

**CITY OF HOUSTON HUMAN RIGHTS ORDINANCE**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**

***Why does Houston need a Human Rights Ordinance?***

Houston is the only major metropolitan area in the country that does not prohibit discrimination in places of public accommodation. Additionally, there is no protection against discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Houston believes that all persons living in or visiting the city are entitled to be treated with equal dignity, respect and status, and have the right to be free from discriminatory and unequal treatment.

***Will there be confidentiality under the ordinance?***

Yes. Complaints filed with the Office of the Inspector General, which is part of the Legal Department, will be subject to existing confidentiality protections (E.O. 1-39) and to the extent permitted by law.

***Does the ordinance impact the at-will employment relationship between private businesses operating in the City and their employees, generally?***

No. However, City contractors, as well as private businesses with 50 or more employees, are prohibited from discriminating in employment on the basis of any protected characteristic as defined by the ordinance.

***Does the ordinance apply to religious organizations?***

No. The ordinance provides exemptions for religious organizations in the provisions that deal with places of public accommodation, private employment, and fair housing, so long as those organizations meet the criteria set forth in the ordinance.

***Will sustained complaints against a business operating within the City affect the business's license and/or permit?***

No. The ordinance only provides for penalties punishable in municipal court by a fine.

***Why are the violations of this ordinance a Class C misdemeanor?***

Municipalities are only authorized to impose Class C misdemeanors for violations of their ordinances unless otherwise expressly authorized by state law.

***Does the ordinance require places of public accommodation to allow men/women to use restrooms designated for the opposite sex?***

No. It does not prevent a place of public accommodation from denying a patron access to a gender specific facility (e.g. restroom, locker room, etc.) so long as the business owner has a good faith belief that the gender identity of that patron is not consistent with the gender designation of the facility.