

**City of Salem Human Rights Commission
2024 Community Belonging Survey
and Executive Summary**

Students in the Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership Program
OL 636: Data-Driven Decision Making
Western Oregon University
June 12, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Over the past few years, the City of Salem Human Rights Commission (HRC) has partnered with Western Oregon University Organizational Leadership (OL) graduate students to conduct and analyze research on discrimination and belonging in Salem, OR. This is executed through an annual survey of Salem residents. This year's study, the *2024 Community Belonging Survey*, was conducted between April 23, 2024, and May 15, 2024. Following the close of the study, qualitative and quantitative analysis was performed by OL students under the guidance of Professor Marianne Bradshaw. This Executive Summary presents notable facts, figures, and findings from this year's survey to better aid HRC in its work.

Corresponding charts are found after each Key Finding is stated. Corresponding recommendations are included at the end of each section of Key Findings. For convenience, a full list of all recommendations is included in a separate section.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

- Measure and analyze the various types of discrimination, frequency of discrimination, and locations of discrimination witnessed by Salem residents.
- Measure and analyze the various types of discrimination, frequency of discrimination, and locations of discrimination personally experienced by Salem residents.
- Measure and analyze Salem residents' rating of discrimination across the city
- Measure and analyze Salem residents' comfort in reporting a bias crime to the Salem Police Department.
- Measure and analyze Salem residents' awareness of the Human Rights Commission
- Measure and analyze Salem residents' sense of belonging in the community

METHODOLOGY

A self-administered questionnaire using Qualtrics was fielded from April 23 to May 15, 2024. After removing spam responses, responses from those under 18, and responses from those who did not live or work within 20 miles of Salem, 979 respondents began the survey. Of those, 821 completed the final closed-ended question.

The sample is a non-probability judgment sample. While responses were gathered from diverse people, the aggregate data does not represent the City of Salem overall. In particular, people experiencing homelessness, people living with disabilities, and people identifying as LGBTQIA+ are overrepresented, while the Latino/a/e population is underrepresented (see Appendix A, B, C, & D). The overrepresented populations were done so intentionally. While most surveys were completed online, some were completed via hard copy at events targeting those overrepresented populations.

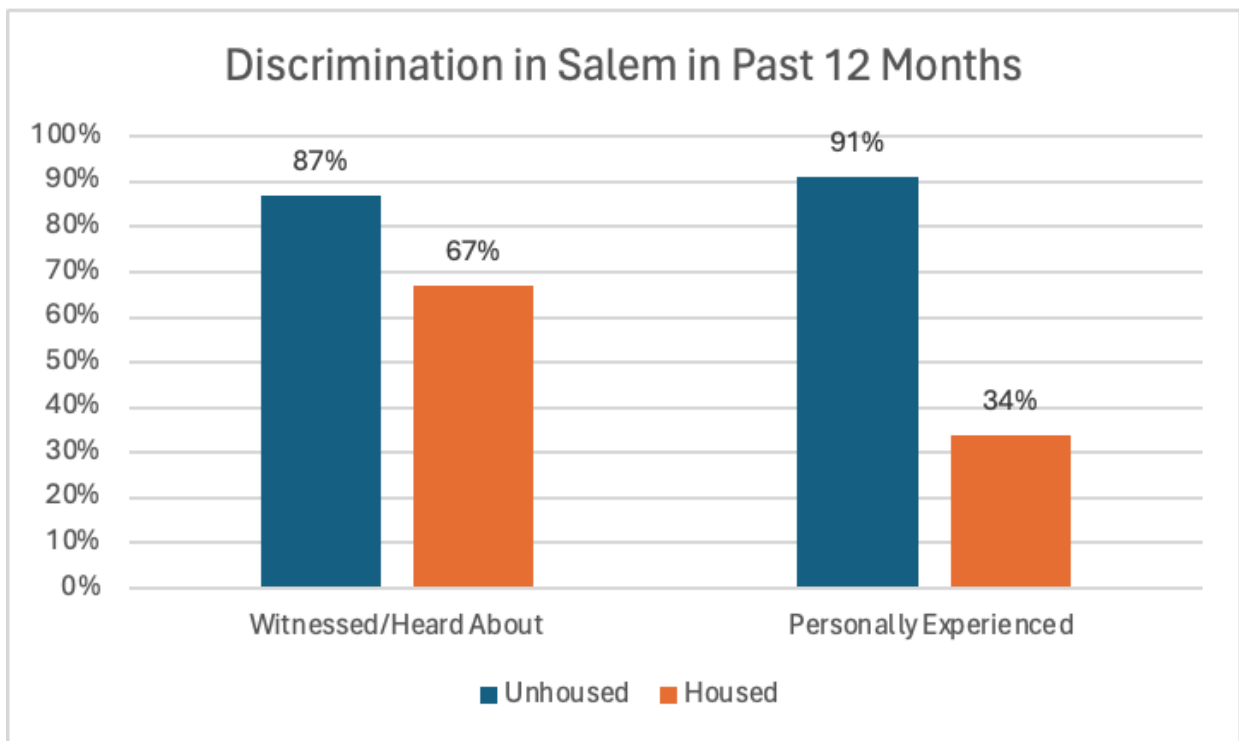
Although HRC and the students put significant resources into reaching out to the Pacific Islander community in Salem (including translating the survey into Marshallese and Chuukese for this year's questionnaire), only 19 respondents identified themselves as Pacific Islander, Micronesian, Native Hawaiian, or Kānaka Maoli. Unfortunately, this number of respondents does not allow us to conduct extensive analyses or draw conclusions about this population.

KEY FINDINGS

DISCRIMINATION IN SALEM

1) The majority of survey respondents report encountering discrimination in Salem in the past 12 months.

Among unhoused respondents, these experiences are nearly universal. About 2 in 3 housed respondents indicate they have witnessed or heard about discrimination in Salem. About 1 in 3 housed respondents report they have personally experienced discrimination in Salem.

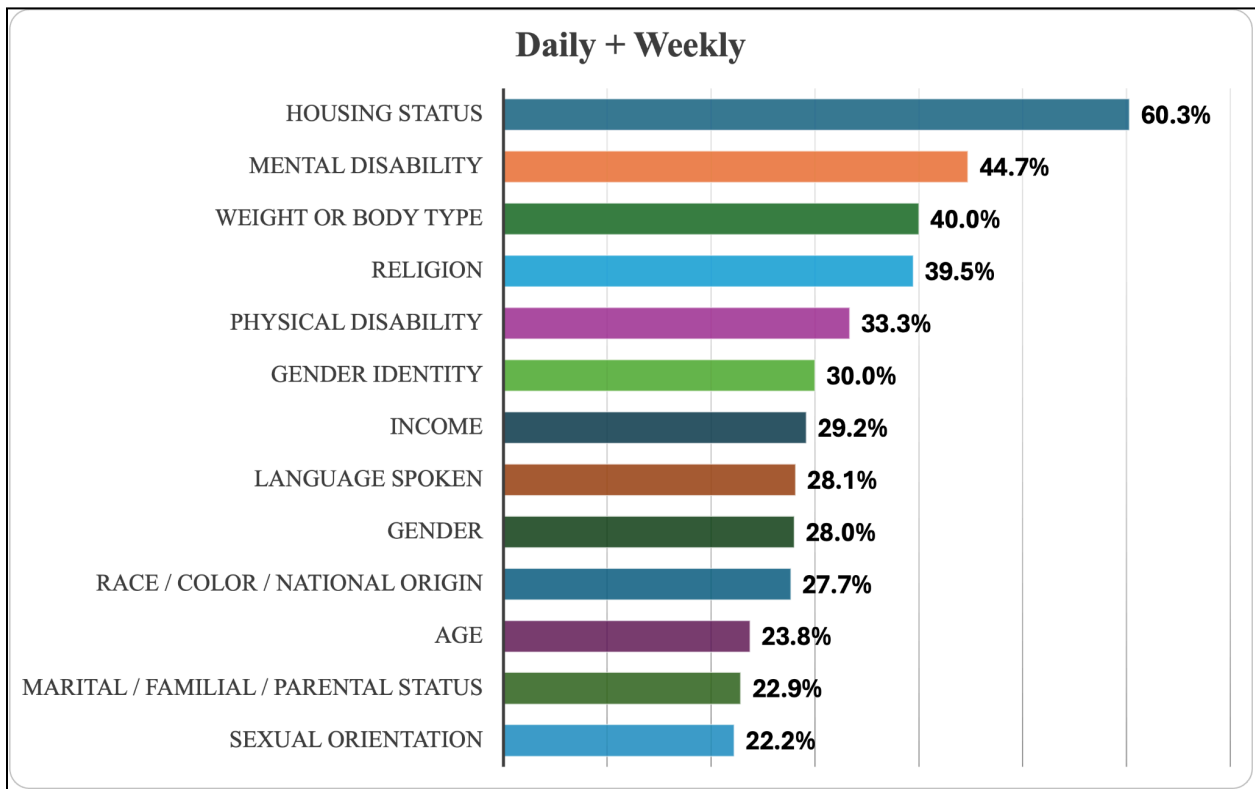


2) Different types of discrimination are experienced in different frequencies and are more prevalent in different settings.

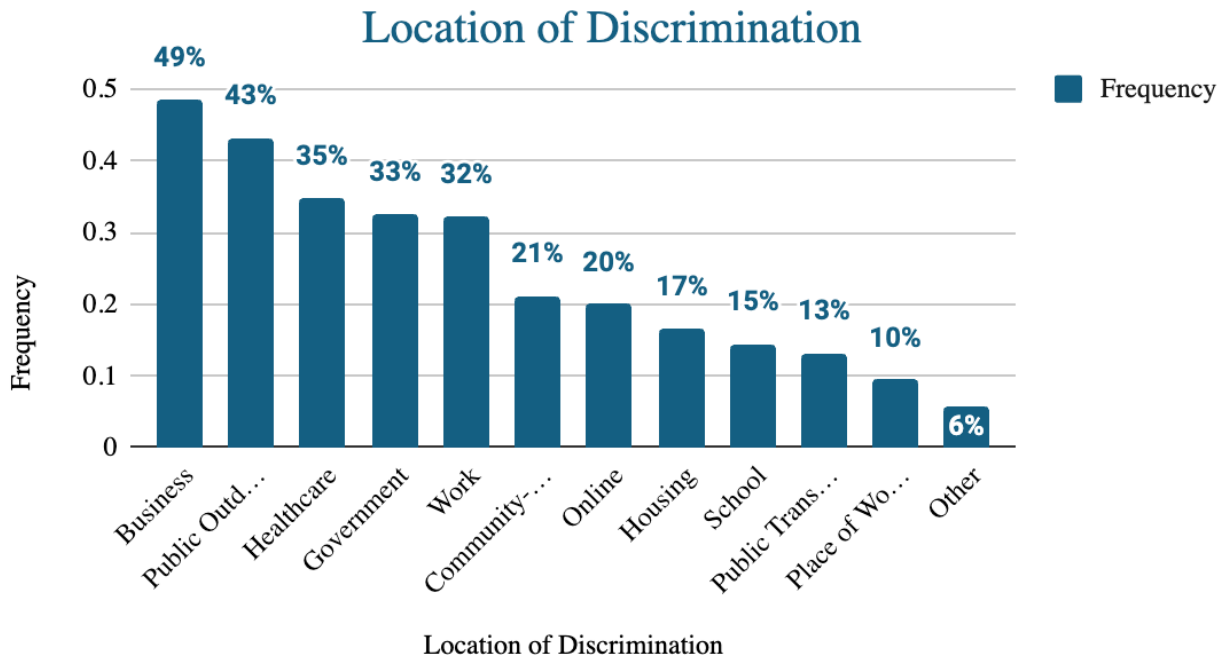
Those who indicated they had witnessed/heard about or personally experienced discrimination in Salem in the past 12 months were then asked to indicate which types of discrimination. The most common types follow:

Types of Discrimination Witnessed/Heard about in past 12 months in Salem (639 respondents, check all that apply)	Types of Discrimination Personally Experienced in past 12 months in Salem (330 respondents, check all that apply)
70% Race/Color/National Origin 59% Housing Status 45% Gender Identity 42% Language Spoken 36% Sexual Orientation	32% Race/Color/National Origin 28% Age 27% Gender 24% Housing Status 21% Weight/Body Type

Those who have personally experienced discrimination in Salem in the past 12 months indicated the **frequency** of that experience for each type they faced. Respondents indicated the following types of discrimination as those experienced most often (on a daily + weekly basis): housing status, mental disability, weight or body type, and religion.

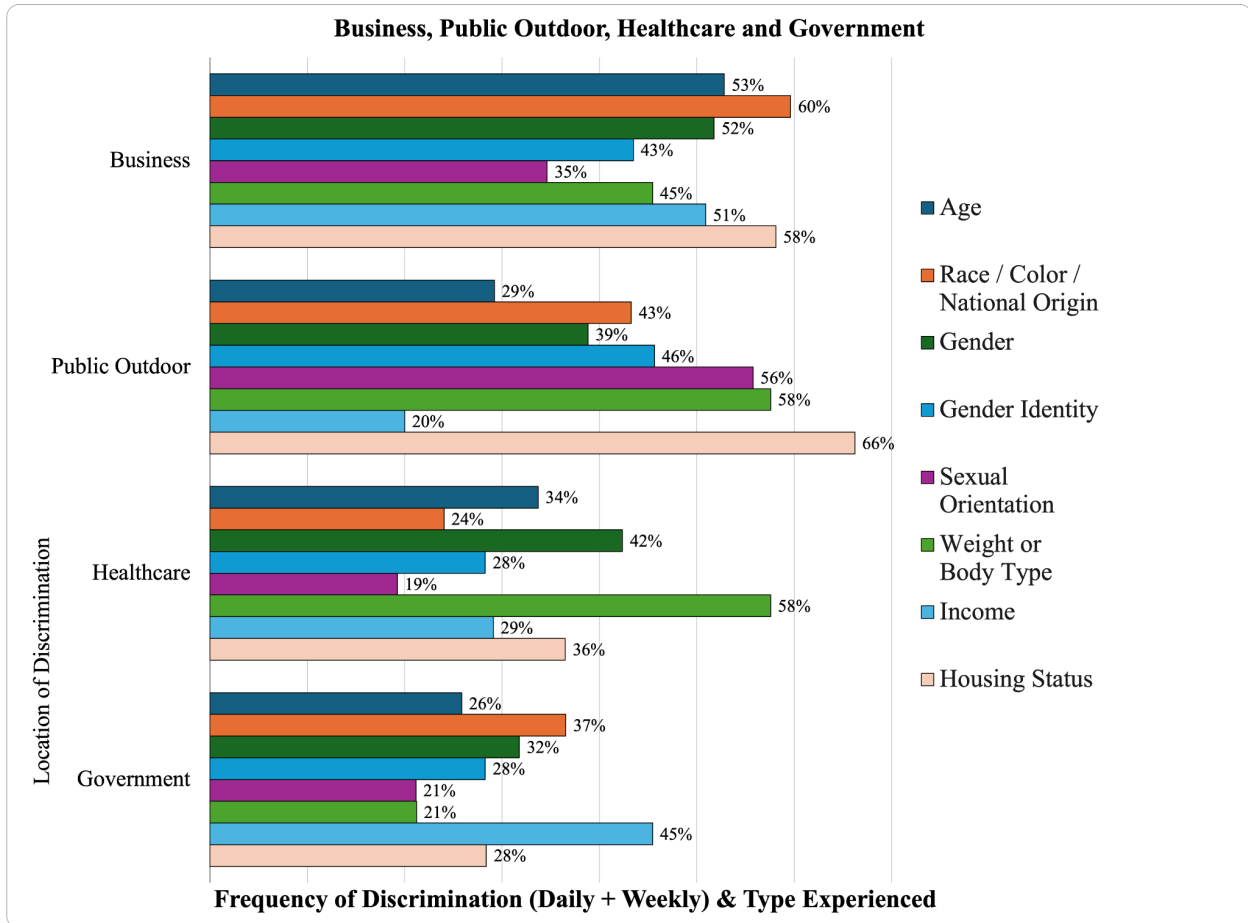


Those who have personally experienced discrimination in Salem in the past 12 months also indicated the **locations** of that experience for each type they faced. The most common locations for respondents to experience discrimination in Salem follow: business, public outdoor spaces, healthcare setting, and government office or agency.



