

# Civil Rights Reporter

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JOURNAL OF THE TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION.



## Mission Statement

Our mission is to reduce discrimination in employment and housing through education and enforcement of state and federal laws.

## Vision

Our vision is to help create an environment in which citizens of the State of Texas may pursue and enjoy the benefits of employment and housing that are free from discrimination.

Texas Workforce Commissioners

Bryan Daniel - Chairman and Commissioner  
Representing the Public

Alberto Treviño, III – Commissioner Representing  
Labor

Joe Esparza – Commissioner Representing  
Employers



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# From the Editor

To all our readers—both long-time supporters and new faces—let me begin by apologizing for the delay in getting this newsletter out. I know many of you were wondering why we missed our last issue. To be honest, your editor and humble publisher of this small-but-mighty newsletter has been especially busy over the past few months.

In just a few short weeks, I played a human version of Pong across the state. I traveled to the Rio Grande Valley, up to the DFW area, back down to the Valley, over to the Panhandle, and then got knocked off into East Texas. It's not an excuse—just a bit of context. I promise to do better at meeting our deadlines moving forward.

Luckily, things should get a little easier from here. Our Training team has officially welcomed a new addition: Hilsa Gomez. Many of you may recognize her already—she's been working with me for a while now, providing Spanish translation and assisting at exhibitor booths. We're excited to have her formally on board.

## Reflecting on Fair Housing Month

Back in April, we celebrated Fair Housing Month, and I want to take a moment to recognize what we accomplished. We had a strong showing, sharing knowledge and resources across the state. In total, we reached more than 1,200 people through trainings, webinars, and in-person events. That number might not seem huge when compared to the population of Texas, but it's up 300 from last year—a sign of steady growth. And when you consider the ripple effect of those 1,200 people sharing what they learned with others in their communities, the impact grows exponentially.

## Looking Ahead

As summer kicks off, our training team is still on the move, delivering Fair Housing and Employment Law trainings to businesses, housing providers, and the general public. We truly love what we do and the people we get to meet and talk to along the way. That's what makes this work so meaningful. If you're reading this because you attended one of our trainings—welcome! I appreciate your support. And to our long-time subscribers, thank you for sticking with us. I'll do my best to get future newsletters to your inbox on time.

With that in mind, we're currently considering a change to our publishing schedule. Instead of quarterly issues, we may move to a biannual format—with summer and end-of-year editions (calendar year, not fiscal). If you have thoughts on that change, I'd love to hear them. You can reach me at:

✉ [civilrightsreporter@twc.texas.gov](mailto:civilrightsreporter@twc.texas.gov)

Until next time—so long, and maybe I'll see you on the road.

## Jeff Riddle

*Editor, Civil Rights Reporter*

# Understanding Privilege: A Personal Reflection

**Joe Rosser**  
**Housing Supervisor**

I never thought much about discrimination when I was a kid. I grew up in a lower-middle-class, mixed neighborhood in the Greenspoint area of north Houston. My neighborhood best friend was a disabled kid who lived across the street and shared a first name with me—Joe. He was born with two deformed hands that did absolutely nothing to slow him down. No one, it seemed, ever treated him differently.

My other best friend in middle and high school was a Puerto Rican named Felipe Sanchez. He hated that name, though, and preferred “David” instead. His parents moved from Puerto Rico to New York City in the '70s and then to Houston a few years later, with David and his three siblings. David and I became like brothers in middle school, and his home was my second home. His parents treated me like part of the family.

David’s parents were native Spanish speakers who grew up in Puerto Rico and were bilingual, but they spoke only English around David and his siblings. Consequently, none of them spoke or understood much Spanish. I didn’t understand why at the time.

## “Separate but Equal”

Like many school districts across the South in the 1960s, the Aldine Independent School District (AISD) had separate schools for Black students. That changed, however, in 1964 when George Sampson attempted to enroll his children into the all-white Aldine High School. The district denied his request, demanding instead that he enroll his children in the all-Black Carver High School.

Sampson filed suit against the district, and a federal court—in *Sampson and the United States v. Aldine Independent School District*—ruled in his favor, declaring AISD’s “separate but equal” policy unlawful. The court ordered the district to begin integrating its schools.

Incredibly, by 1977 the district had still not fully integrated its schools and remained under a court order to redraw its boundaries and attendance zones to comply with desegregation mandates. That court order was not lifted until 2002.

