

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT



CITY OF FORT WAYNE

METRO



METROPOLITAN HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

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Mission

To enforce civil rights laws and empower the citizens of Fort Wayne through education on diversity and discrimination issues.

Vision

To make Fort Wayne a more diverse and inclusive city where every member of the community has equal opportunity to thrive and flourish and is empowered to assist in the eradication of discrimination.

Board of Commissioners

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City Council Appointee
2021 Chair

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Mayoral Appointee
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2021/2022 Commissioner

Letter from the Board Chairs

The Fort Wayne Metropolitan Human Relations Commission empowers residents through discrimination investigation, education, outreach and training to give them equal opportunity to succeed. The Commission is proud to share the 2021–2022 annual report as a reflection of the incredible work Fort Wayne Metro Executive Director Nikki Quintana and her staff have accomplished in that time.

Over the last two years, Fort Wayne Metro has continued to adapt to the changes brought on by a global pandemic. Fort Wayne Metro has not only responded to challenges in how they deliver services—they have also sought to broaden their impact, making significant strides toward a more welcoming Fort Wayne for all.

An impactful initiative that Fort Wayne Metro undertook during this time was conducting the

Equity for All Study, to better understand the unfair experiences our residents face. The study revealed the importance of Fort Wayne Metro’s services, as residents reported discriminatory experiences are still prevalent in employment, housing and public accommodation.

We know that Fort Wayne is a community on the rise, but we can’t truly succeed unless our minority or historically disadvantaged populations receive the same opportunities as everyone else.



Lana Keesling
2021 Commission Chair



Aisha Arrington
2022 Commission Chair

Letter from the Director

I’m pleased to report on the accomplishments of Fort Wayne Metro in 2021–2022. In that time, we’ve made considerable efforts to meet the needs of residents who face discriminatory experiences in employment, housing, public accommodation and education.

In the last two years, we’ve worked to make our services more accessible through initiatives such as Metro on the Move, utilizing our partnerships to increase awareness of the resources we provide, which is featured in this report.

Additionally, armed with the Equity for All Study, we’ve worked hard to expand our outreach and education. The study has opened doors to new

partnerships and opportunities that will significantly impact our residents. We look forward to continuing to schedule presentations about the study itself, as well as increasing our housing and employment discrimination trainings.

With our commissioners, staff and partners, we continue to help community members overcome adversity.



Nikki Quintana
Executive Director



Equity for All

In 2022, Fort Wayne Metro released the Equity for All Study to gain a deeper understanding of the unfair experiences our residents face. The results of the study will not only guide Fort Wayne Metro’s strategic planning and operations, but it will also inform local businesses, housing providers, community leaders and other organizations of the current state of discrimination against members of minority or historically disadvantaged populations.

“Equity for All gives us new benchmarks to aspire to when it comes to measuring feelings of belonging and inclusion. You can’t measure how far you’ve come if you don’t know where you started,” said Cassie Beer, Director of Women’s Fund of Greater Fort Wayne.

“What I also love about this study was that Fort Wayne Metro didn’t just stop at data collection and analysis, but they also launched anti-discrimination training and in-depth presentations on the findings. Fort Wayne Metro isn’t just identifying a problem but jumping in to help offer solutions.”

In this study, we also learned that 56% of survey respondents had never heard of Fort Wayne Metro—assuring that many of those who reported experiencing discriminatory events could not have taken advantage of the agency’s investigation services.

Employment

Employees have the right to a fair work environment, and providing one is good for business. Any form of discrimination leads to higher turnover and greater instability in the workplace. Improving workplace culture, creating a safe work environment and ensuring respect for all employees positively impacts everyone in our community.

Approximately half of all survey respondents heard negative comments about people with disabilities, immigrants or people who do not speak English in their workplaces, and 68% of all survey respondents heard slang, jokes or offensive language about race in their workplaces.*†

“We know employers are in favor of hiring people with disabilities. But those top-level executives aren’t always the people making the hiring decisions—we need to train our front line workers and managers to understand what reasonable accommodations are. This study, and everything Metro is doing as a result, validates the experiences of people with disabilities.”

