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AG Grewal: On the 75th Anniversary of the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination, Our Division on Civil Rights Is More Critical Than Ever

DCR Issues New Guidance on Discrimination, Harassment Related to COVID-19

Civil Rights and COVID-19 (updated).

TRENTON – Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal and the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR) today marked the 75th Anniversary of the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD), at a time when strong state civil rights laws have never been more important. Enacted in 1945, the LAD was the first state civil rights statute to take effect in the United States.

Also today, DCR issued updated guidance ([NJ DCR FAQs on COVID-19 - Updated](#)) to address frequently asked questions about how the LAD and another law enforced by DCR, the New Jersey Family Leave Act (NJFLA), apply to situations that may arise during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among other things, the updated guidance includes information about changes to the NJFLA made in legislation (S2374) signed by Governor Phil Murphy on Tuesday, April 14, to expand the protections of the NJFLA to provide employees forced to take time off to care for a family member during the COVID-19 outbreak with up to 12 weeks of unpaid family leave in a 24-month period without losing their jobs.

Under the expanded NJFLA, employees may be eligible for leave to care for a family member as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic or efforts to prevent spread of COVID-19, such as a family member being in quarantine or isolation. The protections will extend to employees requiring leave to provide care or treatment for their child if the child's school or place of care is closed due to the public health emergency.

"With social distancing, we unfortunately can't celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Law Against Discrimination the way we had planned," said Attorney General Grewal. "But we know that our civil rights laws have never been more important than today, when the rate of bias incidents has been climbing, and when we're confronting discrimination and harassment against the backdrop of a global pandemic. And strengthening our civil rights laws, like Governor Murphy just strengthened the Family Leave Act, helps bend the arc of the moral universe closer toward justice."

"While in many ways the COVID-19 pandemic has united the entire human family and inspired countless acts of selflessness and courage, it has also exposed the persistent and systemic inequalities that continue to plague us, seventy-five years after the nation's first

civil rights law went into effect,” said DCR Director Rachel Wainer Apter. “Today we double down on our commitment to equal rights and opportunities for all New Jersey residents in employment, housing, medical care, and all places open to the public, and we say loud and clear that COVID-19 does not justify racism, xenophobia, or stereotyping based on religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.”

Governor Walter Edge signed the LAD into law 75 years ago, in 1945. The LAD created the Division Against Discrimination, now known as the Division on Civil Rights.

Dr. James O. Hill, who served as State Assemblyman for Newark, sponsored the law to prevent discrimination on account of race, creed, color, and national origin or ancestry in employment.

The LAD was the nation’s very first state civil rights statute to go into effect, and its protections have expanded steadily since then.

The current reach of the LAD (and the NJFLA, which DCR also enforces) is underscored by DCR’s guidance on how its protections apply to situations related to COVID-19.

DCR first issued its COVID-19 guidance on March 19. The guidance answers common questions about discrimination and harassment related to COVID-19 in housing, employment, and places of public accommodation (which can include healthcare facilities), as well as questions about job-protected leave for individuals caring for family members affected by COVID-19 or the public response to the pandemic.

Today’s updates cover recent expansions of the NJFLA’s job protections and a recent Executive Order issued by Governor Murphy to enhance protections for workers in essential businesses by requiring the provision of masks and gloves in certain situations.

For additional information about DCR, the LAD and Family Leave Act, visit DCR’s [website](#). If you would like to speak with a DCR housing investigator, you can call DCR’s Statewide Housing Hotline at **1-866-405-3050**. For all other types of complaints, you can call DCR’s offices including: **Newark (973-648-2700)**; **Trenton (609-292-4605)**; **Cherry Hill (856-486-4080)**; and **Atlantic City (609-441-3100)**.

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