

# Commission on Human Rights

## **KY Human Rights Commission proudly recognizes Women's Equality Day**

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August 26 2015 (Louisville, Ky. USA) – Today is U.S. Women's Equality Day.

"The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is proud of the remarkable women of Kentucky and would like to recognize, in particular, the many who have led and won in the areas of civil and human rights," said John J. Johnson, executive director of the commission.

Women's Equality Day marks the anniversary of the U.S. Constitution 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which guarantees women the right to vote. The law was certified 95 years ago today.

Leading up to the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, the U.S. House of Representatives in 1918 and the U.S. Senate in 1919 voted to pass the law. It was ratified by the 36<sup>th</sup> state, Tennessee, on Aug. 18, 1920. Then, on Aug. 26, 1920, U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby certified the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment and the long fought battle of women's suffrage saw victory. Since the nation's beginning in 1776, women had been prohibited from voting in elections.

The amendment says: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

In 1971, U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY), asked the U.S. Congress to designate August 26 as Women's Equality Day. The congress did so in a joint resolution.

The National Women's History Project website states: "[The 19<sup>th</sup> amendment] was the culmination of a massive, peaceful civil rights movement by women that had its formal beginnings in 1848 at the world's first women's rights convention, in Seneca Falls, New York...The observance of Women's Equality Day not only commemorates the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, but also calls attention to women's continuing efforts toward full equality."

One of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights key partners is the Kentucky Commission on Women, led by Executive Director Eleanor Jordan. "The work of the women's commission makes clear that there are great disparities in opportunity and in the treatment of women in

Kentucky and throughout the nation,” human rights commission Executive Director Johnson said.

“The Kentucky Commission on Women is dedicated to elevating the status of women and girls in the commonwealth, empowering them to overcome barriers to equity, and expanding opportunities to achieve their fullest potential,” according to the website.

The Kentucky Commission on Women shares on its website that the median earnings for Kentucky women is \$31,752, while the median earnings for Kentucky men is \$41,517. A woman in Kentucky working full-time, year-round, is paid only 77 cents to every dollar paid to a man working full-time, year-round, the same as the national gap. (The U.S. Census Bureau is cited for these and the following statistics.)

In Kentucky, 18.5 percent of women over the age of 18 live below the poverty line, compared to 14.8 percent of men. In the U.S., 30.3 percent of families with a female householder (no husband present) live in poverty. The poverty rate for families with a female householder is 38.1 percent in Kentucky.

Kentucky ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation on the National Women’s Law Center report card on women’s health and well-being.

The Kentucky Commission on Women recognizes the achievements of women in the state with its “Kentucky Women Remembered” portrait exhibit. Each year, the commission selects from public nominations four Kentucky women who have made history and changed the lives of future generations. The exhibit is displayed on the walls of the state capitol.

Officially recognizing women in Kentucky has also been a concern of the state human rights commission. The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Board of Commissioners at its meeting earlier this month passed a resolution urging state, city and county governments to erect statues of women of historical significance and of notable achievement in places of honor throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

The resolution says: “Women, the same as men, have advanced Kentucky, the nation and world, and Kentucky has done little to acknowledge and honor this reality in bronze or in marble. In our visual culture, the icons and symbols of women achievers is sorely lacking throughout our state.”

The commission Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame includes numerous women inductees.

Mae Street Kidd (1904-1999) was inducted in 2000. She was a Kentucky state representative from 1968 to 1984 (one of three African American members in the legislature at the time). She helped lead the push to end legal housing discrimination and segregation. She, along with state Sen. Georgia Davis Powers and Rep. Hughes McGill introduced the Kentucky Fair Housing Law to the Kentucky General Assembly. The law passed in 1968, making Kentucky the first state in the south to have a fair housing law.

Another 2000 inductee was state Sen. Georgia Davis Powers. She was the first woman and the first African American elected to the Kentucky General Assembly. She served as a state senator for 21 years from 1967 to 1988. In addition to her leadership in the passage of the Kentucky Fair Housing Law, she was one of the organizers of the Kentucky (civil rights) March on Frankfort in 1964. The massive demonstration helped lead to the U.S. Civil Rights Act, which was passed the same year, and to the Kentucky Civil Rights Act, which was passed in 1966.

Inducted into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame in 2001 was Anne Braden (1924-2006). She was the first recipient of the American Civil Liberties Union Roger Baldwin Medal of Liberty. She was author of a book, *The Wall Between*, which discussed the issue of racism. She and her husband Carl came under public attack and legal prosecution in 1954 for selling a home in an all-white neighborhood in Louisville to a black couple. She dedicated her life to civil rights and led the Louisville branch of the Alliance against Racist and Political Repression.

Another 2001 inductee was Lucretia (Lukey) Baldwin Ward (1922-1996). She founded the Women's Alliance of Louisville. She was a cofounder of the Allied Organizations for Civil Rights and a cofounder of the Louisville Chapter Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She was a member of the Kentucky Commission on Women and the Jefferson County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council. She also helped organize the civil rights March on Frankfort. She was often involved in open housing marches during the turbulent sixties.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government authority that enforces civil rights laws, which make discrimination unlawful. For help with discrimination, contact the commission by calling 1.800.292.5566.