– John Guingrich, The League

Housing

Fair housing fosters inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to opportunity. Where a person lives impacts their access to food, jobs, quality education, childcare, transportation, healthcare and more. When we ensure fair housing for everyone, we take steps towards eliminating inequity. Residents believe unfair housing practices are taking place in Fort Wayne—48% of all survey respondents believed Fort Wayne housing providers and apartment complexes use an applicant’s race or ethnicity in making rental decisions.*

“As an agency committed to amplifying the voices of the immigrants and refugees in this community, we experience firsthand the difficulties these minority populations must confront. For example, our advocates help our clients navigate housing discrimination incidents on a daily basis. Finding a place of residence can be incredibly challenging when landlords unfairly consider an individual’s ability to speak English.”

– Ewelina Connolly, Amani Family Services

Public Accommodation

Public spaces are where individuals access goods and services—as well as each other. They’re where people secure their families’ necessities, and where communities gather to connect. When residents feel welcomed in these places, it cultivates a sense of belonging.

48% of respondents who reported unfair treatment in stores or restaurants believed it was because of their race or ethnicity.*

“It’s vitally important that, in our race for economic growth, we make sure we’re building spaces—literally and metaphorically—for every member of our community, not just some. We must measure and analyze how well we are creating welcoming, supportive environments in all of our public spaces if we truly want to be a thriving city.”

– Cassie Beer, Women’s Fund of Greater Fort Wayne

Learn more about the study at FortWayneMetro.org/Equity.

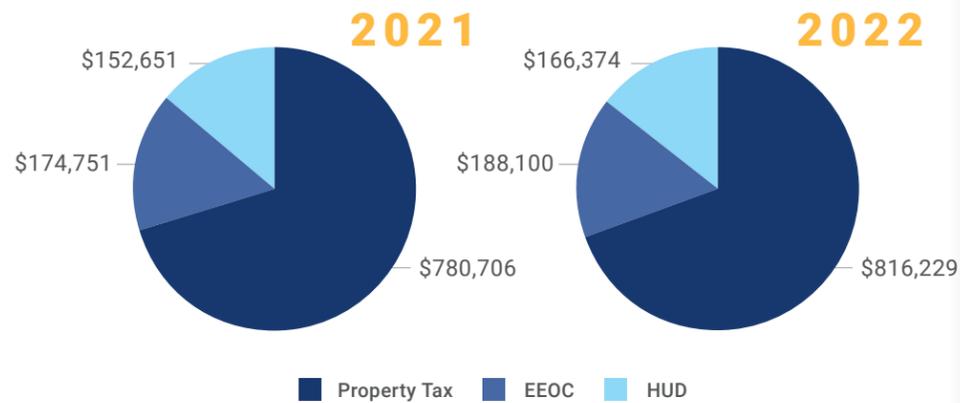
*Equity for All Study, 2022.

†Reflects respondents who are currently employed.

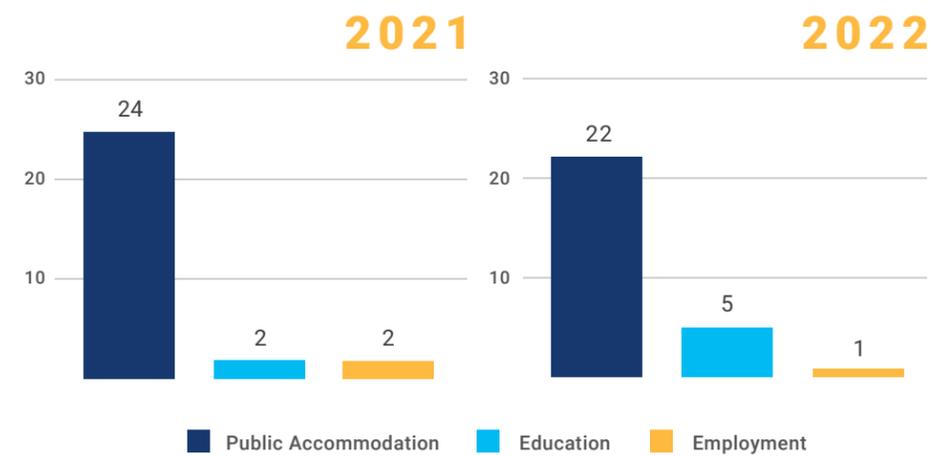
Financial Overview

Fort Wayne Metro operates on funding from the City of Fort Wayne, United States Housing of Urban Development (HUD) and United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Financial Summary



City Ordinance Charge Closures



Total Charges Processed

	2021	2022
Charges Drafted	362	443
Charges Investigated	351	356
Monetary Settlement	\$231,000.47	\$125,410.33

Outreach and Education

	2021	2022
Organizations Served	29	31
Individuals Served	1,573	1,395
Inquiries	1,047	1,085
Events	7	4
Trainings	38	36



Metro on the Move

In 2021, Fort Wayne Metro launched Metro on the Move to better serve the community and raise awareness of its services. By meeting people where they are and going out into the community, individuals who hadn't previously known about the organization could speak privately with an investigator about discrimination. The service was free of charge and took place twice a week from June through August, 2021 and included on-site interpreters.