If we look specifically at the top locations where survey respondents indicate they experienced discrimination in the past 12 months in Salem, we can observe the types of discrimination most prevalent in each:

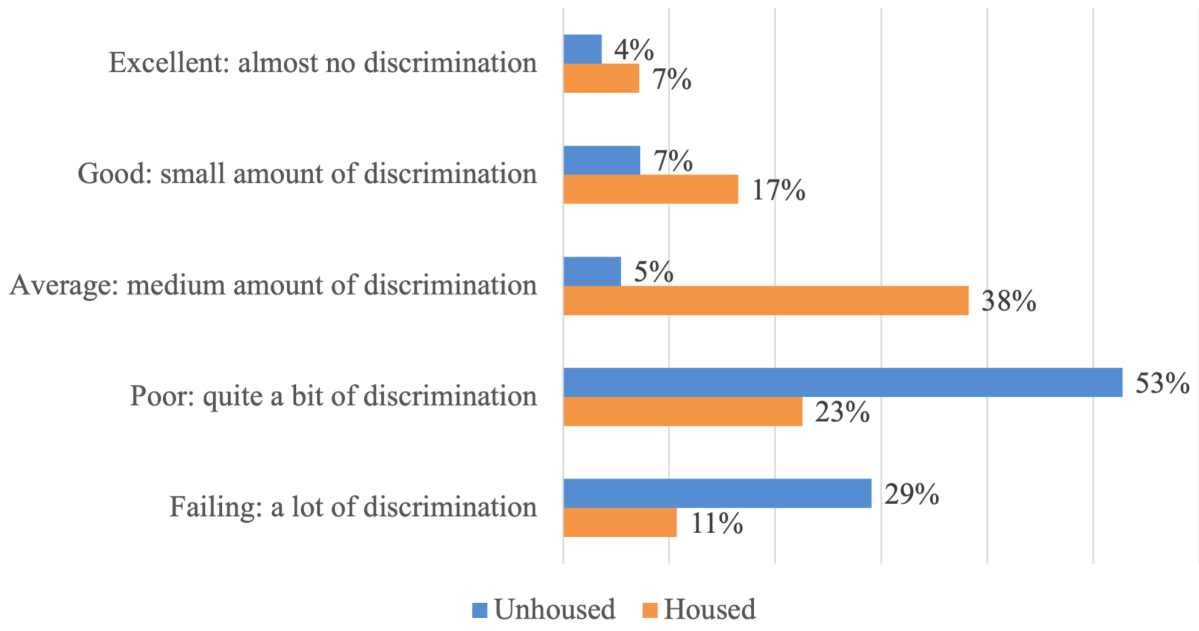
Location	Top Type of Discrimination Reported in that Setting
Businesses	Race/Color/National Origin
Public Outdoor Space	Housing Status
Healthcare Settings	Weight/Body Type
Government Offices	Income



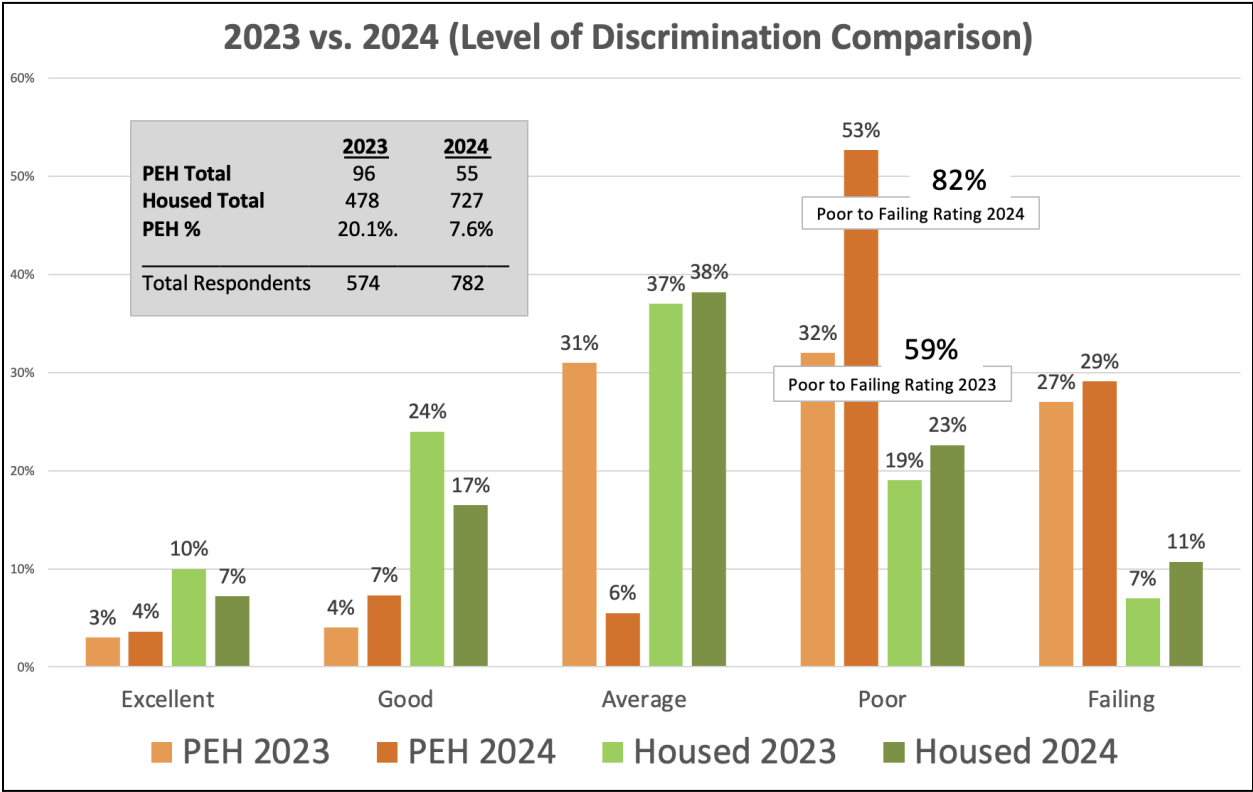
3) Respondents on average, give Salem an “Average” rating overall for the level of discrimination.

Respondents rated Salem for the level of discrimination on a 1 (failing, a lot of discrimination) to a 5 (excellent, almost no discrimination) scale. The average rating across all respondents was 2.68. The average rating among unhoused respondents was 1.98, the lowest observed of any sub-group.

