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Maryland Commission on Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget Response to Department of Legislative Services Budget Analysis

House Appropriations Committee
House Health and Social Services Subcommittee
Delegate Kirill Reznik
February 1, 2023

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Health and Human Services Subcommittee
Senator Melony Griffith

February 3, 2023

To the Members of the House Health and Social Services Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Department of Legislative Services Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Analysis. We would like to thank our assigned analyst, Ms. Naomi Komuro, for her thorough analysis. The recommended spending plan will preserve the opportunity for the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) to meet its production obligations with our Federal partners while creating an initial opportunity for us to positively impact sustained reductions in cases not yet assigned into investigations.

As we continue to move responsibly away from the restrictions of COVID we are proud that 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 has been able to mitigate much of the impact on service delivery once remote work operations were initiated and have now created a more effective service delivery process since they have become permanent. The residents of Maryland

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

benefit from having more options to interact with Commission staff and accessing agency services.

Despite continued challenges resulting from the staff reorganization, staff departures, and training new staff, 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 520 EEOC closures,* and 98 HUD closures.

In FY 2022, after creating a dedicated Housing Unit, MCCR was challenged when two of the Unit Investigators (out of 3) left the Commission to accept positions with the Federal government and with a non-profit advocacy organization, respectively. While this loss caused a reduction in the total number of Housing complaints closed for the year, it did not prevent MCCR from meeting its contract nor impact our standing with our federal partner.

We have had great success in creatively using our Education and Outreach (E&O) Unit in reaching our vision of having a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination. A priority of the Unit has been to partner with organizations and local communities to address issues of equity, inclusion and diversity. We have forged strong partnerships with the Office of the Attorney General and the Maryland State Police in addressing issues of hate/bias. We have formed an Advisory Council in the Western Maryland region comprised of volunteer residents from Frederick, Washington, Allegany and Garrett counties to help us understand how we can better use the resources of the Commission to support existing and new efforts to promote civil rights and understanding throughout the region.

While we have not had reductions in staffing over the past few years, we continue to be challenged by our staffing levels. We are however, encouraged by recent positive budget related actions. Though not reflected in the current analysis, MCCR did receive approval for three additional Contractual Full-Time Civil Rights Officer positions in FY 23, which we have been successful in filling, increasing our total number of positions to 37. Additionally, we have successfully worked with the Department of Budget and Management, Office of Personnel Service and Benefits in resolving an ongoing problem of salary inequities within our Civil Rights Officer (Investigator) series. The salary parity that has been created, along with the regular COLA adjustments and increments for all State employees are anticipated to have a favorable impact on recruitment and retention efforts with our Investigator positions. The staff of MCCR continues to work hard and creatively to reduce our case inventory, and the recent aforementioned developments are certainly expected to help.

In closing, MCCR respectfully requests the committee’s support of the Governor’s FY 2024 Allowance. As per the committee’s request, MCCR will provide a status update on all items identified under the Operating Budget Recommended Actions section of the Analysis.