

**BUDGET STATEMENT
FY2020**

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

October 29, 2019

Honorable Chairman Dowell 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 2020 Budget Recommendation for the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR).

Discrimination and prejudice continue to serve as barriers to employment, housing, and public accommodations, and are often the basis for community tensions and hate crimes. Thus, the CCHR continues our outreach efforts targeting community organizations, chambers of commerce, faith-based institutions and schools. Through our bilingual presentations, we seek to educate communities on their rights as well as their obligations under the Chicago Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances to address and prevent discrimination. We also work to stop hate crimes and advocate for victims of these harmful acts. Similarly, we respond to intergroup tensions by providing mediation, educational workshops, and peace circles.

We are not requesting an increase in funding, nor any new positions for 2020. We are however, seeking to retain our current Human Relations Investigator II vacancy (and fill it as Human Relations Investigator I) if it is not filled by the end of 2019.

Background

The Chicago Commission on Human Relations (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 Division and Inter-Group Relations Unit (IGR).

- 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, the case will be forwarded either to mediation or an administrative hearing. Either way, we encourage parties to enter into a settlement agreement at any time. If the case is moved to the administrative hearing phase, at the conclusion of the hearing, the 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 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.

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 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 the most thorough and efficient investigations of discrimination complaints as 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. Near the time of my appointment to the CCHR, the department had 41 cases on its docket that had been pending two years or more. Currently this number is down to just three.

From January 1, 2019 through October 4, 2019, the CCHR received 132 new discrimination complaints. Of these complaints, 48 were based on housing discrimination, 48 in employment, and 36 in public accommodations. Complaints are down this year by 24%. While we are concerned with this decline in filings, we have reached out to other civil rights agencies and have learned that this appears to be the trend in 2019. We suspect the Trump Administration’s attack on communities of color may be one of many factors for the lower complaint numbers. In particular immigrants, as a group, are a vulnerable population that is often reluctant to reach out to government for assistance, which has only been exacerbated by the anti-immigrant sentiment coming out of Washington. In response, the CCHR has ramped up our outreach efforts and have accelerated the translations of many of our outreach materials in multiple languages.

2019 INITIATIVES

Management

LegalServer Case Management System

In September, the CCHR’s long-awaited LegalServer case management system went live. After many years of managing CCHR’s discrimination complaints through a variety of homemade tools with limited capability, funds were provided in our 2019 budget for a new case management system. This cloud-based program which will enable the department to track the status of complaints from intake, through investigation, and the administrative hearing process.

Housing

Aggressive Monitoring of Discriminatory Apartment Listings

CCHR's Adjudication Division has begun to proactively seek out discriminatory online advertisements for housing that explicitly state, "No Section 8" and other phrases that discriminate against potential tenants based on their lawful source of income (i.e. Housing Choice Vouchers). When the CCHR becomes aware of a possible ordinance violation such as this, it has been making good faith efforts to resolve any alleged ordinance violation prior to the filing of a complaint. Recently, the CCHR became aware of a real estate firm that had multiple listings for apartments in Chicago with discriminatory "No Section 8" language in the ads. The CCHR's Adjudication staff was able to contact the company, and the individual real estate agent who placed the ads and educate them on the requirements of the Fair Housing Ordinance and have the discriminatory ads taken down.

Fair Housing Testing and Training

Discrimination against Housing Choice Voucher holders is the most prevalent form of housing discrimination that we see at the CCHR each year. We are continuing to address this issue through our Fair Housing Testing and Training Program. The program was first launched in 2017 with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. That round of testing which went into 2018, found discrimination against Housing Choice Voucher holders in all six of the communities tested. The full report is posted on our webpage at:

https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cchr/supp_info/FairHousingReportAUG2018.pdf.

The testing component was followed up with fair housing training for landlords and others in the real estate industry. The CCHR is replicating this program for 2019-2020 by expanding it into previously untested community areas. The results of the 2019 testing and training phase will be available in the upcoming months.

Community Outreach

Building Bridges between the Police and the Muslim Community

In our continuing efforts to increase outreach to the Muslim Community, in 2019 the CCHR co-hosted four Ramadan Iftars with the Chicago Police Department (CPD). On May 22, 2019, CPD Headquarters opened its doors for its first ever Iftar dinner. Nearly 200 people representing the diversity of the city joined together to break bread in solidarity with our Muslim neighbors. The CCHR also co-hosted Iftars with the CPD at the 8th, 17th, and 24th Police Districts. The Iftars create safe and respectful opportunities for shared learning and dialogue, while building stronger communities.

Community Focus Groups Project

The CCHR will host a series of three focus groups in the next few months to gauge how discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations are impacting the Muslim, African American, Latino and Asian communities, and to better understand the barriers to reporting discrimination. The objective of the focus groups is for CCHR to learn how to better serve these communities through our enforcement of the Chicago Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances.

Training for CPD: Working with the LGBT Community at the Intersections of Identities

The CCHR, Center on Halsted, and the National Alliance on Mental Health Chicago (NAMI) are conducting a series of trainings for CPD lieutenants and sergeants October through December to provide education and training in the aim of increasing understanding and improving relationships between CPD and certain

populations (LGBTQ, African Americans, and other people of color). The trainings will be held at the Center on Halsted and the CPD training facilities.

Communications

CCHR is Now on Twitter

To expand upon our outreach efforts through social media, the CCHR has created its own Twitter page. Our Twitter page provides updates about our work, upcoming programs, and other posts related to civil and human rights.

“Discrimination, Don’t Ignore It Report It” Topical Flyers in Multiple Languages

To provide important information on a variety of discrimination related topics, the CCHR is developing a new series of easy to read one-page flyers based on our “Discrimination, Don’t Ignore it Campaign.” Some of the topics include Sexual Harassment, Disability Access, and Housing Choice Voucher discrimination. The flyers will be translated into Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Polish, Arabic, and Hindi. They will be available online on our web page. Printed copies will also be available and distributed as part of our outreach initiatives.

CCHR Quarterly Newsletter

2019 marked the second year that the CCHR has published its quarterly newsletter, “CCHR a Closer Look.” The newsletter highlights the work of the agency, new changes in the law, and other information which is distributed by email to hundreds of community groups, government agencies, elected officials and community partners. The newsletter serves as a great outreach tool to introduce new readers to the work of the department and helps strengthen and maintain existing contacts. If you are not currently receiving your CCHR newsletter, please let us know and we will be happy to add your email address.

We are proud of these accomplishments and look forward to implementing additional innovations in program delivery. Our 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 the mayor’s budget request for our department your most thoughtful consideration so we may continue to improve upon this important work. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Mona Noriega,
Chairman and Commissioner
Enclosures