"Overall, how would you rate the level of discrimination in Salem, Oregon"



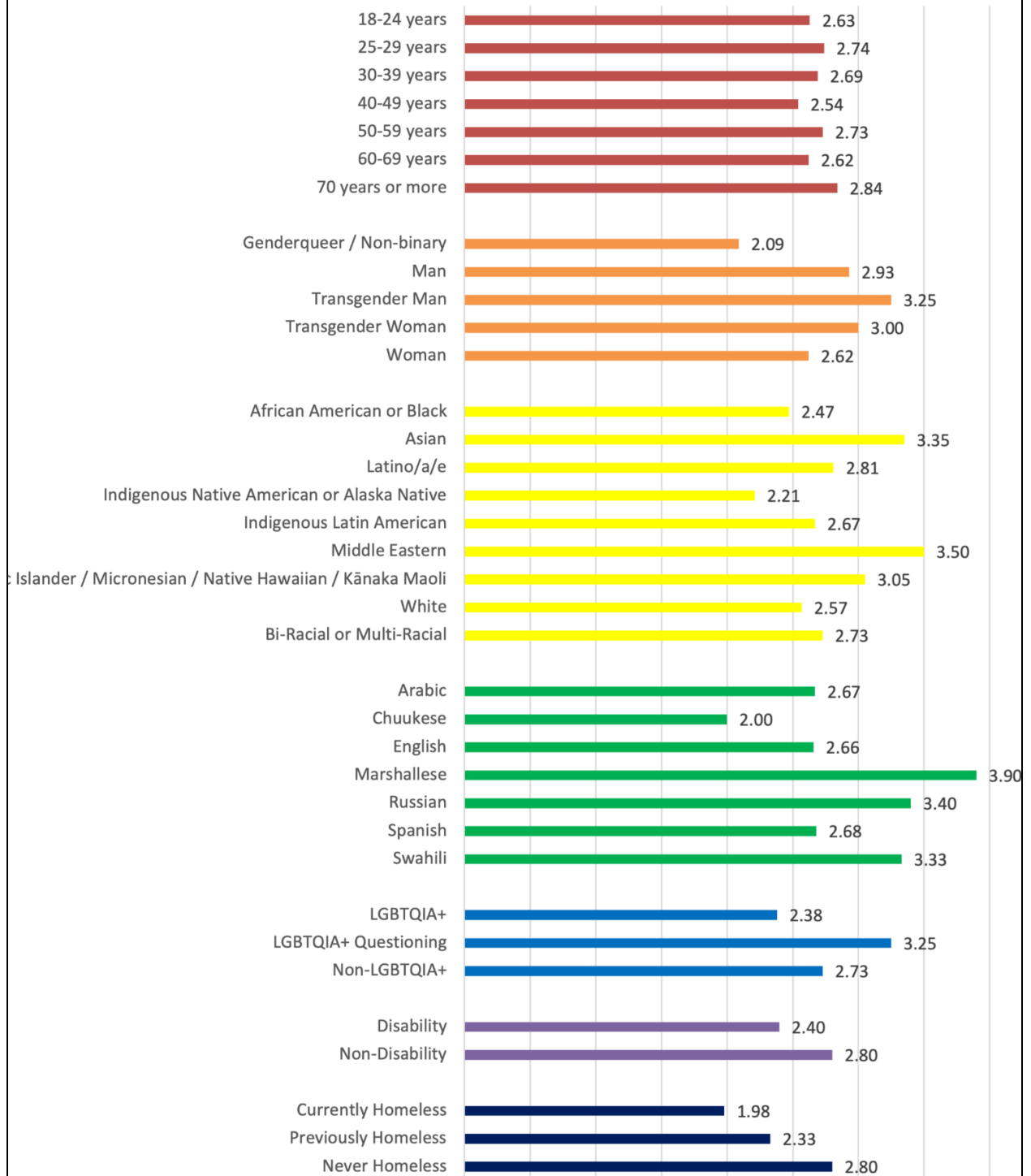
In 2024, 82% of the unhoused respondents gave Salem a rating of Poor + Failing for the level of discrimination. In comparison (and we make year-on-year comparisons with a variety of caveats around the sampling methodology), in 2023, 59% of the unhoused respondents gave Salem a rating of Poor + Failing for the same thing. This trend is going in the wrong direction and highlights a lack of progress despite the 2022 change in the city code in a focus area.



In addition to observing the mean rating for housed versus unhoused, we calculated the mean rating for a variety of sub-groups to identify priority populations. The chart on the following page compares the mean rating for the level of discrimination in Salem across a variety of sub-groups. The sub-groups with the lowest mean rating for the level of discrimination are:

- 1.98 Unhoused
- 2.09 Genderqueer/non-binary
- 2.21 Indigenous Native American or Alaska Native
- 2.33 Previously unhoused
- 2.38 Members of the LGBTQIA+ community
- 2.40 Respondents with a disability

Average Rating of Salem for Level of Discrimination
 5 = Exc. (Almost No Discrimination); 4 = Good (Small Amount);
 3 = Avg. (Small Amount); 2 = Poor (Quite a bit); 1 = Fail (Lots)



4) When invited to explain their selected rating for the level of discrimination in Salem, over half of those who chose to type in a comment described discrimination they've seen, heard about, or experienced.

Here are the most common themes in those open-ended comments with example quotes:

Theme	%	Example Quote
I've Seen	25%	<p><i>People openly condemn the disabled, houseless, and queer communities and communities of color here. They don't even try to hide it, from bumper stickers on their cars to Salem community Facebook posts, hearing people talk amongst themselves at work and in other public spaces. Downtown is the worst, people defacing black owned businesses. People yelling out of their cars at houseless people. The mentally ill houseless population are so vulnerable and people are really mean to them. I don't feel safe at events or even just walking alone.</i></p> <p><i>I've lived in a lot of places, and I was shocked when I moved to Oregon, and Salem in particular. It's undoubtedly the most racist place I have ever lived in my life. The racism is so overt, but covered by a veneer of white saviorism that is painful. The people living here are in complete denial about it too. There is a huge amount of religious discrimination too for anyone who isn't Christian.</i></p>
I've Heard	21%	<p><i>My elementary-aged kid was bullied for their gender identity when we moved here last year from PDX. I also see and hear of folks treating the houseless people here very poorly.</i></p>
I've Experienced	14%	<p><i>They say "You can't judge a book by its cover" but people look at homeless people and do that all the time. They look at us like we are bad or lazy or criminals.</i></p>

Discrimination within Answer	9%	<i>I'm confused on how people are discriminated against. Where is this happening?? The grocery store?? I have never heard nor seen this happen. If it's with homeless, I can understand that. The ones we see are trashing our city. No one wants that around.</i>
Never Seen Discrimination	5%	<i>I own a restaurant and we routinely serve all kinds of people - black, white, Hispanic, gay, straight, overweight, thin, trans, young, old and others. I believe people want to see, and look hard for discrimination. I don't see homelessness as a discrimination issue.</i>
Reverse Discrimination	2%	<i>I've lived here my entire life and if I see any discrimination today it's against white males.</i>
Other	40%	<i>Lack of education within businesses, law-enforcement, and other government agencies. Lack of trauma informed care as well within all of these businesses and agencies.</i> <i>Salem is not doing a very good job of bringing the community together. Our community needs more opportunities for community gatherings of people from diverse groups and backgrounds. We need more open dialog as well as more opportunities for participation by marginalized populations in Salem.</i>

Recommendations:

