

## COMMENTARY

# Changing perceptions, promoting equality

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Choy Felix -

### CHOY FELIX

FOR MANY people across TT, home is a place of comfort. But for those who live in so-called “hotspots,” their address alone can be a source of stigma and discrimination.

Hotspot communities labelled as high-risk or crime-prone are often treated as monolithic areas of lawlessness. These labels not only affect how the public views these communities, but also how residents are treated when they apply for jobs, seek housing, or try to access services. In short, the stigma of living in a hotspot can follow someone long after they leave their street.

This kind of stereotyping can lead to real consequences. Job seekers may be turned down simply because of the community they come from, rather than their skills or qualifications. A landlord may reject a rental application based solely on an address, without ever meeting the applicant. A business may impose extra conditions or even refuse service because of assumptions about a person's neighbourhood. These practices are often rooted in prejudice, not facts, and they harm individuals, families, and entire communities.

At the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), we understand that discrimination isn't always about race, sex, or religion. Sometimes, it shows up in more subtle but damaging ways like judging someone because of where they live or grew up.

Under the Equal Opportunity Act, the commission is responsible for receiving, investigating, and, where possible, resolving complaints of discrimination in four main areas: employment, education, the provision of goods and services, and accommodation. While the act defines specific grounds that are protected like race, religion, sex, disability, and origin, many cases reveal deeper patterns of social exclusion that come from years of bias, marginalisation and profiling.

When someone is denied an opportunity because of their perceived background or place of origin, it often overlaps with other protected characteristics. For example, a young person from a marginalised community may be denied an interview not just because of their address, but because of stereotypes linking people from that area to crime or violence. Similarly, an individual from a stigmatised community may face barriers to advancement because of assumptions that people from that area are not "trustworthy" or "professional."



This is why public education is so important. Beyond handling complaints, the EOC has a mandate to promote understanding of the principles of equality and good relations between people from different backgrounds. That includes highlighting the long-term effects of stereotyping and working to shift how we view each other.

The reality is that many communities labelled as hotspots are also home to vibrant cultures, hard-working families and very talented young people striving for better. They deserve to be seen for who they are; not reduced to a stereotype based on a few headlines or police reports.

To address this, we encourage employers, educators, service providers, and the general public to examine their own biases. Are we giving everyone a fair chance, or are we unconsciously closing doors because of where someone lives? Do we assume a person is dangerous, uneducated, or unreliable because of their community? These are hard questions, but asking them is the first step toward building a more inclusive society.

At the EOC, we offer free workshops to help organisations understand how discrimination can show up and what they can do about it. We also provide support for anyone who feels they've been unfairly treated.

Stigma should not be a barrier to opportunity. Every citizen of TT, regardless of their address, deserves respect and a fair chance to contribute to society. It's time we stop judging people by where they live and start recognising their potential.

Let's stop the nonsense of discriminating based on where someone lives, their race, or background and work toward a society where everyone has a fair and equal chance at education, employment, and access to goods and services.

*If you've been discriminated against or want to learn more about your rights, we're here to help. Visit [www.equalopportunity.gov.tt](http://www.equalopportunity.gov.tt), e-mail us at [communications@eoc.gov.tt](mailto:communications@eoc.gov.tt), or call 1-868-672-0928 to book a free workshop for your organization, report discrimination or victimisation, or get support. You can also follow us on social media.*

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