

State of Maryland

Commission on Civil Rights

“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”



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Maryland Commission on Civil Rights **Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget** **Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis**

House Appropriations Committee
House Health and Social Services Subcommittee
Delegate Kirill Reznik
January 28, 2021

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Health and Human Services Subcommittee
Senator Melony Griffith
January 28, 2021

To the Members of the House and Senate Health & Human Services subcommittees:

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Department of Legislative Services Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Analysis. We would like to thank our assigned analyst, Mr. Samuel Quist, for his thorough analysis. While the current budget realities and resulting spending plan present challenges, we believe it is responsible. The recommended spending plan will preserve the opportunity for the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) to meet its production standards because no currently filled staff reductions will occur.

As you know, the State workforce was ordered to begin working from home in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, MCCR had taken steps over the previous years to implement an infrastructure that enabled staff to complete their work remotely, while ensuring that we were capable of connecting with and receiving complaints of alleged unlawful discrimination from throughout the State. Because of these proactive measures, the Commission was able to mitigate much of the impact on service delivery once remote work operations were initiated.

Despite the challenges arising from the pandemic, MCCR enjoyed continued success through FY 2020. The Commission fulfilled the obligations of its federal contracts with both the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) and the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (“HUD”). Our total case closure numbers were 620 EEOC closures*, and 125 HUD closures. The HUD closure number increased by 19 over last year, and is now the fourth

* Timeframe for EEOC closures is October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020.

year in a row that the agency has been able to increase its closure rate. MCCR expects to continue building upon our overall four year positive trajectory in FY 2021.

Increasing our Education and Outreach (E&O) footprint has been vital in reaching our vision of having a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination. MCCR participated in several in-person events before March 2020, and as the COVID-19 health crisis began to curtail outreach opportunities, the E&O Unit identified new ways to provide information and services. During FY 2020, MCCR attended 121 E&O events, trained 7,082 individuals and provided outreach to approximately 3,600 individuals. Of particular note, MCCR has continued to implement the passage of House Bill 1423, which requires all State employees to complete a minimum amount of sexual harassment training on a regular, rolling basis. In response to increased requests for trainings, MCCR drafted a virtual sexual harassment module and course booklet that meets the legislative requirement for interactive training and expands the subject matter to include relevant and prescient information for teleworking entities.

While we have not had significant reductions in staffing over the past few years, please note that any reductions in full staffing levels will have a debilitating impact on the service delivery of the agency. At our current staffing levels, MCCR is continually challenged at meeting our federal contracts and obligations with the EEOC and HUD. Despite our successes, the number of cases assigned to staff creates little margin for error and overwhelms our investigators who go above and beyond what is expected of them in order to carry out the mission of the agency. Even a singular reduction would threaten this balance and jeopardize the agency's sustainability in maintaining its relationship with our federal partners. We continue to work creatively to reduce our case inventory, and anticipate the approved contractual conversions will yield positive results. Ultimately, however, we believe an increase in the Civil Rights Officer positions will provide the best opportunity for us to see a more significant and lasting reduction in our case inventory.

In closing, MCCR respectfully requests the committees support for no additional cuts to the agency in the Governor's FY 2022 Allowance. As per the committees' request, MCCR will provide a status update on the total inventory of pending and open cases that have been received for processing by MCCR, as well as the status of current investigator caseloads and case processing times. The report will include the current total number of open and pending cases, the number of cases that have been unresolved for more than one year, the number awaiting assignment, the current caseload per investigator, as well as the estimated timeframe for assigning remaining outstanding cases to investigators.