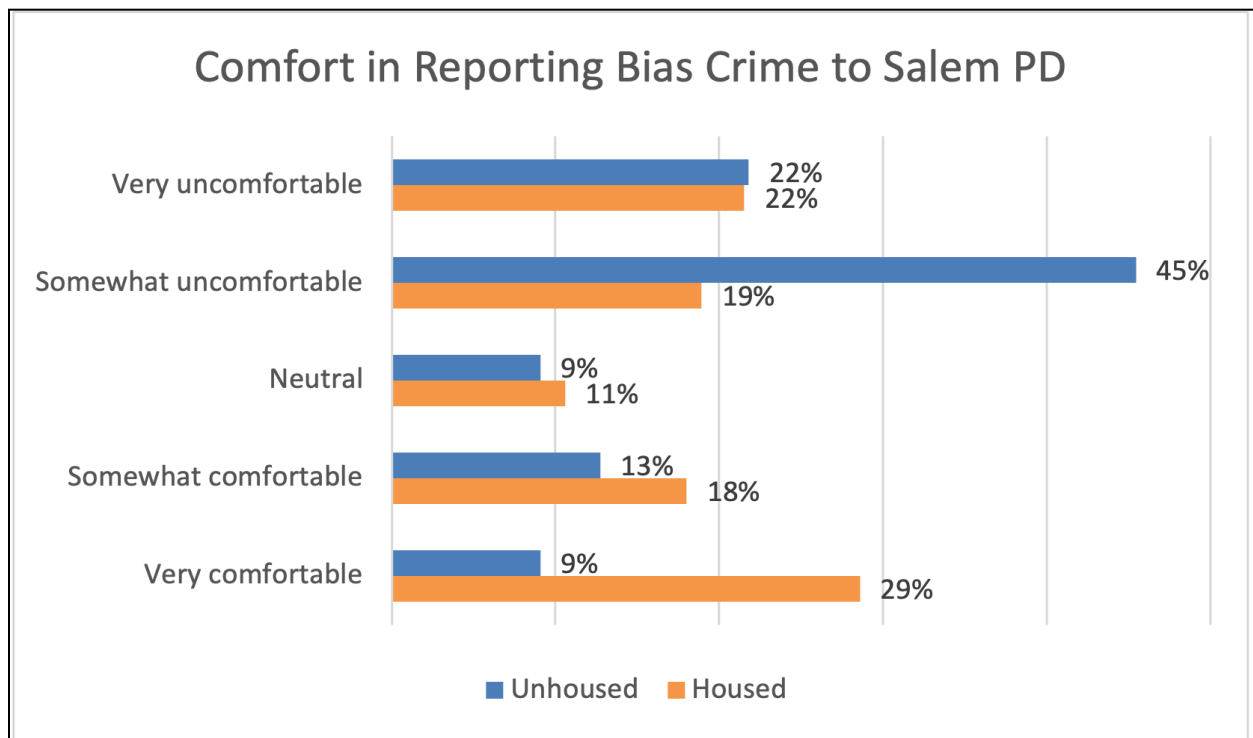
- Nearly all people experiencing homelessness report experiencing frequent discrimination. In October 2022, the City of Salem added a prohibition to discriminate on the basis of housing status to its code. Develop a communication plan to increase awareness of that change, especially among business owners.
- Public outdoor spaces: Continue work with Salem Police to decrease discrimination experiences based on housing status in public outdoor locations.
- Healthcare settings: Share the information that healthcare settings are a top location for discrimination in Salem with healthcare providers. Consider partnering with Salem Health to raise awareness among medical providers and staff.

- Government offices or agencies: Work with other City of Salem staff and the State of Oregon to train government employees in their interactions with the public, focusing on sensitivity and awareness of discrimination based on factors of income, gender identity, and race.
- Consider sub-groups with the lowest mean rating for Salem's level of discrimination (unhoused, genderqueer/non-binary, LGBTQIA+, Indigenous Native American/Alaska Native, with a disability) and explore ways HRC can understand their experiences and serve them.

REPORTING BIAS CRIME TO THE SALEM POLICE DEPARTMENT

5) The unhoused are much more likely to feel uncomfortable in reporting a bias crime to Salem Police than the housed.

Overall, respondents were mixed in their level of comfort in reporting a bias crime to the Salem Police Department. The top responses were polarized between “very comfortable” and “very uncomfortable,” while neutral responses were the lowest by percent. Differences are more noticeable when broken out between the housed and unhoused populations.



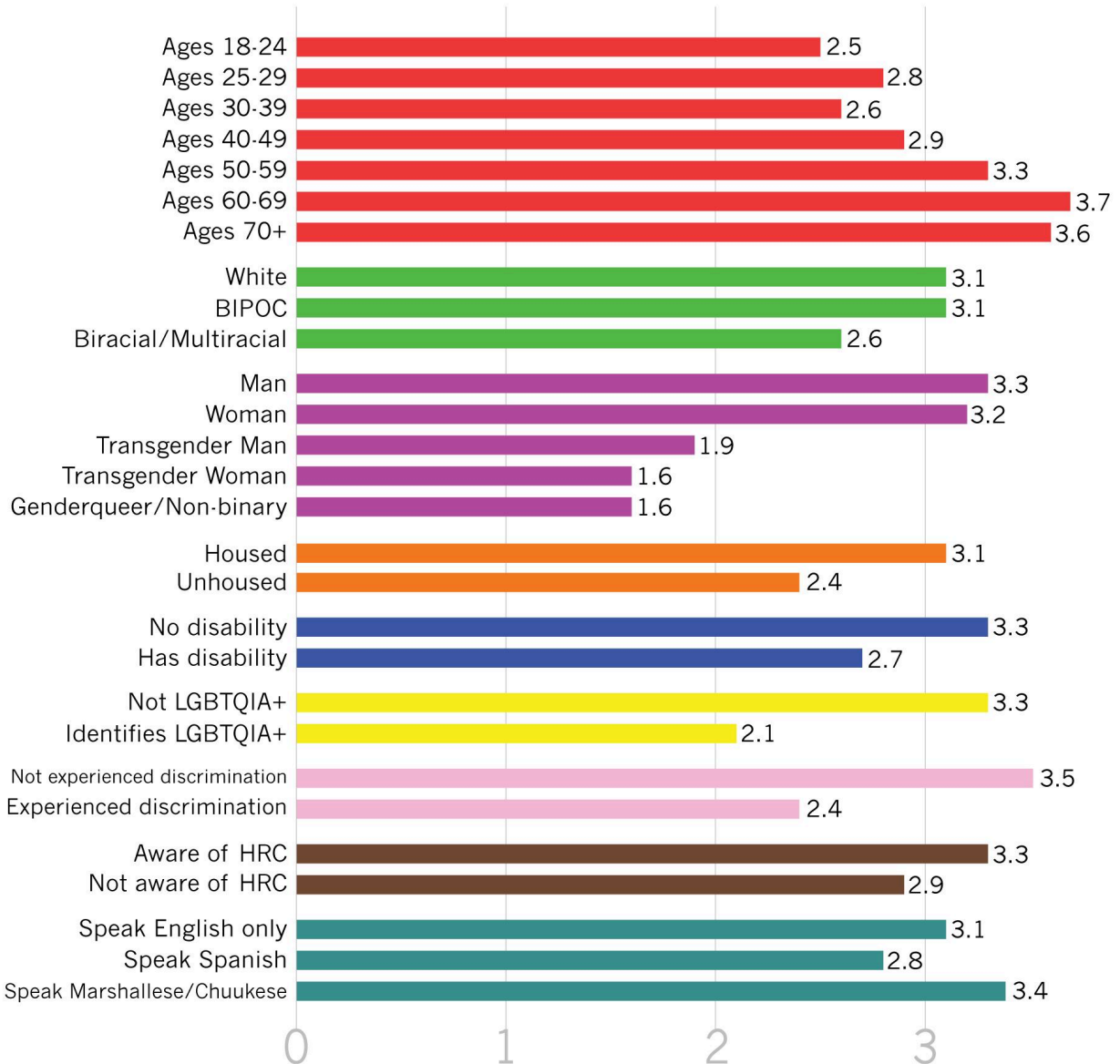
Note that the number of respondents who marked “very uncomfortable” was equal in the housed and unhoused categories. Anecdotal responses in the field included themes that the police don’t care about the homeless and won’t do anything and the fear of the police arresting them if they report being a victim.

6) Respondents with historically marginalized gender identities and sexual identities are least comfortable in reporting a bias crime to the Salem Police Department.

Most significant disparities in comfort level come from those two demographic populations. Genderqueer, non-binary, and transgender respondents are at least 40% less comfortable than cisgender respondents.

Respondents who identify as LGBTQIA+ are 35% less comfortable than respondents who do not identify as LGBTQIA+. Respondents who had recently experienced discrimination were 32% less comfortable reporting than respondents who had not recently experienced discrimination. In comparison, respondents who were aware of HRC were 14% more comfortable reporting bias crimes.

Comfort in Reporting a Bias Crime to Salem PD



7) Many feel that reporting biased crimes to the Salem Police Department is futile due to perceived inaction, lack of follow-up, and insufficient resources.

Some comments were positive about the Salem Police Department and its ability to serve the public well. However, a significant number of comments mentioned concern about inaction on the part of Salem PD. Additionally, those comments were not limited to only those who felt "very uncomfortable" or "somewhat uncomfortable."

Very Positive
<i>Despite nationwide negative reporting on law enforcement, I have faith in the Salem PD doing an excellent job.</i>
<i>I have volunteered with SPD for many years and believe sworn officers to be good people.</i>

Comfortable, but Concerned About Inaction
<i>I would report it. I'm not convinced that SPD would act on it.</i>
<i>I am not sure there will be a follow-up, but I have referred others to make complaints. I was disappointed that there was no follow-up in the past on threats and racial intimidation.</i>

Uncomfortable and Very Concerned
<i>The couple times I've had to call the police we were told that they cannot do anything to help. It almost feels like they cannot respond until someone gets hurt or something worse happens. I've also seen biases in the local police department itself, which makes me feel unsafe depending on them.</i>
<i>I've seen my favorite businesses be targeted multiple times, and they have not helped prevent those businesses from experiencing bias.</i>

When taken in the aggregate, a troubling theme seems to emerge: some Salemites feel unsupported and unprotected, facing issues of police inaction, with varying reasons for this perceived inaction. The lack of trust undermines the community's confidence in those systems, highlighting a failure in procedural justice. When people perceive that the processes in place are not fair or effective, trust and cooperation, which are essential for maintaining social order and justice, are eroded. The lack of trust could be what has led to lower reporting rates of crimes and an overall sense of insecurity.

Early in the questionnaire, respondents were asked where they witnessed/heard about and experienced discrimination in Salem. They were given answer options such as businesses, outdoor public spaces, and healthcare settings. They could also add in their own response. 8 respondents named the Salem Police Department as a place where they have experienced discrimination, making it the most common “Other” response (see Appendix E). While this is a small percentage of respondents overall, it highlights another factor that may contribute to people feeling uncomfortable in reporting a bias crime to the Salem Police Department.

We do commend Salem PD for requesting that these questions be included in the survey because of their commitment to serving and protecting our community and their willingness to hear from community members about opportunities. We are encouraged by the partnership and communication between the SPD and the HRC and offer the following suggestions for interconnection.

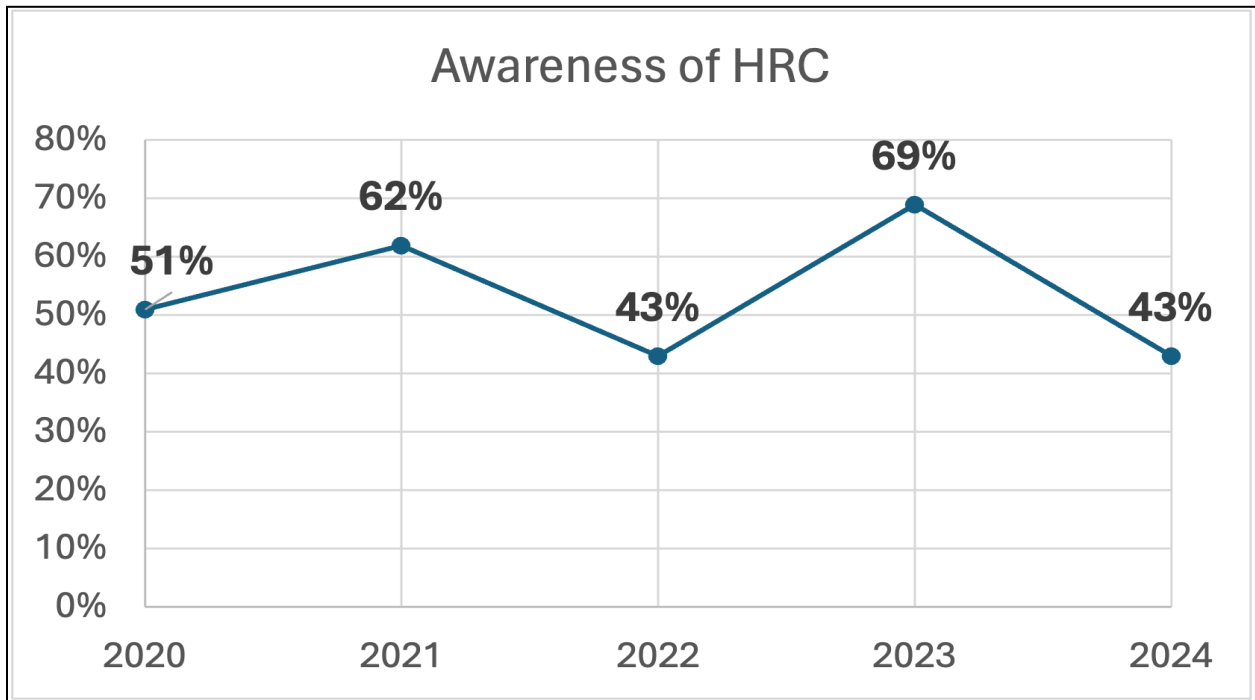
Recommendations:

- Continue efforts to disseminate information about the existence and purpose of the City of Salem's HRC and the State of Oregon Bias Crime hotline. Increase visibility to employees and the public, particularly historically marginalized populations, about the HRC so they can pass on the information in everyday interactions with citizens. Knowing other options than direct police contact may increase the likelihood of reporting. The 911 dispatch center, WVCC (Willamette Valley Communications Center), takes emergency and non-emergency calls for various agencies, mainly the Salem Police and Salem Fire Departments so it could be a helpful conduit. Victims of bias crimes would be supported more effectively, contributing to the overall feeling of community trust and safety.
- Work with SPD to evaluate training on inclusivity and bias for effectiveness. Is the training sufficient? Does it get to the heart of the issues? If not, suggest training that does.
- Consider offering programs such as paid volunteering at a homeless shelter or LGBTQIA+ center to connect and integrate police more with different people. While having a presence at events is helpful, optimize the integration to lessen the “us/them” perception.

- Partner with SPD to look at current hiring practices within the police department. Encourage the hiring and development of a workforce that supports and sustains diversity, equity, and inclusion. If SPD is open to it, help them find ways to cultivate and sustain a positive systemic culture where differences are valued. This includes promoting leaders who model positive behaviors and accountability for poor behaviors and practices.

AWARENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

8) Awareness of the City of Salem’s Human Rights Commission appears to be in flux, not only when looking at historical year-by-year data from past studies by Western Oregon students and the HRC but also by exploring subgroups participating in the 2024 survey and study.



Since the inception of this collaborative study, the survey has posed a crucial question to HRC respondents: “Were you aware (before this survey) that the City of Salem has a Human Rights Commission (HRC)?” To ensure a fair comparison, this chart only considers responses from those who learned about the study through City of Salem sources (Facebook, Instagram, website, or email). The chart above illustrates a decrease in 2024 HRC awareness, but equal to 2022.

Just 22% of those currently experiencing homelessness were aware of the HRC, while 42% of the housed population said they were aware. Participants who primarily speak Marshallese exhibited an awareness level of 70%. However, the study also notes that just ten respondents in this category—despite being a targeted audience for the HRC—completed the survey. (See Appendix F for a complete review of all demographic subgroups and their awareness of HRC)

Respondents who exhibited awareness of the HRC were 14% more likely to have comfort in reporting such a crime than those without awareness (see Key Finding 6). This suggests that if the HRC increased visibility in Salem (especially among historically marginalized populations

around gender identity and sexual identity) and further educated these groups about their options in reporting bias crime (reporting to Oregon's Bias Crime Hotline vs. having to interact with Salem PD, e.g.), these groups would be more comfortable—and thus more likely—to report bias crime targeted at them.

Recommendations

- The HRC should leverage personal networks and word-of-mouth strategies more effectively. This can include encouraging HRC commissioners and active participants to personally share information about the HRC and its initiatives with their networks, implementing referral programs where individuals can invite friends and family to participate in HRC activities or surveys, partnering with community leaders and influencers who can help disseminate information within their networks.
- Additionally, it is crucial to enhance the effectiveness of other outreach methods, such as social media and organizational emails, by making the content more engaging and relatable. Tailored messages that highlight personal stories and testimonials about the positive impact of the HRC can make these channels more compelling.
- Strengthen anti-discrimination laws and support their need to be strengthened so that discrimination can hopefully be eliminated.

