

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Fifty years ago this month, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, banning racial, religious and gender discrimination in employment and public facilities, ending Jim Crow laws, and establishing the legal basis for decades of federal civil rights enforcement. It also established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service. The Civil Rights Act not only laid the groundwork for other critical civil rights laws, including the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, it also helped shape the mission of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Department's Civil Rights Division has long been the center of federal expertise when it comes to civil rights enforcement, but United States Attorneys play a pivotal role. We help shape the Department's overall civil rights enforcement priorities through the Civil Rights Subcommittee of the Attorney General's Advisory Committee, on which I serve. But we also bring enforcement actions in our own districts, often in conjunction with the Civil Rights Division. In recent years this office has prosecuted hate crimes and brought civil cases to enforce fair housing and anti-discrimination laws. In order to enhance those efforts here in the Eastern District of California, and to increase our focus on human trafficking, I recently created a working group consisting of criminal and civil litigators in both the Sacramento and Fresno Offices.

In some areas there has been tremendous progress in the 50 years since the Civil Rights Act was enacted. In striving to ensure equal access for the disabled, protect women from sexual harassment by landlords, and achieve equality for members of the LGBT community, the Department and my office are seeking justice in ways that would have seemed a distant dream fifty years ago. But sadly, we are sometimes reminded that there is still much to do. Fifty years ago, three civil rights workers, friends who were white and black, were slain in Mississippi by white supremacists, and the U.S. Department of Justice prosecuted the offenders. Today, my office is prosecuting three white supremacists who assaulted two friends, one white and one black, at a gas station in Yuba County.

Five decades after its passage, the Civil Rights Act continues to touch the lives of Americans every day. While the challenges today are sometimes different, ensuring equal treatment under law for all Americans is still a critical function of the Department, and we in the Eastern District of California are as active in civil rights enforcement as we have ever been.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner