

**BUDGET STATEMENT
FY2014**

**MONA NORIEGA
CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONER
CHICAGO COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS**

November 7, 2013

Chairman Austin and Members of the City Council:

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and staff, I hereby submit the following statement in support of the Mayor's 2014 Budget Recommendation for the Commission on Human Relations (CCHR).

In furtherance of the Mayor's stand against hate and bigotry and to provide high quality anti-discrimination services more efficiently, the CCHR continues to improve internal procedures, increase standards of performance and develop new strategies to reach more Chicagoans regarding the services available to them.

Background

CCHR serves as the City of Chicago's civil rights arm. The CCHR addresses issues of discrimination by enforcing the Chicago Human Rights and the Fair Housing Ordinances. We carry out this work through our Adjudication Unit, Inter-Group Relations Unit (IGR) and Advisory Councils.

The Adjudication Division receives and investigates complaints of discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodations, and credit. While there are 15 protected classes under the ordinances, most complaints are based on race, gender, disability or source of income. If an investigation reveals substantial evidence of an ordinance violation, an administrative hearing will be held. However, parties may opt to enter into a settlement agreement at any time. At the conclusion of the administrative hearing, a hearing officer will prepare a recommended decision that is presented to our Board of Commissioners. If the Board rules that discrimination has occurred, violators can be ordered to pay damages, fines to the city and potentially also injunctive relief.

CCHR's Inter-Group Relations Unit (IGR) mediates conflicts, most often based on race, advocates on behalf of victims of hate crimes and proactively works to prevent discrimination through the delivery of educational programs in schools and communities most at risk for violence based on bias and stereotypes.

The Advisory Councils to the Commission convene representatives of the protected classes to serve as a resource for the Mayor and City Council on policy matters regarding civil rights and to assist the CCHR in creating programs and outreach strategies to communities that experience discrimination and hate based violence.

Investigating and Adjudicating Discrimination Complaints

By ensuring a quality and timely neutral complaint process for individuals who seek to file a discrimination complaint, we deliver on the city's mandate of addressing bias and discrimination. When a person files a discrimination complaint with our office, it is most often because they believe they have been wrongfully denied an employment opportunity, a place to live or access to a public place or service.

The CCHR has implemented several internal changes and has embarked on new initiatives to help improve the adjudication process for parties involved in discrimination cases.

As of January 1, 2013 we have raised the performance standards for completed investigations by 26 percent for our investigators. This will help the CCHR complete more investigations earlier in the process when evidence is most accessible which will lead to better investigations.

In collaboration with the Law Department, we are taking steps to introduce amendments to the Human Rights Ordinance which will, 1) clearly state the CCHR's authority to award punitive damages, a tool in deterring blatant discrimination, 2) provide authority to issue sanctions against persons who file frivolous complaints which serve to harass the other party, most often small businesses, and waste valuable city resources and 3) increase the maximum fine for violations of the Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances from \$500 to \$1,000. This would be the first increase in the fines in more than 20 years.

We are also developing a new collections process to ensure that fines are paid by parties in violation of our ordinances and regulations. We anticipate the new collection process will be implemented later this year.

In addition to these initiatives, the CCHR is also moving quickly to implement improvements which will assist parties to the cases filed with our department, their attorneys, and others who may be interested in learning about the CCHR's decisions and rulings.

For example, CCHR is working closely with the Department of Innovation and Technology (DOIT) on two major technological improvements. One of these initiatives is the creation of an online filing system. When completed in 2014, the system will allow the public to file discrimination complaints online directly from our web page. Currently, complaints must be filed in person, by mail, by fax and by email. We are also developing new technology which will allow the public to access all CCHR legal decisions online in a searchable format. This will enable parties, attorneys and the public to more easily research CCHR case law and decisions by conducting searches by title, subject and other forms of information.

We have also been working with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) for several months to develop new regulations for public accommodation disability complaints. These new regulations will mirror the regulations of the ADA thereby making them more familiar to small businesses and attorneys. The goal is improve compliance with the ordinance and help to make more businesses accessible to people with disabilities

Creating Opportunities to Connect with Communities

To ensure we reach all of the diverse communities that may be affected by discrimination, we have segmented our audience and crafted outreach that fits the needs of each group.

As the city expands our efforts to reach out to Chicago's many immigrant communities, the CCHR works to reach beyond language barriers to serve non-English speaking communities. In 2012, we began to work with our volunteer Equity Council members and Board of Commissioner to reach out into several immigrant communities. Our volunteers translated the CCHR brochure into Spanish, Polish, Chinese, Korean, Arabic and Russian. The Equity Council and Board of Commissioners, all representatives of specific communities, have contributed to crafting and executing a strategic distribution plan that targets the communities most impacted by discrimination.

In addition, the CCHR is also seeking funding in 2014 for translation services for incoming telephone calls. Currently, we only have English and Spanish speaking capacity. Through the services of Language Line, the interpreting service currently used by other city departments we will be able to accept calls in additional languages including Polish, Mandarin and Arabic.

Recognizing that the legal field and service providers often make claims on behalf of their constituents, we have expanded our efforts to provide more technical workshops and presentations about the Chicago Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances to bar associations and other organizations.

CCHR was not previously in the 311 Customer Service Report System (CSR). In 2013, service codes were developed and assigned to our department so the public can now reach us through the 311 operators for requests related to discrimination, hate crimes, information concerning many immigrant communities and educational workshops. CCHR now receives calls daily from the public, and as a result, we have seen several new discrimination complaints generated from the CSR system.

Social media is also an important communication tool. In 2013, the department created a CCHR Facebook page, enabling us to engage new audiences interested in receiving information about our programs and events specifically highlighting the Commission's work addressing civil rights issues.

Fighting Hate Crimes Through Education

Hate crimes continue to be a concern for all communities, but they are particularly problematic for people of color, different religious groups, immigrants, people with disabilities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Chicagoans.

We have created curriculum for parents and students in English and Spanish. Understanding that hate is born from ignorance, CCHR talks to students about how and why bullying occurs and how it can be stopped. Workshops for parents help the adults recognize signs of their child being a bully or being bullied, and opportunities to role play intervention strategies. The goal is to be responsive to communities and schools that are experiencing bullying, to reduce the amount of bullying and to produce an outcome of reduced hate incidents. The CCHR has delivered 47 workshops in 2013 as opposed to 31 by this time last year.

Underreporting is a frequently cited problem in addressing incident hate-based violence. To increase communication, collectively find solutions and to share best practices, the CCHR has taken the lead in convening stakeholders who address hate crimes. Currently the CPD's Civil Rights Unit, The Center on Halsted, the Anti-Defamation League and researchers from the University of Illinois at Chicago meet on a quarterly basis. This group has initiated research, hosted panel discussions, and has developed a successful working model that showcases how collaborations of government, community based organizations and academia can work together to address a social problem..

We are proud of our initiatives and look forward to further innovations in program delivery. The ultimate goal is to create a more efficient and effective Commission that can better serve the needs of Chicagoans facing discrimination. We hope that you will give our budget request your most thoughtful consideration so we may continue and improve upon this important work. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Mona Noriega,
Chairman and Commissioner

Enclosures

Chicago Commission on Human Relations 2014 Organizational Chart

