



Equal Opportunity Commission
Promoting Equality

JULY

EQUALITY ONLINE FORTNIGHT COLUMN

004

Finding Common Ground: How Conciliation Helps Resolve Discrimination Complaints

Finding Common Ground: How Conciliation Helps Resolve Discrimination Complaints

When people hear that a complaint has been filed, they often imagine a lengthy legal battle, heated disagreements, and a winner and a loser. However, not every dispute needs to end in a courtroom. In many cases, issues can be resolved through open dialogue, mutual understanding, and a willingness to find common ground.



That is where conciliation comes in

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) is responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of discrimination under the Equal Opportunity Act. While some matters may eventually require determination by the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, many complaints can be resolved through the process of conciliation.

Conciliation is one of the most important services provided by the EOC. It offers individuals and organisations an opportunity to discuss concerns, address misunderstandings, and work together to find practical solutions in a confidential and respectful environment.

The Equal Opportunity Act recognises that not every dispute requires formal legal action. In fact,

the Act empowers the Commission to attempt to resolve complaints through conciliation where appropriate. This approach reflects an understanding that many disputes can be settled more effectively through constructive dialogue than through adversarial proceedings.

At its core, conciliation is a voluntary process that encourages communication between the parties involved in a complaint. A Conciliation Officer from the Commission facilitates the discussion, helping each party to express their concerns, understand the perspectives of others, and explore possible solutions.

Importantly, the Conciliation Officer does not take sides, make decisions, or determine who is right or wrong. Their role is to assist the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.

For a person who believes they have experienced discrimination, conciliation provides an opportunity to have their concerns heard and acknowledged. For the respondent, whether an employer, educational institution, landlord, business, or service provider, it provides an opportunity to respond to those concerns and participate in finding a fair resolution.

One of the greatest benefits of conciliation is that it allows the parties themselves to maintain con-

trol over the outcome. Unlike court or tribunal proceedings, where a decision is imposed by an adjudicator, conciliation encourages the parties to develop solutions that work for their unique circumstances.

Every complaint is different, and therefore every resolution may be different. Depending on the circumstances, outcomes may include an apology, changes to workplace procedures, revisions to policies, staff training, improved communication practices, or other measures agreed upon by the parties.

Confidentiality is another important feature of the conciliation process. Discussions are conducted privately, allowing participants to speak openly and honestly about their experiences and concerns. This confidential setting often creates an atmosphere that is more conducive to understanding and problem-solving.

Conciliation can also help preserve important relationships. In many situations, the parties involved must continue interacting after the complaint has been resolved. This may include employers and employees, colleagues, students and educational institutions, landlords and tenants, or businesses and their customers. By encouraging respectful communication and collaboration, conciliation can help rebuild trust and create a stronger foundation for future interactions.

Some people mistakenly believe that participating in conciliation means that a complaint is not being taken seriously. In reality, the opposite is true. Conciliation is a structured process that acknowledges the seriousness of the concerns raised while seeking to resolve them in a fair, efficient, and respectful manner.

The Equal Opportunity Commission understands that discrimination complaints can be deeply personal and emotionally challenging. Individuals who feel they have been treated unfairly often want more than a legal outcome; they want to be heard,

understood, and treated with dignity. Conciliation provides an opportunity for that to happen.

At the same time, organisations and individuals who are the subject of complaints may welcome the opportunity to address concerns, clarify misunderstandings, and take positive steps towards resolution. In many cases, conciliation can achieve outcomes that benefit all parties while avoiding the stress, time, and expense associated with formal proceedings.

As a society built upon diversity, Trinidad and Tobago benefits when differences are addressed through understanding rather than division. Conciliation supports this goal by promoting respectful dialogue, encouraging accountability, and fostering positive relationships between individuals of different backgrounds and experiences.

Through conciliation, the Equal Opportunity Commission continues to advance its mandate of eliminating discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations among all persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

After all, lasting solutions are often found not in conflict, but in conversation.

Visit:

www.equalopportunity.gov.tt,

email us at :

communications@eoc.gov.tt,

or call 1-868-672-0928 to book

A FREE WORKSHOP

**for your organisation, report
discrimination or victimisation, or
get support. You can also follow us
on social media.**



This article is intended for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice