



State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

April 9, 2025

Chairperson Osten, Chairperson Walker, Ranking Member Somers, Ranking Member Nuccio,
and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing on behalf of all the Commissioners of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) to express deep concern regarding the proposed budget cuts to the Commission. The recent withholding of \$900,000 from our budget, coupled with the additional \$500,000 reduction to Other Expenses outlined in House Bill No. 6863, significantly hampers our ability to fulfill our mission of protecting civil rights in Connecticut.

For several months now, even before the hiring freeze implemented in March, we've been unable to fill crucial staff positions. Currently, we have 92 filled positions, but funding only covers 90. Six more positions are vacant and left unfunded, for a total of 98 positions. This shortage has led to a backlog of intake appointments, as we've seen a sharp increase in inquiries and complaints. Appointments in one of our regional offices are currently being scheduled for October 2025.

The state also recently completed a Disparity Study to determine which businesses were awarded state contracts and which were not. The study found significant disparities for women and minority-owned businesses in contract awards and made several recommendations for an effective compliance program. This includes an additional attorney, an additional investigator, and a case management program for effective administration. These are essential for fulfilling the promise made to the people of Connecticut when the \$4 million appropriation was made for the study in 2021 (Special Act 21-8).

Finally, a recent study of the state's affirmative action program found a need for a digital platform for all state agencies to streamline affirmative action plan drafting and review. To implement this recommendation and ensure our commitment to equality of opportunity becomes a reality, we would very much encourage a permanent budget line item of \$150,000 to be added to the CHRO's budget.

To effectively address these challenges, we respectfully request:

1. **Funding for six additional intake positions:** These positions are not optional – they are critical to the agency's ability to meet its statutory obligations and uphold the civil rights of Connecticut residents. As the oldest state civil rights agency in the country, we have a proud legacy of fighting discrimination and promoting justice. But without sufficient staffing, that legacy is at risk. Intake officers are the front line of civil rights enforcement – they ensure that every complaint is heard, investigated promptly, and moved swiftly

through the system. With caseloads at historic highs, delay is no longer a possibility – *it's a reality that harms real people*. These six positions will immediately reduce backlogs, speed up investigations, and restore confidence in our ability to deliver on our mandate. Failure to fund them jeopardizes the rights of the very people we are sworn to protect.

2. **Funding for all current and vacant positions:** This is to fund the currently allotted 98 employees, including the six vacancies that cannot be filled.
3. **An additional \$250,000 for overtime expenses:** This will allow our current staff to work beyond regular hours to address the backlog and provide the level of service our community expects and deserves.
4. **Funding to implement the recommendations of the Disparity Study:** The additional staff and case management system are essential for addressing the significant disparities found in state contracting.
5. **Allotment for an affirmative action online platform:** This will implement recommendations from DAS and OPM to streamline affirmative action plan drafting and review. We have heard from EEOs across state agencies about the need to streamline and modernize our affirmative action plan processes, and we are committed to doing just that. However, we cannot do it without the proper funding.

The national climate underscores the urgency of our request. Recent federal initiatives, such as the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act and executive actions targeting programs aimed at eliminating discrimination, have raised concerns among civil rights organizations. These actions have devastated organizations and individuals not only across the country but also right here in Connecticut.

Additionally, proposed cuts to federal civil rights enforcement agencies, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), threaten to weaken the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. Without viable federal enforcement, the CHRO is a crucial resource for individuals seeking protection and redress against civil and human rights violations – in some cases, the CHRO is the *only* resource for Connecticut citizens.

It is imperative and urgent that the CHRO remains well-equipped to serve as Connecticut's primary defender of civil rights. The proposed budget cuts not only hinder our operational capacity but also signal a step back from our collective commitment to justice and equality.

I urge the Appropriations Committee, in the strongest possible terms, to reject these harmful reductions and fully fund the CHRO and its additional requests. Anything less potentially undermines our ability to protect civil rights, enforce the law, and serve the people of Connecticut with the urgency and integrity they deserve. Your support is crucial for maintaining robust civil rights protections and ensuring that justice is accessible to all Connecticut residents.

We are ready, willing, and able to do this work, but we need your help to ensure we have the resources to meet the moment. The demands on our agency have never been greater – and neither has our resolve. With your support, we can expand our capacity, protect the rights of more Connecticut residents, and continue to be a national leader in civil rights enforcement. This is not just an investment in staffing – it is a fundamental investment in justice, equity, and the essential promise of equal treatment under the law.

Yours In the Pursuit of Justice,

Nicholas D. Kapoor

Chairman

Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities