



**Sonoma County Homeless Coalition Board
Agenda Report**

Item No: 6
Subject: Racial Equity Workgroup Update
Meeting Date: January 22, 2025
Staff Contacts: Karissa White, CoC Coordinator, Karissa.white@sonoma-county.org

During the Homeless Coalition Board meeting on July 24, 2024, the board discussed Systemic and Institutional Discrimination in the System of Care. One of the key topics discussed was the need for a reporting process for discrimination to the Homeless Coalition Board. The board directed staff to consult with the Racial Equity Workgroup about developing a reporting process for discriminatory acts, similar to a grievance process. Since this meeting, staff have researched other community procedures for discrimination reporting and that information has been provided to the workgroup.

Since August, the Racial Equity Workgroup has made progress in developing a draft discrimination reporting protocol for clients served by Homeless Coalition-funded projects. A policy has been drafted that outlines equal access and non-discrimination, defining key terms such as discrimination, harassment, and bias, and identifying all protected classes. The group has emphasized the need for a client-centered approach, promoting inclusive language, culturally relevant services, and accessible reporting mechanisms. A complaint process has been outlined, including provisions for anonymous reporting, third-party oversight, and anti-retaliation protections to ensure the safety of individuals speaking out. This outline also includes the integration of data collection and the development of regular feedback mechanisms to track incidents and gauge satisfaction. Additionally, the workgroup has planned outreach efforts, including listening sessions with individuals with lived experience of homelessness, to gather input on the development of the procedure/reporting mechanism. The plan will address how to inform clients of their rights and incorporates restorative justice practices to promote healing. However, the workgroup has decided to pause further progress on the protocol until they receive clear direction from the Board regarding the accountability mechanisms for the reporting process and clarification on the Board's authority over these complaints.

The Racial Equity Workgroup requests that the Homeless Coalition Board address the following questions before moving forward with further development of a system-wide anti-discrimination protocol. The workgroup is committed to creating a meaningful and effective process, but they seek clarity on these critical issues to ensure that the protocol is implemented with proper accountability. Their concern is to avoid establishing a system that lacks the necessary follow-through, which could ultimately cause more harm than good.

Recommended Action:

Please provide clarity on the following questions as it relates to a Homeless Coalition Anti-Discrimination Reporting Protocol.

1. What are the consequences?
2. How will providers be held accountable?
3. What authority does the Homeless Coalition Board have over complaints?

Please see Attachment A for the rough draft outline of the document.

Attachment A: Draft Outline of RE Workgroup Anti-Discrimination Protocols

1. Purpose of Policy

2. Statement of Policy

- **Equal Access/Non-Discrimination** policy for HC funded projects-In charter
- **Clear Definitions:** Define discrimination, harassment, and bias in clear, accessible language
- **Protected Classes:** List all protected classes (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, national origin, religion, etc.).

3. Client-Centered Approach

- **Inclusive Language:** Encourage the use of inclusive language and practices that reflect the dignity and humanity of every client, regardless of their identity.
- **Culturally Relevant Services:** Ensure that services are culturally appropriate and accessible to clients from diverse backgrounds, including translation and interpretation services as needed.

4. Complaint and Reporting Mechanism

- **Anonymous Reporting:** Provide a way for clients, staff, and community members to report incidents of discrimination anonymously and without fear of retaliation.
- **Clear Process:** Outline a step-by-step process for reporting and investigating discrimination claims, with specific timelines for resolution.
- **Third-Party Oversight:** Consider using a neutral third-party organization to investigate complaints to ensure impartiality.
 - *Guiding principles*
 - *Training*
 - *Review process.*
 - *Timeline*
- **Regular Feedback Loops:** Implement regular client satisfaction surveys to gauge experiences with discrimination and ensure continuous improvement.

5. Anti-retaliation policy: ensures that individuals can safely speak and report out about unfair treatment or violations of their rights without fear of suffering negative consequences.

Possible actions below

- TA
- CAP
- Written report of grievance filed and retaliation to program funder (Board)

6. Data Collection and Reporting

- **Discrimination Incident Tracking:** Collect data on reported incidents of discrimination to identify trends and patterns, which will help inform continuous improvements in services and practices.

7. Resource Accessibility

8. Public Awareness and Education

- **Community Outreach:** Promote the CoC's anti-discrimination policy publicly to ensure all community members are aware of the organization's commitment to equality and justice.
- **Client Rights Education:** Provide clients with information about their rights under the HC policies, including how to report discrimination or bias.

9. Restorative Justice Approaches

- **Restorative Conversations:** In cases of discrimination, offer restorative justice processes to allow all parties to come together and address the harm, with the goal of healing and understanding.

10. Regular Review and Policy Updates

- **Ongoing Evaluation:** Regularly review and revise the anti-discrimination protocol to adapt to emerging issues, feedback from stakeholders, or changes in the legal landscape.
- **Best Practices:** Stay up-to-date on best practices for anti-discrimination and equity work, attending conferences, reading new research, and engaging with professional networks.

DRAFT