among these groups to take any information that we learned through the presentation and bring that back into our own spheres of influence...I am hopeful this will keep moving forward. I am hopeful in addition to this day of learning and sharing there will be some key actions that go forward."

Lipshez-Shapiro said the program was not about focusing on what might be wrong in Guilford or calling Guilford a bad place to live, but just acknowledging that everyone can try and do a little more to put aside stereotypes to make all people feel welcome.

"This is teaching people to think critically, to be personally conscious about what they are saying," she said. "...Between this program and my involvement with Witness Stones, it has been my proudest moment in my 25 years in Guilford. I am just so proud of the community to come together."

Those who are interested in staying informed about the program can contact Petra at lizapetra@gmail.com.

This editorial, which appeared in the *Guilford Courier* on January 31, 2018, addresses the need for a Human Rights Commission in Guilford. We appreciate and respect the Guilford Police Department's responses to recent acts of local vandalism; we also agree with the author's perspective on the need for a more lasting solution to issues involving diversity to ensure Guilford's continued growth as a caring community.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Meaningful and Lasting Solution

Richard Bach once said, "We teach best what we need to learn."

The *Courier's* recent coverage of the program, Building a Community of Compassion ["Building a Community of Compassion in Guilford," Nov. 30] does a beautiful job of illustrating how hatred, even at the micro-aggression level, can permeate and poison an entire community. While I applaud the community leaders who have taken up the mantle of human rights, I can't help but feel that without addressing the glaring source of this problem, a meaningful and lasting solution will continue to elude us.

As an activist, community organizer, and founder of a non-profit, I've spoken with many victims of stalking, domestic violence, and hatred on the shoreline who have disclosed that their experiences with the police were humiliating, shaming, and re-traumatizing. It is my belief that prior to attempting to hold others accountable, our Police Department must be willing to hold itself accountable. The rate of domestic violence within the law enforcement profession is higher than in

the general populace, and I believe abusers support and identify with other abusers.

Consequently, it came as no surprise to me when several years ago, someone spray painted swastikas on mailboxes throughout my Guilford neighborhood and my complaint was ignored.* Therefore, I was a bit confused and disappointed when Police Chief Jeff Hutchinson chose to embrace Noel Petra in the aftermath of his traumatic exposure to Asian graffiti during his morning run on the Guilford Green. Obviously Petra's safety and feelings mattered and mine did not. This blatant sexism clearly illustrates an inappropriate bias.

In essence, it is clear to me that the Guilford Police Department along with its various supporters are in need of a public relations boost, but have no intention of honoring the human rights or civil rights of all of the people who live in Guilford.

**Shawanna Armstrong
Guilford**

Editor's Note: In response to a query from the Courier, the Guilford Police Department reviewed every report on record for an instance of swastikas being painted on mailboxes; the department has no record of any such complaint.

Appendix H: Conclusion

The Guilford Human Rights Advocates (GHRA) was formed in August of 2017 by a group of Guilford residents united by a desire to establish a Human Rights Commission within the Guilford Town Charter. Since then, we and the other dedicated members and supporters of GHRA have successfully organized monthly meetings, researched and compiled pertinent Town data, spoken with numerous Town leaders, and hosted a variety of educational programs for the public. We have discovered that our changing Town demographics, an ever-increasing interest in community education around diversity, the willingness of other community organizations to partner with us, the letters of support received, and the enthusiastic response to our petition all indicate the need and desire for a Human Rights Commission in Guilford.

We thank you for your time and consideration of our proposal.

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