3

MONTHS

3

LOCATIONS

24

SESSIONS

— Our Partners —





EMPLOYMENT

Employment Charges Processed

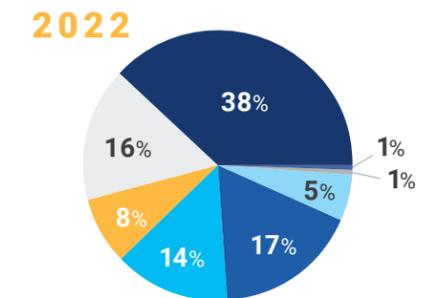
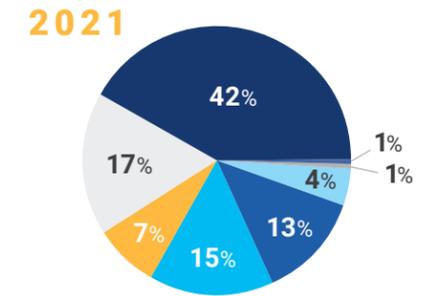
This data reflects dual-filed cases.

	2021	2022
Charges Drafted	277	329
Charges Investigated	266	250
Monetary Settlement	\$189,138.47	\$109,050.83

Investigated Employment Cases by Protected Class

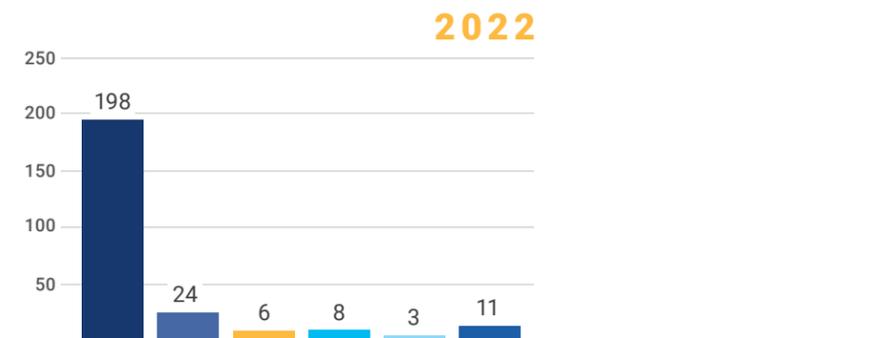
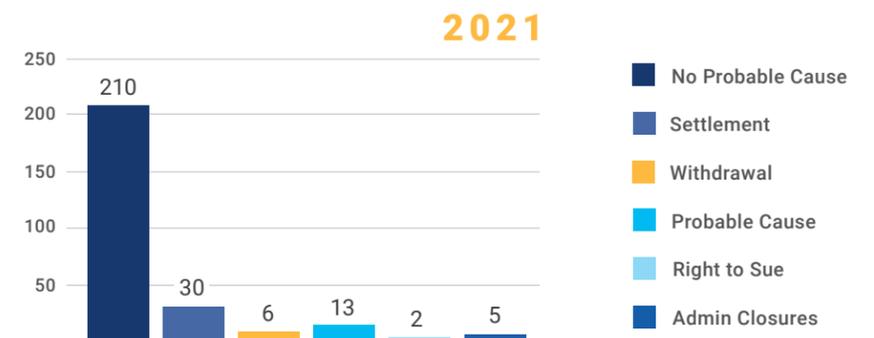
This data reflects the number of dual-filed cases in each of the protected classes. Some cases include multiple protected classes.

	2021	2022
Race	153	177
Color	3	1
Religion	2	4
National Origin	16	26
Sex	47	80
Disability	55	64
Age	28	37
Retaliation	63	74



Employment Closure Findings

This data reflects dual-filed cases.



Affecting Mental Health

Workplace discrimination affects individuals' economic security—but it also affects their emotional well-being. The average person spends one-third of their life, or about 90,000 hours, working. Courageous Healing, a nonprofit offering culturally-centered mental health counseling services, sees this day in and out.

"Individuals in marginalized classes often find themselves having to prove themselves. From the start, they have to work harder to overcome the perceptions of other people," said Aaron Lane, Co-Founder of Courageous Healing. "Many people spend their entire lives trying to combat discriminatory experiences. The workplace is usually just one of many places they are facing this, and that compounding effect has serious repercussions on their mental health."

Stress in Our Bodies

Discrimination exacerbates stress and, for many individuals, can trigger trauma responses. "Individuals who face long-term discrimination develop trauma responses to those situations," explained Janell Lane, Courageous Healing Co-Founder. "People are activated by their environment, and when they face these experiences every day at work, compounded with experiences in other facets of their lives, they begin to live in their trauma response."

"They are constantly in fight or flight mode. Their body doesn't return to baseline; they are constantly alert and on the defensive. Our bodies aren't designed to live in that state all the time."

Aaron added, "The side effects look a lot like workplace burnout. People who are living in their trauma response appear scattered and exhausted and have a hard time concentrating. And it's cyclical—burnout causes low productivity, which leads to employers using tools like the performance improvement plan, which then individuals struggle to meet because they're continuing to battle discrimination, leading to more burnout."

"This type of behavior has led many individuals to 'code-switch,' meaning they develop dual personalities. They have a work personality and a home personality, and the cost of code-switching is expensive. They spend all day translating and adjusting to the cultural norms set by the majority, not being able to authentically show up."

This prolonged stress can also cause significant effects on our nervous, immune and digestive systems and cardiovascular health. "People of color are more likely than white people to develop high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and more, which is a reflection of the effects that discrimination and stress have on our bodies," said Janell.

Changing the System

Mitch Landrieu, former mayor of New Orleans and founder of E Pluribus Unum Fund (Out of Many, One), conducted the Divided by Design study to break down barriers that divide the South by race and class. One of the findings reported that many individuals primarily interpret racism as the acts of individual people, and not the systems within which they operate.

"The responsibility to overcome discrimination is often placed on the person being discriminated against, rather than the individual performing the aggression," explained Janell. "One of the most important things our workplaces can do is create cultures that promote emotional safety. The people at our workplaces always change. But the systems they work in don't unless leadership takes the initiative to give everyone a safe environment to operate in."





HOUSING

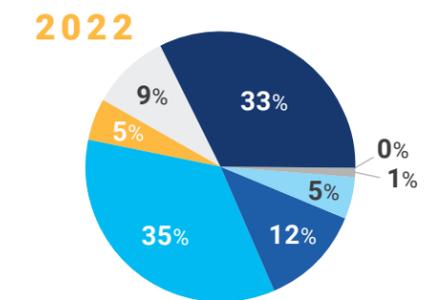
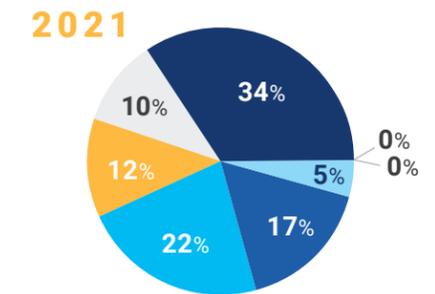
Housing Charges Processed

	2021	2022
Charges Drafted	66	78
Charges Investigated	57	78
Total Settlement Amount	\$22,612.00	\$12,059.50