## Busing

I began middle school in 1977 amidst AISD’s busing program, which transported Black students to the more predominantly white schools. I never thought much about the hassles and sheer inconvenience my Black classmates endured just to get to school each day.

Though I never personally witnessed overt acts of racism or prejudice, the racial tension at school was palpable. I didn’t understand why.



## Privilege

It was September 1984, and I was in my senior year at Chester W. Nimitz High School, Aldine ISD's new flagship high school. A grueling football practice had just ended. That year, I drove my stepfather's old, beat-up Chevy Blazer to and from school, and I was taking my friend David to his house to hang out before heading home.

Two Black teammates—RJ Jackson and Darien Barlow—asked for a ride to their homes in Bordersville after RJ's ride fell through. They were my teammates, and I agreed without hesitation.

Bordersville was a five-block area located between the City of Humble and Houston. It was a historically Black neighborhood, economically disadvantaged, and as recently as 1981, still lacked running water and proper sewage in some areas—despite being annexed by Houston in 1965.

As I drove down the narrow, pothole-filled road into Bordersville, the red and blue lights of a police cruiser flashed behind me. I considered myself a good driver, so I couldn't understand why I was being pulled over.

The officer approached my vehicle but didn't say a word to me or ask for my license. Instead, he directed all his attention to RJ and Darien in the backseat. He told everyone to keep their hands visible, then ordered the two of them out of the vehicle.

Law enforcement and policing ran in my family, so in my naïve 17-year-old mind, I assumed this was just routine. I watched as the officer frisked—what I later learned as a police officer myself was a search, not merely a frisk—both of my teammates. I couldn't hear what the officer was saying, but I could see they were scared.

He then pointed down the road, and RJ and Darien walked off in that direction. The officer came back to my window and told David and me to go home and not to come back to that neighborhood.

As we drove off, David quietly said, "See, that's why I don't speak Spanish. My parents wanted me to fit in."

Then I understood why.

RJ and Darien were back at practice the next day and made light of what had happened, but it left a lasting impact on me. So much so that, after I became a police officer, I felt compelled—at our five-year high school reunion—to apologize to them for that night.

"You good, Rosser. Just another day in the B-Ville," RJ said.

# AI Will Not Save Us

**BRYAN SNODDY - DIVISION DIRECTOR**

For many leaders, managers, and professionals in business and IT, we grew up watching Arnold Schwarzenegger embody the relentless force of technology in *The Terminator* (1984). For a 10-year-old me, it was terrifying. Now, nearly 40 years later, I still feel a sense of unease—though my concerns have shifted.

By way of background, my journey has taken me from programming a TRS-80 Model 1 in BASIC at age six to serving in the U.S. Air Force specializing in global logistics. I've practiced law for two decades and now lead a civil rights division in Texas state government. Across education, private industry, and military/government service, one truth has remained: artificial intelligence (AI)—especially generative AI—is just another tool, often wrapped in the familiar American cycles of hype and fad.

Consider this: what do New Coke, Big Data, Neon, Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality, Digital Transformation, NFTs, AOL, the Metaverse, Blockchain, 5G, and K-Pop (yes, I know this last one might stir controversy) have in common? Each was once hailed as a revolutionary force destined to reshape the world. That's not to say they didn't make an impact—but not all lived up to the seismic expectations placed upon them.

New Coke was never followed by a New Pepsi. Big Data improved quality and safety, yet consulting firms have largely retired the buzzword. Digital transformation brought work flexibility but deepened the digital divide for the rural and less tech-savvy. The Metaverse proved that cyberspace is vast—so vast that immersion feels like being dropped off at the edge of the galaxy in a NASA shuttle.

The point isn't that these technologies lacked value (excluding, perhaps, New Coke). Instead, human nature drives an ongoing fascination with novelty. We chase the next big thing, forgetting that the most profound advancements aren't dictated by tech alone—they stem from our ability to rethink, reevaluate, and reshape society amid constant change.

No AI can replicate the essence of human imagination, empathy, optimism, adaptability, collaboration, or humility. Generative AI might produce flawless briefs, but it will never grasp the complexities of human struggle. Managers won't be replaced because AI lacks intuition—the ability to read the intangible and make nuanced decisions. AI may outperform us in the rote, but the heart of creation, judgment, and vision remains uniquely human.

We shouldn't fear AI taking over. Instead, we should be wary of over-relying on AI for tasks only human minds can truly master. The future won't be shaped by hype—it belongs to those who see beyond the trends, imagine what does not yet exist, and wield tools like AI to turn vision into reality.

