

THE MANITOBA
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION



LA COMMISSION DES
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE
DU MANITOBA

News Release: The Manitoba Human Rights Commission

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 18, 2002**

Manitoba Human Rights Commission More Proactive

As revealed in its 2001 Annual Report, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission continues to set new goals promoting human rights, strengthening its education programs, improving its complaint resolution process, updating its policies and reviewing the Human Rights Code.

According to Chairperson Janet Baldwin, the Board has taken a more proactive approach to the promotion of human rights. "It expanded its outreach and education programs, held the first Annual Youth Awareness Conference, continued a full schedule of speaking engagements, and issued news releases on such topics as the dangers of stereotyping and backlash after the September 11th tragedy", she said.

The Commission also spoke out on issues such as supporting the right of same-sex partners to adopt, the extension of family property laws to common-law couples, and the right of same-sex couples to choose to marry. The Commission urged the Government of Manitoba to intervene in the cases challenging the restriction of marriage to heterosexual couples, if and when they reach the Supreme Court of Canada. In November the Commission recommended the addition of "social condition" as a protected ground under the Code, to address discrimination on the basis of poverty and homelessness. Ms. Baldwin also addressed the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights and spoke about the impact of the Manitoba Commission on the evolution of Canadian human rights as well as its own initiatives and challenges.

"The Board is committed to emphasizing systemic issues and will consider the greater use of Commission-initiated complaints to address systemic discrimination," Ms. Baldwin said.

The 2001 Annual Report also disclosed monitoring reports regarding the under representation of women in both faculty and administration at two of the province's universities: the University of Winnipeg and Brandon University. These published reports are part of settlement agreements

Although the volume of complaints is comparable to last year, the Commission noted that the percentage of complaints based on disability continues to increase steadily. According to the Commission's Executive Director Dianna Scarth, "a substantial increase in disability complaints is a trend noted by other commissions across the country. Not only has there been an increase in disability complaints, but also the allegations raised have become increasingly complex, and there are more complaints based on mental disability than was the case in the past."

The vast majority of complaints continue to occur in employment.

The report also indicates that the Commission continues to improve efficiency in its resolution of complaints. When all of the options available to resolve a complaint were combined and a time calculated, the average time to process complaints that were resolved in 2001, was 103 days or just over 3 months.

The 2001 Annual Report states that the decrease in the amount of time required to resolve a human rights complaint is a result of the use of such efficient and remedial practices as pre-complaint resolution and mediation.

The full report will be available on the Commission's website at www.gov.mb.ca/hrc

For more information, contact
Patricia Knipe
Communications Coordinator
945-5112