

## Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities



### At a Glance

**TANYA A. HUGHES**, Executive Director

Established – 1943

Statutory Authority – CGS Chapter 814c

Central office – 450 Columbus Blvd, Ste 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Website – [www.ct.gov/chro](http://www.ct.gov/chro)

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**2016-2017 Budget: \$6,409,092**

**Number of positions filled - 66 full-time**

**Authorized positions - 80 full-time**

**Organizational structure:** Nine-member commission establishes policy; Executive Director manages administrative office and four regional offices; and, independent Human Rights Referees hear contested cases.

### **Mission:**

The mission of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities is to eliminate discrimination through civil and human rights law enforcement and to establish equal opportunity and justice for all within the state through advocacy and education.

### **Statutory Responsibility:**

The statutory responsibility of the Commission is to:

- Eliminate illegal discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and credit transactions through education and law enforcement;
- Monitor contract compliance laws and small contractor set-aside provisions by state agencies, contractors and subcontractors;
- Review and monitor state agency affirmative action plans and compliance with laws requiring affirmative action and equal opportunity in state government; and

- Establish equal opportunity and justice for all persons in Connecticut through education and outreach.

**Public Service:** The Commission is headed by a policy-making body consisting of nine members. Five of the members are appointed by the Governor and four are appointed by the leadership of the General Assembly. All new appointments require legislative approval through the advice and consent of the House and Senate. The Commission conducts regular monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of the month. The Commission conducts special meetings as it deems necessary.

Eight Commissioners were serving at the end of the fiscal year. They were Chairperson Cherron Payne, Secretary Edward Mambruno, and Commissioners Andrew Norton, Edith Pestana, Joseph Suggs, Dr. Shuana Tucker, Lisa Giliberto and Nicholas Kapoor. One vacancy remains unfilled.

An Executive Director appointed by the Commission oversees the operations of the agency. The agency has four regional offices located in Hartford, Waterbury, Bridgeport and Norwich, which receive and investigate cases from individuals who believe that they have suffered illegal discrimination. The agency's administrative office, also located in Hartford, houses the Office of the Executive Director, the Legal Division, the Affirmative Action and Contract Compliance Unit, the Fair Housing Unit and the Office of Public Hearings.

**Improvements/ Achievements 2016-2017:** This has been a banner year for the Commission. The commission reduced its aged inventory to less than 1% agency wide. This is the best record nationwide for state sponsored civil rights agencies. Focusing on reducing statutory timeframes and lengths of the investigative process continue to be tantamount to our success.

**Complaint Tracking System:** We are constantly making upgrades and improvements to our Complaint Tracking System. We have updated our website to include many required reports in accordance with the statutes and regulations.

**Affirmative Action Training:** CHRO is mandated by CONN. GEN. STAT. § 46a-68(b)(3) to provide training concerning state and federal discrimination laws and techniques for conducting investigations of discrimination complaints to persons designated by state agencies, departments, boards or commissions as Equal Employment Opportunity professionals. The AA Unit staff provides numerous technical training opportunities to Affirmative Action Officers during the fiscal year. CHRO is continually reviewing the Affirmative Action/Contract Compliance database and working with BEST to implement an effective change.

**Contract Compliance:** In 2016-2017 the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities' (CHRO) Contract Compliance Unit (CCU) advised state agencies and their funding recipients of their anti-discrimination and supplier diversity statutory and regulatory obligations under C.G.S. §4a-60 and relevant CHRO Contract Compliance Regulations. During FY 2016-2017, 491 new plans were filed; 575 reviews were conducted. Agency staff also reviewed Affirmative Action Plans (AAPs) submitted by contractors who were awarded state-funded public works and other state financed contracts whose monetary values ranged from \$50,000 to \$174,000,000, totaling \$819,610,030; thousands of technical assistance sessions and/or conversations were conducted to assist contractors in complying with anti-discrimination and supplier diversity statutes and regulations.

**Complaints Against Agency Heads and Affirmative Action Officers:** Pursuant to CONN. GEN. STAT. § 46a-68(b)(4)(B), the Commission receives any complaint alleging that the executive head of a state agency or department, any member of a state board or commission or any affirmative action officer engaged in discriminatory conduct to determine whether it should be forwarded to the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) for investigation. If the complaint is filed against DAS, the Commission conducts the investigation. The purpose of this legislation was to eliminate the conflict that may arise if an affirmative action officer has to investigate allegations against his/her supervisor, as EEOs report directly to the appointing authority. In this fiscal year, the Commission has not received or forwarded any such complaints to DAS.

**Diversity and Education:** By statute, the Commission serves as the secretariat for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission (MLK). The MLK Commission, with assistance from the CHRO and the African American Affairs Commission, sponsored the 30th annual awards event commemorating the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 16, 2017 in the Hall of Flags at the State Capital, Hartford, CT.

**Field Operations Reports:** Overall, CHRO was successful at closing 2,684 complaints while filing 2,265 cases. This was the best production rate reported by agencies from across the country at the annual EEOC conference. Of this number, approximately 40% of the cases were closed during the earliest phases of the investigation as Releases of Jurisdiction, Merit Assessment/Case Assessment Review, the tools originally made available through PA 11-237.

**Public Hearings:** The Office of Public Hearings (OPH) conducts contested case proceedings in discrimination cases brought by the Commission and in whistleblower retaliation cases filed with the Chief Human Rights Referee pursuant to CONN. GEN. STAT. § 4-61dd. The average number of cases pending litigation at OPH continued to show

increase in FY 2016-2017, averaging at 145. This was largely due to an extended vacancy in referee appointments. This division operates autonomously and is slated to consist of three appointed referees. It is significant to note that one of the positions has remained vacant since June of 2014. Current CHRO Referees include Chief Referee Michelle Mount and Alissa Wright (appointed 7/20/2015). Currently, a vacancy remains.

**Training, Education and Outreach:** In FY 2016-2017, CHRO collaborated with numerous entities, namely, the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA), Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), the State Department of Education and the State Department of Economic Development.

Human Rights Attorneys serve on the Safe Schools Climate Committee and the Safe Schools Climate Resource Network of professionals working to eliminate discriminatory bullying in schools. The CHRO partners with the Department of Labor, Health and the CT Breastfeeding Coalition to publish joint guidance regarding breastfeeding at work and in places of public accommodation. The CHRO hosted multiple conferences on the School to Prison Pipeline, Racial Profiling, Religious Bias, Fair and Impartial Policing, Barriers to Health Equities and Bullying in Schools.

The CHRO sponsored a Kids Court Competition to raise the social consciousness of youth regarding civil and human rights issues. The 2017 conference housed closed to 750 participants from all over the state. Key speakers included DJ Buck and Nancy Barrow from WZMX Hot 93.7 Radio station. The CHRO sponsors an internship program for high school, college and law school students which allows students to learn first-hand about the civil rights movement and the CHRO's role in that movement. Human Rights Attorneys provided diversity training to over 2,000 educators across the state.

The CHRO, in collaboration with the Governor's Prevention Partnership held housing training seminars across the state to educate the public about housing laws, bullying and discrimination. The Executive Director and human rights attorneys serve on the Racial Profiling Advisory Board and are developing a program to address racial profiling in the state.

The Agency's Business Training Institute and Speaker's Bureau provides training to businesses and non-profit organizations across the state on the Commission's complaint process, sexual harassment in the workplace, and employment, credit, housing and public accommodations discrimination. The CHRO co-sponsored multiple informational sessions and community events throughout the state to raise the consciousness of the general public regarding civil and human rights laws.

### **Information Reported as Required by State Statute:**

#### **Affirmative Action**

The Commission remains firmly committed to the principles of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. The commission's affirmative action plan for the review

period ending October 31, 2016 was approved. The Commission remains on a biennial filing schedule and will file the next plan on January 30, 2019. Over the last fiscal year, the Commission reviewed fourth-eight (45) affirmative action plans submitted by state agencies. Of these, thirty-six (39) were approved, seven (6) were disapproved, and none (0) were conditionally approved. Additionally, the Commission staff conducted technical assistance reviews with agencies seeking assistance to address weak or deficient areas of their affirmative action plans.

### **Freedom of Information**

The Commission takes seriously its responsibility to comply with the provisions of the state's Freedom of Information Act. The Legal Division is responsible for responding to all freedom of information (FOI) requests, except those received directly in a regional office requesting a file being processed by that office. The Legal Division also responds to subpoenas for documents and testimony related to agency procedures and documents. Support staff handles most requests; complex requests and hearings are referred to the Executive Director. The Legal Division in fiscal year 2016-2017 received a total of 119 FOI requests. The Executive Director ensures that all regular and special Commission meetings are properly noticed and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act.

Additional Information: Individuals seeking more information about the Commission, the laws it enforces or its services and programs are encouraged to contact the Commission's website (<http://www.ct.gov/chro>) or call our toll-free number (800) 477-5737.