## Religious Accommodations

Lynn Leffew|CivilRightsInvestigator

### Religious Accommodations

Employees requesting a religious accommodation should clearly communicate their needs to their employer. The request should specify the religious practice or belief requiring accommodation, how it conflicts with work requirements, and the specific accommodation being sought.

It is important that employees be open to working with their employer to explore a range of accommodation options. The goal is to find a mutually agreeable solution, which may not always be the employee's original request. Employees should also understand that the accommodation process may take time.

While employees must be prepared to provide information and participate in the interactive process, the employer ultimately bears responsibility for providing a reasonable accommodation. However, the accommodation provided may not always align with the employee's preferred solution.

Employers are obligated to engage in the interactive process in good faith. This includes having a meaningful discussion with the employee to understand their religious needs and to explore possible accommodations. Employers are only required to provide accommodations that are reasonable and do not impose an "undue hardship" on the operation of the business. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), "undue hardship" must involve more than minor inconvenience or additional cost—it must present significant difficulty or expense to the employer, not just an assumption of hardship.

### Case Example: Religious Accommodation Request

One case investigated by the Texas Workforce Commission Civil Rights Division (TWCCRD) involved an employee of the Muslim faith who requested a religious accommodation to attend weekly prayer services.

The employee had served as a school principal for several years without needing accommodation, as their prayer meetings were near their original work location. However, when the position was relocated to a different campus in another city, the employee's ability to attend services was affected, and they formally requested an accommodation.

Although the employee correctly initiated the request process, the accommodation was denied. The employer cited "undue hardship" but initially failed to articulate specific reasons. The employee appealed the decision three times and filed a grievance, but each time the request was denied based on the same generalized claim of undue hardship.

The Civil Rights Division (CRD) required the employer to provide a more detailed justification. It was eventually determined that, due to the employee's role as a high school principal, their physical presence during specific hours was essential. Based on the employee's stated prayer schedule and travel time, the accommodation would have significantly interfered with their duties, thereby creating an undue burden.

# TEXAS CONFERENCE FOR EMPLOYERS

As I've mentioned we do get out and about. One of the events we participate in is the Texas Conference for Employers. Come out and join us at our booth to talk over our training programs or try your hand at winning one of our fancy coffee mugs.

TWC's Office of the Commissioner Representing Employers sponsors the Texas Conference for Employers, a series of employer seminars held each year throughout the state. Employers who attend the seminars learn about state and federal employment laws and the unemployment claim and appeal process. We assemble our best speakers to guide you through ongoing matters of concern to Texas employers and to answer any questions you have regarding your business.

We encourage every employer to attend at least one of these conferences every year, since the topics are updated whenever there are new laws, regulations or court cases. Each conference is geared toward small business owners, HR managers and assistants, payroll managers, and anyone responsible for the hiring and managing of employees.

All in-person meetings do have a virtual option available that is attended via Zoom. The same material is presented and all informational handouts provided in-person, are provided in a digital format to virtual attendees. The virtual option is also great for companies that are headquartered outside of Texas and have operations within the state or planning to.

[June 13, 2025](#)      [Victoria](#)  
[Victoria College Emerging Technology Complex](#)

[July 10-11, 2025](#)      [Houston/The Woodlands](#)  
[The Woodlands Waterway Marriott & Convention Center](#)

August 8, 2025      Abilene  
DoubleTree by Hilton Abilene Convention Center

August 22, 2025      Round Rock  
Kalahari Resorts & Conventions

September 5, 2025      Dallas  
The Westin Galleria



## Equal Employment Training

If you didn't already know and are still reading, our training is provided at no cost to the employer. Take advantage of having our training team do the training for you.

Are you a private employer looking to develop your company on the basics of Equal Employment Opportunity or for a better understanding of how to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace?

The Civil Rights Division's Training team can help. We offer numerous EEO training presentations and can tailor training to your needs. Reach out to our training team at [CRDTraining@twc.texas.gov](mailto:CRDTraining@twc.texas.gov) to discuss and schedule your training!

[Register Here.](#)

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## Fair Housing Training

Join us on every first and third Tuesday from 10:00 - 11:00 (CST) where we discuss Fair Housing and Housing Accommodations.

This is a great webinar for those interested in their rights or those that manage or own properties. Did we mention it is free!

[Register Here.](#)

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