

**BUDGET STATEMENT
FY2018**

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

NOVEMBER 1, 2017

Honorable Chairman Austin 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 2018 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 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.

Background

CCHR serves as the City of Chicago's Civil Rights agency. 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 16 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. We encourage parties to enter into a settlement agreement at any time. If an administrative hearing reaches its conclusion with no settlement, 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.
- 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 most at risk for violence based on bias and stereotypes.
- 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 CCHR in creating programs and outreach strategies to communities that experience discrimination and hate-based violence.

Investigating and Adjudicating Discrimination Complaints

Providing a quality and timely neutral complaint process for individuals who seek to file a discrimination complaint is the primary means of delivering 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. CCHR represents the City's commitment to civil rights and the process by which the complainant seeks redress.

CCHR strives 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, 2017 through September 29, 2017, CCHR received 167 new discrimination complaints. The number of complaints filed this year has increased by 29 percent, up from the 129 total complaints filed at this time last year. The most frequently filed basis for complaints with CCHR this year is employment discrimination, with a total of 81, representing just under half of all complaints received this year. This is a more than 60 percent increase in employment discrimination complaints from the same period in 2016. Housing discrimination complaints have increased by 29 percent, with 53 complaints filed this year, compared to 41 during the same period in 2016. Complaints with regard to discrimination in the area of public accommodations are down slightly from last year, with 33 complaints, compared to 39 for the same period in 2016. The number of public accommodation complaints may increase in the last quarter of 2017 as CCHR continues to do outreach to both businesses and disability rights advocates about CCHR's new disability access regulations.

There are a number of factors that may be behind the overall increase in complaint numbers for 2017, including increased outreach on the part of CCHR staff, particularly to community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and bar associations. In addition, the increased national dialogue in 2017 around issues of discrimination and harassment may be empowering individuals to speak out and voice complaints about perceived discrimination

2017 Initiatives

Expanded Outreach to the Muslim Community

The inflammatory rhetoric of the U.S. presidential election scapegoating Muslims and the subsequent travel ban on several Muslim nations stoked fear, anxiety, and a sense of isolation among many members of Chicago's Muslim community. Past experience has taught us that anti-Muslim rhetoric on a national level has led to increased community tensions and hate crimes here in Chicago. CCHR vividly recalls how the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 created a backlash against the Muslim community, resulting in 50 hate crimes targeting this community over a two week period. As similar incidents began to be reported from other areas of the country late in 2016, CCHR made outreach to the Muslim community a priority. We worked to strengthen existing relationships with Muslim organizations, and reached out to establish new ones. Similarly, we helped facilitate the building of relationships between the Muslim community and the Chicago Police Department by coordinating Iftar dinners—bringing the community and police officers together. For many participants, this was their first

contact with the other group in an unofficial setting where they could talk and learn more about one another, and challenge stereotypical thinking.

In addition to these initiatives, CCHR further demonstrated our support for the Muslim and immigrant communities by testifying at City Council committee hearings in favor of resolutions speaking out on the federal Muslim travel ban and hate speech. We also provided notice to the Federal government of our intention to serve as a certifying agency for U and T visas which will provide an additional layer of protection for immigrants who have been victims of crimes. Finally, we proudly supported and participated in the City's "One Chicago" and "Chicago is With You" initiatives.

New Disability Regulations Became Effective

On July 1, 2017 the new disability regulations to the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance for public accommodations went into effect. The regulations were developed through a joint initiative with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). The regulations were drafted to more 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 make more businesses accessible to people with disabilities. CCHR has conducted extensive outreach to the business community through presentations to numerous chambers of commerce, bar associations, and small business workshops, including sessions at BACP. Flyers and fact sheets on the new regulations were developed and continue to be distributed to the business community.

Fair Housing Testing and Training Program

Discrimination against Housing Choice Voucher (commonly referred to as Section 8) holders is the most prevalent form of housing discrimination in terms of complaints received by CCHR. In 2016, 58 percent of fair housing complaints received by CCHR were based on source of income discrimination/Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) complaints. To help address this problem, CCHR successfully advocated for funding through the CDBG Program to conduct fair housing discrimination tests based on HCVs. The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights (LCCR) has been retained as the consultant on this two year initiative. The testing program will help identify specific areas where this type of discrimination occurs, and fair housing training will then be conducted in those areas to help landlords and real estate professionals better understand the law. Working with LCCR, CCHR has identified six initial community areas to target for testing and fair housing training. The testing has been done in five of the six areas to date, and the first series of trainings will begin soon.

Housing Choice Voucher Early Intervention Initiative

CCHR recognizes that the first priority for Housing Choice Voucher (i.e. Section 8) recipients is to obtain housing before their voucher expires, which is typically 90 days. As a result, those who may encounter discrimination in the rental process often forego filing discrimination complaints because of the time required for the investigation and adjudication of a complaint. Thus, in 2017, CCHR instituted a new pilot program to provide early intervention in housing discrimination cases alleging refusal to rent based on source of income; specifically, Housing Choice Vouchers. The purpose of this program is to determine at the time the complaint is filed whether CCHR can assist the parties in reaching a resolution comprised of processing a rental application for the subject property.

To be eligible for this pilot program, the complainant must indicate that he or she is still interested in renting the subject property, and the alleged incident must have occurred within 30 days of the time the

complaint is filed. After the complaint is filed, CCHR will contact the respondent (person whom the complaint was filed against) to determine whether the subject property is available, and, if so, whether the respondent is interested in participating in the program. Participation is voluntary, and the Commission maintains its neutrality throughout the process.

Hate Crime Summit

On October 25, 2017 CCHR and other collaborating organizations hosted its second Hate Crime Summit at the University of Illinois, Chicago campus. The event, first held in 2014, was created in commemoration of the anniversary of the Matthew Shepard & James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act that President Obama signed into law in October 2009. Through the Hate Crime Summit, CCHR and its partners seek to raise awareness regarding hate crimes, address the barriers to reporting hate crimes, and provide opportunities for networking and collaboration. Summit participants included educators, law enforcement, researchers, service providers, and community members.

We are proud of our initiatives and look forward to further innovations in program delivery. The ultimate goal is to create the most efficient and effective Commission to serve the needs of Chicagoans facing discrimination. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Mona Noriega,
Chairman and Commissioner

Enclosures