COMMUNITY BELONGING & PUBLIC SPACES

9) Approximately one in five respondents (21%) shared that community events and community spaces are essential to their feeling of community belonging.

In his book *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, sociologist Eric Klinenberg pushes for communities to focus on and invest in “social infrastructure,” a term he uses to explain how libraries, playgrounds, and other shared spaces are essential for society.

Salem’s abundance of parks—90 (within seven park classifications) noted on the city’s website—showcases many opportunities to ensure social infrastructure is being met in Salem. Unfortunately, the city’s library system lacks as much access as it could have due to funding considerations. Already closed on Sundays and Mondays at the Main Branch, the city system reduced evening hours at its primary location and operations to just two days per week (Tuesdays and Saturdays) at its West Salem Branch in January 2024.

“The library is one of the few public places in Salem that I find space to be my queer self.”

2024 HRC Report, Anonymous Respondent

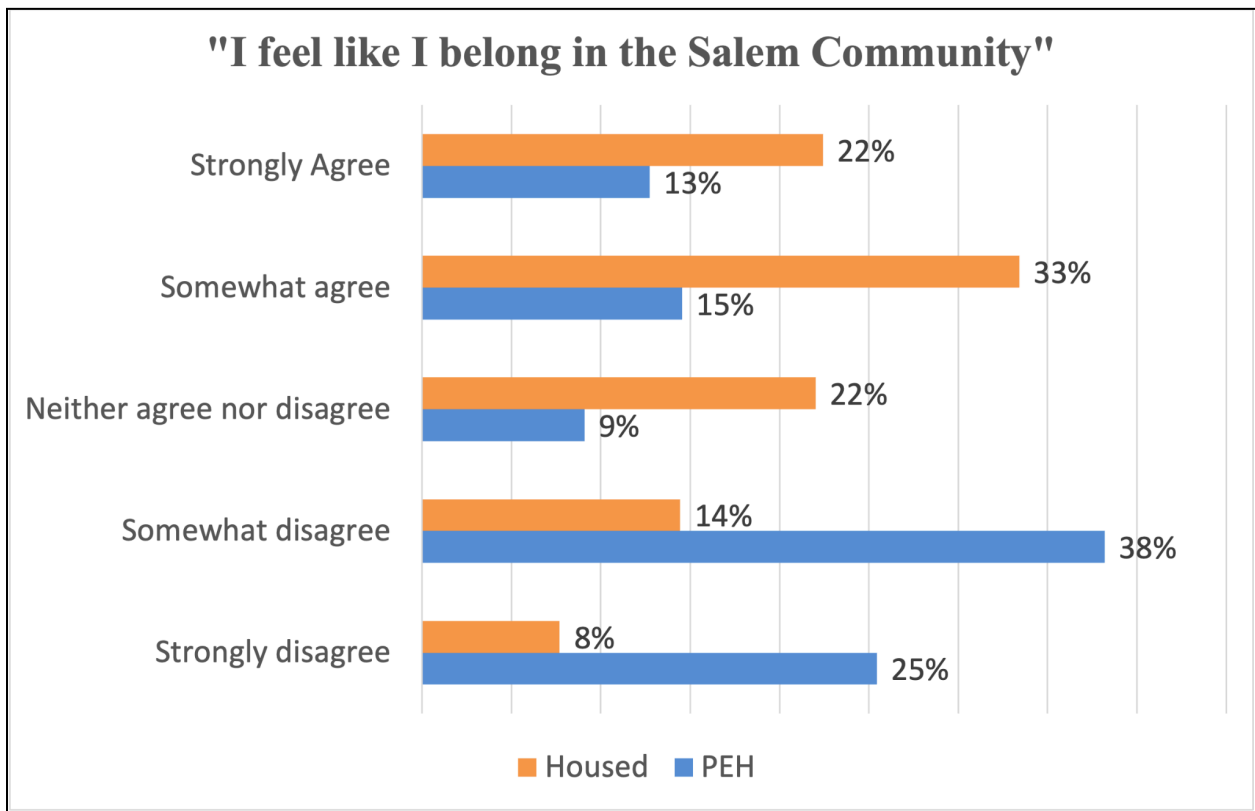
Considering responses about events and public spaces is important because these areas bring people together into an actual community. Individuals want to be a part of something bigger, and providing free or low-cost events that are inviting and represent different cultures is just one way that allows community members to find connections. The parks and library systems are just two areas where activities like this can take place. Even more important is that there are free spaces for people to gather. 6.5% of respondents stated how important it is to have the library and the events at the library. They praised the actions and validated the efforts to keep the public library open.

Respondents were candid about their feelings on community and library spaces. These two quotes also stood out to the study’s evaluators:

- *Create more spaces that welcome everyone and allow us as a community to be together. The library is a perfect example of a place where I see all of my neighbors from a variety of backgrounds getting their needs met. I don’t have to pay to be there and that makes it easy to simply exist. We need more places like the library.*

- *One of the safest spaces in Salem is the public library. I understand we have about a year to figure out a way to keep it funded and I feel this is a crucial step to continuing to support underrepresented minority groups in our city. The free public library is a place for everyone and must be protected...*

10) Survey data also reveals a significant disparity in belonging between the housed and people experiencing houselessness populations.



Only a very small percentage of the unhoused strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging compared to the housed. The rate of the unhoused who somewhat agree is slightly higher than those who strongly agree, and it remains relatively low compared to the housed group. Both groups have notable percentages in the "neither agree nor disagree" category, but the housed group shows a higher rate. The unhoused are more likely to somewhat or strongly disagree with the statement about belonging, with a substantial portion strongly disagreeing. In contrast, the housed group has very few individuals who strongly agree.

One open-ended comment also encouraged a deeper look at the “racist framework the state of Oregon was built on.” The anonymous respondent further stated, “The foundation of this state needs to be addressed. It should be torn down and rebuilt with love, tolerance, and acceptance.

As long as we keep pretending we cannot clearly identify the problem, we will continue wading water in this pool of ignorance. Open your eyes and keep them open."

Recommendations

- Considering the library's importance as a medium for community connections—and a cherished public space among many gender and sexuality minority groups in Salem—the HRC should consider hosting a recurring series of community outreach and education events in its library system. These events would build upon the themes of how Salemites could participate in battling discrimination in the city and increasing belonging for all. As cuts to the library budget were recently under consideration—and could be revisited—the HRC could consider being a champion of the library.
- For future survey work, separate a new category of “neighborhoods” from public outdoor spaces to capture any discrimination occurring within neighborhoods, which erodes the feeling of belonging.
- Events like National Night Out—utilized by communities throughout the United States to increase engagement between law enforcement and the public—were reduced during and following the COVID-19 Pandemic. Bringing these back to communicate in safe spaces would meet the public's request for more events while increasing awareness of the HRC and other city services.

ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nearly all people experiencing homelessness experience report frequent discrimination. In October 2022, the City of Salem added a prohibition to discriminate on the basis of housing status to its code. Develop a communication plan to increase awareness of that change, especially among business owners.
- Public outdoor spaces: Continue work with Salem Police to decrease discrimination experiences based on housing status in public outdoor locations.
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- Work with SPD to evaluate training on inclusivity and bias for effectiveness. Is the training sufficient? Does it get to the heart of the issues? If not, suggest training that does.
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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

How Would You Describe Your Race or Ethnicity?, as a Percentage of Question Respondents (2024 Community Belonging Survey)

African American or Black	1.9%
Asian	2.2%
Latino/a/e	11.9%
Indigenous Native American or Alaska Native	1.8%
Indigenous Latin American	0.8%
Middle Eastern	0.5%
Pacific Islander / Micronesian / Native Hawaiian / Kānaka Maoli	2.4%
White	67.1%
Bi-Racial or Multi-Racial	8.4%
Another race or ethnicity not listed here (please specify):	3.2%

Salem Population Ethnicity (Neilsburg Research, Aug. 31, 2023)

Hispanic or Latino	22.4%
Non-Hispanic or Latino	77.6%

APPENDIX B

Housing Status in Salem, as a Percentage of Question Respondents (2024 Community Belonging Survey)

Unhoused	6.7%
Housed	93.3%

Unsheltered in Salem, as a Percentage of Total Salem Population (City of Salem website)

Unsheltered in Salem	<1%
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APPENDIX C

Do You Have a Disability?, as a Percentage of Question Respondents (2024 Community Belonging Survey)

Yes	31.9%
No	68.1%

Disability Population, as a Percentage of Total Salem Population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022)

Living with a Disability	16.2%
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APPENDIX D

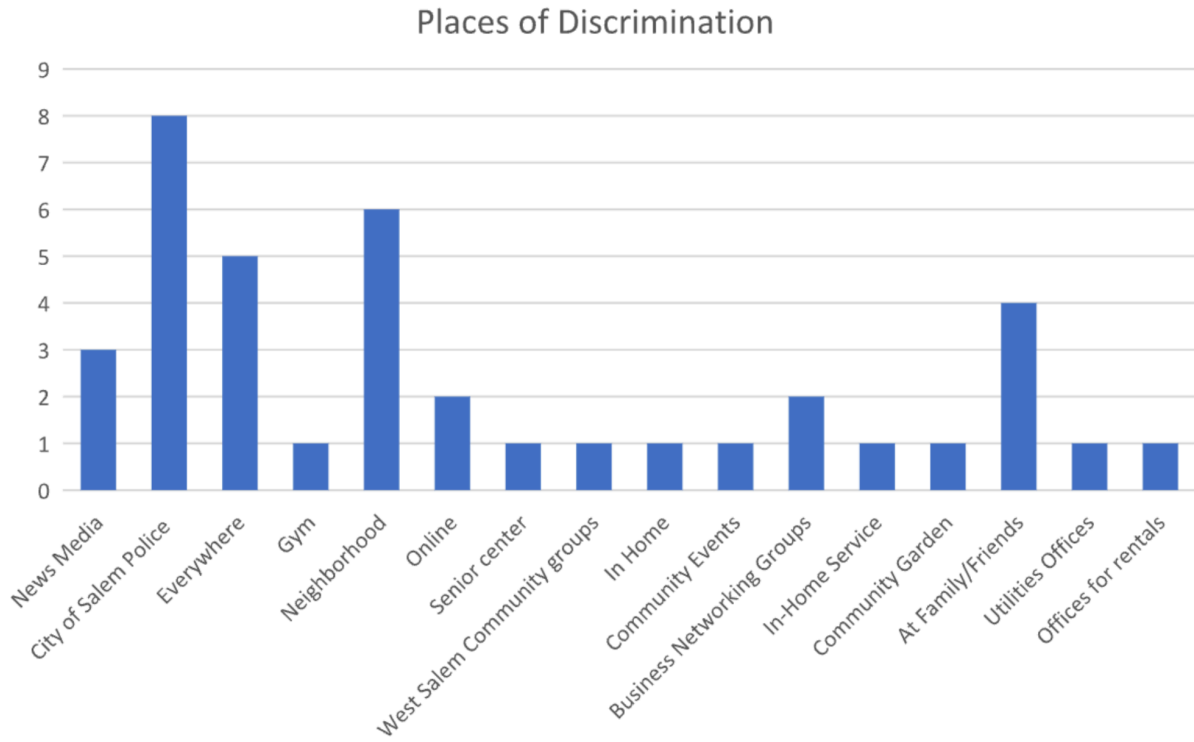
Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community in regards to your sexual or romantic orientation?, as a Percentage of Question Respondents (2024 Community Belonging Survey)

Yes	19.7%
No	80.3%

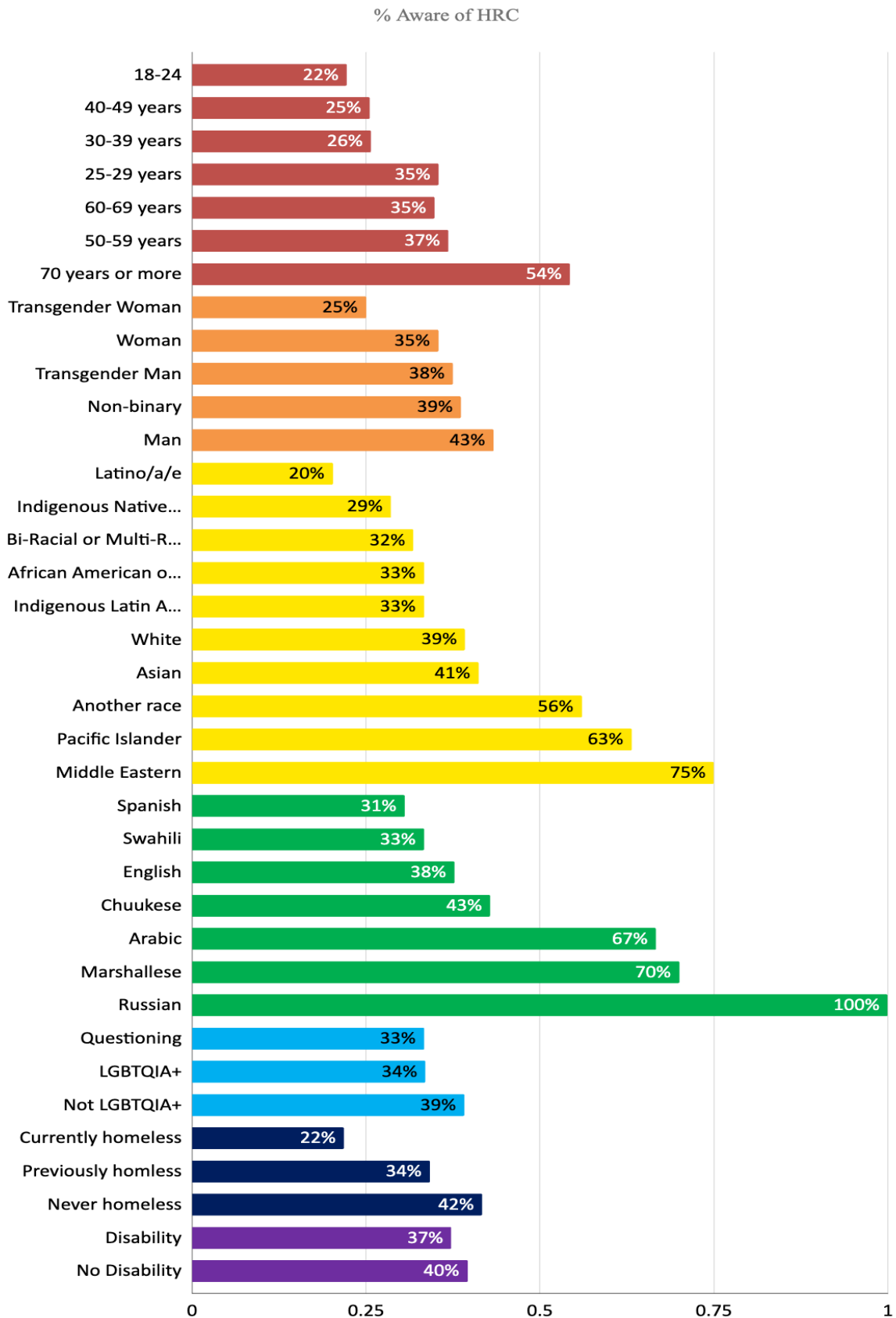
Oregon LGBT Population, as a Percentage of Total Oregon Population (Gallup/Williams, 2019)

LGBT in Oregon	5.6%
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APPENDIX E



APPENDIX F



APPENDIX G

Survey Data Link to PDF of Spreadsheet

[2024 City of Salem HRC Survey Simple Tabulation Final](#)

Open-Ended, Selected “Other” Results Analysis

[2024 “Other” Data Charts and Information](#)