

**BUDGET STATEMENT
FY2016**

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

SEPTEMBER 29, 2015

Honorable Chairman Austin, Vice Chairman Ervin and Honorable Members of the City Council Committee on the Budget and Government Operations:

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and staff, I hereby submit the following statement in support of the Mayor's 2016 Budget Recommendation for the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR).

Equal access to jobs, housing, and public accommodations is important to Chicago as a city and as a community. Thus the CCHR continues bilingual outreach efforts with community based organizations, chambers of commerce, schools, and faith based institutions, to educate communities on their rights and their obligations to avert discrimination as provided under the Chicago Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances. We also work to prevent hate crimes and upon request respond to intergroup tensions through educational trainings, mediations, and peace circles.

We have and will continue to make improvements in all areas of our work in 2015 and 2016.

Background

The CCHR serves as the City of Chicago's Civil Rights agency. 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, we encourage parties 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, attorney fees, and fines to the City. Injunctive relief may also be ordered.
- The 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 CCHR's Equity Advisory Council convenes 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

Delivering a quality, timely and neutral complaint process for individuals who seek to file a discrimination complaint is how we deliver on the City's mandate of addressing bias and discrimination. When a person (referred to as a "complainant") 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 represents the City's commitment to civil rights and the process by which the complainant seeks redress.

The CCHR has continued to strive to deliver thorough and efficient investigations of discrimination complaints. High quality and timely investigations are essential to protecting the rights of both parties to a complaint, and help ensure that justice is served.

- From January 1, 2015 through September 18, 2015, the CCHR received 195 new discrimination complaints, and completed 188 investigations. The 188 total includes complaints filed in 2015 and earlier. The efficient investigation of complaints keeps cases from becoming backlogged and justice being denied to victims of discrimination.
- Similarly, 82% of investigations have been completed within one year as of September 18, 2015 as compared to 63% for the same time period in 2014.

Hate Crimes Prevention Efforts

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. Hate crimes run the range from simple battery and property damage to more severe crimes, and can invoke fear among entire communities.

Our first line of defense in fighting hate crimes is education, starting with our youth. The CCHR provides workshops on bullying to schools and youth organizations. We have also found it helpful to provide these workshops to parents as well so they can have a better understanding of this problem. Our workshop helps parents identify whether their child has been a victim of bullying, or if their child may in fact be a bully. The workshop can be delivered in both English and Spanish. As of September 18, 2015, the CCHR has delivered 103 workshops to 727 participants.

Community Outreach Initiatives

At the CCHR, we believe the most effective communication is done face to face. While that's not always possible, we prioritize going out into the community to tell the public about our services and to inform them about the legal protections afforded all who live, work, or visit the City under the Human Rights Ordinances. Here is just a summary of some of our outreach initiatives thus far in 2015:

- **Ban the Box Outreach:** On January 1, 2015 an amendment to the Human Rights Ordinance went into effect prohibiting discrimination against individuals based on their criminal history. The new "Ban the Box" Ordinance prohibits employers from asking questions related to arrests and convictions until after an offer of an interview has been extended. The CCHR produced informational materials about the new law, and staff has continued to meet with business organizations, chambers of commerce, aldermen, and a variety of community based organizations to explain the ordinance and help the public become more aware of this new protection.
- **Disability Access:** The CCHR staff developed a presentation for businesses to advise them of upcoming changes to our regulations in line with the ADA. We have met with disability advocacy organizations, ethnic chambers of commerce, and many small businesses through meetings

organized by BACP. Through these presentations, businesses are informed about what is required under the law to make their facilities accessible to the public and their legal obligations.

- **Polish Community Outreach:** During the summer of 2015, the CCHR was fortunate enough to bring on a Polish speaking college intern who was able to join our IGR team to conduct outreach to the Polish community. While we have been distributing our Polish language brochures and other materials in the Polish community for over a year, working with the intern to go into the community to speak to businesses, community based organizations and community members was a tremendous asset to this important initiative. Similarly, one of our Board of Commissioners who is very active in the Polish community has been instrumental in increasing awareness about the CCHR through the Polish newspapers.
- **Spanish Radio:** Our IGR team which includes two Spanish speakers was successful in getting radio interviews to discuss the work of the CCHR on two Spanish language radio programs in 2015. These interviews have helped us reach thousands of Chicagoans who may not have otherwise learned about the CCHR and our services.
- **Community Events:** The CCHR continues to have a presence at as many community events as possible. Staff and members of the Equity Advisory Council have attended dozens of community festivals, Back to School Fairs, Aldermanic Ward Nights, to name a few. Through these events we are able to make face to face contact with hundreds of Chicago residents.
- **Neighborhood Canvassing:** Our IGR staff regularly conducts neighborhood canvassing visits to meet one on one with businesses, libraries, community based organizations, and other important institutions in each community. At each visit, a brief presentation is given to share information about the services offered through the CCHR and the protections provided through the Human Rights Ordinances. As of September 18, 2015 we have delivered 254 presentations to 2760 people. We have also distributed 23,647 CCHR brochures.
- **Chicago Ethnic Museum Tour Series:** Year two of our successful Ethnic Museum Tour Series has also been helpful in expanding our outreach efforts into more communities. On a strictly voluntary basis, the CCHR staff, volunteers, families, and friends join together on a Saturday every other month to visit one of the City's fascinating ethnic museums. We arrange to have tours of the facilities and conclude with an ethnic lunch in the vicinity of the museum or on the museum grounds. Through these visits, participants learn about the culture and history, as well as the triumphs and tragedies of our neighbors and fellow Chicagoans. Thus far in 2015, we have visited the Holocaust Museum's exhibit on Race, the Indo-American Center, the Chinese-American Museum, the "Vodou: Sacred Powers of Haiti" Exhibit at the Field Museum, and National Museum of Mexican Art's "Day of the Dead" exhibit. Our last tour of the year will be to the DuSable Museum's "Freedom, Resistance, and the Journey Towards Equality." These museum visits help to build a cultural bridge of understanding which helps to dissolve the barriers between us.

We are proud of our initiatives and look forward to further innovations in program delivery. The ultimate goal is to maintain an efficient and effective Commission that best serves the needs of Chicagoans facing discrimination and provides education and outreach that prevents future

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 2016 Programmatic Organizational Chart

