

BUDGET STATEMENT FY 2017

MONA NORIEGA CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONER CHICAGO COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

OCTOBER 25, 2016

Good morning Vice-chair Ervin and 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 2017 Budget Recommendation for the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR).

Discrimination and prejudice continue to serve as barriers in equal access to jobs, housing, and public accommodations, and are often the basis for community tensions and hate crimes. 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.

While we are not requesting an increase in funding, nor or any new positions for 2017, we have and will continue to make improvements in all areas of our work.

Background

CCHR serves as the City of Chicago's Civil Rights agency. We address 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. If, after an investigation and administrative hearing, 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.
- CCHR's IGR mediates conflicts, advocates on behalf of victims of hate crimes, and proactively works to prevent discrimination through the delivery of educational programs in schools and communities.
- 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 and timely neutral complaint process for individuals who seek to file a discrimination complaint is the primary means by which to deliver on the City's mandate to address 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 continued to strive to deliver the most thorough and efficient investigations of discrimination complaints possible. 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, 2016 through September 30, 2016, the CCHR received 129 new discrimination complaints, and completed 156 investigations. The 156 total includes complaints filed in 2016 and earlier. The efficient investigation of complaints keeps cases from becoming backlogged and justice being denied to victims of discrimination.
- Similarly, 55 percent of investigations have been completed within 180 days of filing as of September 30, 2016 as compared to 47 percent for the same time period in 2015.

Strengthening and Enhancing Anti-Discrimination Laws

In 2016, the City Council approved three new amendments to the Chicago Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances. The first added a new protected class for military status which prohibits discrimination against veterans and active duty members of the military in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, and bonding. The amendment seeks to protect past and present members of the military who may encounter discrimination in obtaining employment, renting or purchasing a home, and other areas.

The second change amended the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance (CHRO) to remove the identification requirement for the use of a public accommodation that is distinctly private in nature, such as a restroom, when the perceived gender identity of a person differs from the gender-designated facility sought to be used by the person. As previously written, the ordinance created an undue burden on the transgender community, many of whom may not have the requisite identification.

The third change added retaliation as a basis for a fair housing complaint. This now makes it illegal for a landlord, seller, real estate agent, etc. to take a retaliatory action against a person who has previously filed a complaint of discrimination against the person or entity with the CCHR.

In addition to the amendments to the ordinances, the CCHR has worked extensively with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) to develop new regulations for public accommodation disability complaints. The new regulations closely mirror the regulations of the ADA thereby making them more familiar to small businesses and attorneys. The goal of this initiative is to improve compliance with the ordinance and help to make more businesses accessible to people with disabilities. The regulations were approved by our Board of Commissioners this year and will become effective January 1, 2017.

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 death, 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 to tell 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 30, 2016, the CCHR has delivered 52 workshops to nearly 1400 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 2016:

- **TRUST Initiative:** In response to the tragedy of the Pulse Nightclub shootings in Orlando, Florida the CCHR convened representatives and supporters of those communities directly impacted by this horrendous event (Latino, LGBTQ, and Muslim) to develop mechanisms to work together on a continuous basis to support one another, and build relationships between these diverse communities to stand together against future acts of hate and bigotry. This working group has now become the TRUST Collective (Transforming, Respecting, Unifying, Striving, and Teaching). The organization is meeting regularly and has developed its mission statement, vision statement, and goals.
- **Fair Housing Trainings:** CCHR staff provided several trainings on fair housing laws in 2016 including four to over 100 CDBG delegate agencies in conjunction with the city's CDBG workshops at various locations throughout the city.
- **Media Outreach:** CCHR staff appeared on numerous radio and television programs in 2016. These included programs on Spanish television and radio, and Arabic radio programs. Outreach to ethnic media outlets has helped us reach new audiences who have now been introduced to the services offered by the CCHR.
- **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 events, and aldermanic resource fairs, 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 210 presentations to 3800 people.
- **Chicago Ethic Museum Tour Series:** Year three of our Museum Tour Series has also been helpful in expanding our outreach efforts into more communities. On a strictly voluntary basis, CCHR staff, volunteers, families, and friends join together every other month to visit one of the city's fascinating cultural museums. 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 2016, we have visited the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Chicago History Museum's Facing Freedom in America Exhibit, Pritzker Military Museum, and the Legacy Walk Outdoor LGBT History Museum. 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 create a more efficient and effective Commission that better serves 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