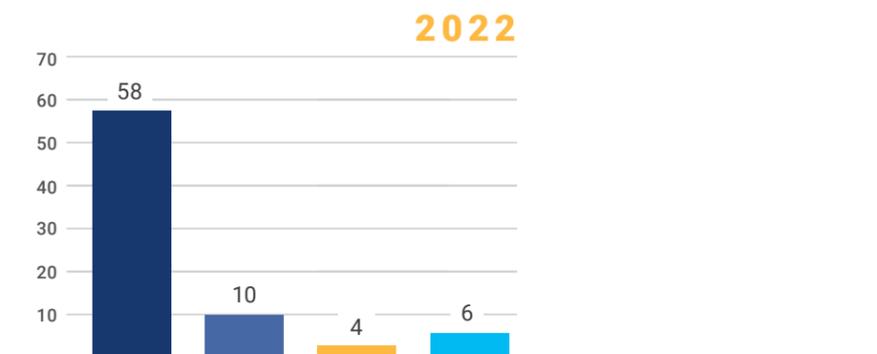
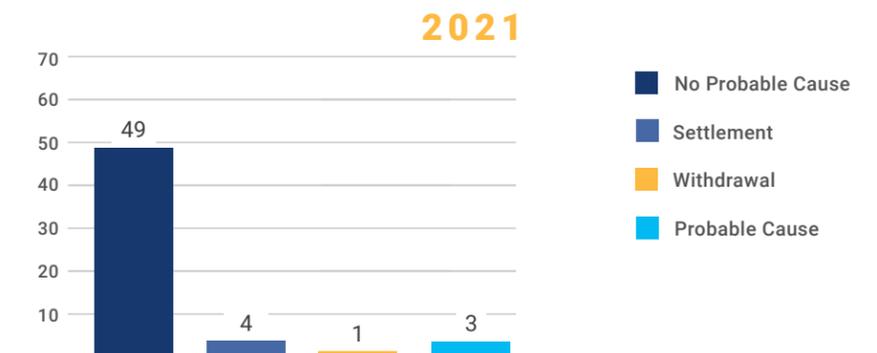
Investigated Housing Cases by Protected Class

This data reflects the number of cases in each of the protected classes. Some cases include multiple protected classes.

	2021	2022
Race	23	32
Color	0	0
Religion	0	1
National Origin	3	5
Sex	11	12
Disability	15	34
Familial Status	8	5
Retaliation	7	9



Housing Closure Findings



Understanding Evictions

According to 2016 eviction rankings, Fort Wayne is the 13th worst city for evictions in the United States, with eight families being physically removed from their homes by eviction every day.* Our eviction filing rate (the number of eviction filings divided by the number of renter homes) is 10.8%.*

“The eviction issue in Fort Wayne contributes to the cycle of poverty,” said Kelly Lundberg, Deputy Director of the Office of Housing and Neighborhood Services at the City of Fort Wayne. “Eviction is a compounding, detrimental issue for families because it makes it hard for them to find new housing. Even just having an eviction filed, but not executed, makes it less likely that a new landlord will rent to that family. Many end up being taken advantage of because they have to rent by last resort. It limits their housing choices and creates financial instability—which turns a cycle of poverty for a family into generational poverty.”

Eviction has long-term negative effects on physical health and emotional wellbeing, and increases the likelihood of homelessness.

Who Gets Evicted in Fort Wayne?



Housing in Protected Classes

Fort Wayne Metro focuses on providing investigation services, training and education in fair housing. Protected housing classes include race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity,

sexual orientation and pregnancy), national origin, age, disability or familial status. Unfair treatment in housing includes denial of housing or intimidation of people in their apartments, condominiums and nearly all housing transactions including lending discrimination and steering.

Fort Wayne Metro, in partnership with the Office of Housing and Neighborhood Services, puts on the Fair Housing Summit every year to identify barriers and create solutions to fair housing. This event draws diverse audiences, including individuals representing developers, social services agencies, landlords and more.

Fair Housing Summit	2021	2022
Keynote Speech	<i>Tenants' Rights to Fair and Affordable Housing</i> by Aaron Carr	<i>Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City</i> by Dr. Matthew Desmond
Number of Attendees	200	275

Fort Wayne Metro and the Office of Housing and Neighborhood Services also frequently partner with Indiana Legal Services, to make sure residents are aware of their rights and have access to free legal help if they qualify.

“I have observed that the eviction process is often treated as a remedy of first resort rather than the extreme remedy that it is—the forced removal of a household from their home. Without robust legal protection and available legal representation, tenants face a swift and imbalanced eviction process designed to make the tenant leave, rather than settle the matter in a way that maintains housing stability.”

– Andrew Thomas, Indiana Legal Services

“We are grateful for our partnership with Fort Wayne Metro and Indiana Legal Services, who give us the opportunity to proactively combat unfair housing experiences in protected classes,” said Lundberg. “We truly serve as crucial resources to one another, and continue to move the needle toward a more equitable housing environment in our community.”

*Source: Eviction Lab.

†Source: City of Fort Wayne Division of Community Development 2019 Study.





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