

**BUDGET STATEMENT
FY2021**

**KENNETH GUNN
ACTING COMMISSIONER
CHICAGO COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS**

October 28, 2020

Honorable Chairwoman 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 2021 Budget Recommendation for the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR).

Over the past four years we have witnessed a steady assault on civil and human rights in our country. Immigrants' rights, LGBT rights, voting rights, a woman's right to choose, and more have been under attack by the current administration. Just recently, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rolled back the requirements under the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule which will essentially promote segregation. The President has gloated that the new rule will protect the suburbs by keeping low-income people out, meaning black and brown people. While our attention has understandably been consumed by COVID-19, police shootings and protests, we must remain vigilant to guard against these attempts to take back hard-fought gains in civil and human rights for all Americans.

Here at home, the CCHR continues to fight discrimination and hate through our legal enforcement powers and community outreach programs. We investigate and adjudicate complaints filed under the Chicago Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances to punish and deter discrimination. We also target outreach to community organizations, chambers of commerce, faith-based institutions and schools. Hate crime victim assistance and advocacy also remain a priority for the department. And as many of you are aware, we respond to intergroup tensions by providing mediation, educational workshops, and peace circles.

Understanding the difficult fiscal position of the City going into next year, the CCHR is not requesting an increase in funding, nor any new positions for 2021. We are, however, seeking to retain our current vacancies, so we may continue to provide our critical services.

Background

The CCHR serves as the City of Chicago's Civil Rights agency. 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. 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, 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. On average, half of our complaints are filed in person and the rest are filed by mail, fax or email. Since the office was closed to the public for six months, the Adjudication staff has "pivoted" by taking complaints over the phone. In 2020, new complaint filings are coming in at a somewhat slower pace than what we typically see, which we attribute to the pandemic. As of October 9, 2020, we have received 123 new complaints as compared to 138 in 2019. 35% of investigations are being completed within 180 days this year, as compared to 31% in 2019, and 50% are being completed within one year as compared to 58% in 2019.

2020 INITIATIVES

Asian Community Hate Crime Webinar: The CCHR worked with the Chinese American Service League (CASL) and Asians Advancing Justice to produce a hate crime webinar, "Hate Crime in the Age of COVID-19." The webinar discussed the increase of hate crimes and bias incidents against Asians in the U.S. since the outbreak of COVID-19 and provided information on what to do to stay safe in the face of hate.

New Training Offerings: This year, the Commission developed two new training, a new *Hate Crimes Educational Video* and a *Bystander Intervention Training*. CCHR workshops are offered to schools, community organizations, and other non-for-profit entities.

Cook County Regional Fair Housing Assessment: The CCHR has led the city's efforts to develop the first ever Cook County Regional Assessment of Fair Housing. Working with the contractor, Enterprise Community Partners, and more than a dozen municipalities and public housing agencies in Cook County, the report, identifies barriers to fair housing and offers detailed strategies to address those barriers.

Fair Housing Testing Project: In 2020, the Commission completed our second fair housing testing study in recent years, this time partnering with Roosevelt University and UIC John Marshall Law School. The study examines housing discrimination based on source of income, specifically Housing Choice Vouchers (i.e. Section 8), and race and national origin, through testing in four community areas, two on the North Side and two on the South Side.

2020 has been challenging for all of us but has provided opportunities to re-examine how we do our work, and how we can improve our service to the public. Through technology and networking, we have begun to expand our outreach efforts significantly. We will continue to challenge ourselves to be more creative, more efficient, and more effective as an agency. Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully,

Kenneth Gunn,
Acting Commissioner