



VT Human Rights Commission
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Representative David Yacovone
House Committee on Appropriations
Vermont Legislature
Statehouse
Montpelier, Vermont

RE: An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government: Vermont Human Rights Commission, Budget Request FY2020

Dear Representative Yacovone and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Vermont Human Rights Commission (VHRC) and answer questions regarding our FY2020 budget. As requested, I'm providing statistics relating to the number of cases processed in the last five years. I'm happy to provide additional information, answer questions and testify again before the Committee, if this would be helpful.

As I shared during my testimony, I believe that the relatively small increase in our budget could result in substantially greater outcomes for the people of Vermont. Hiring attorneys to do the investigative work at the agency allowed our investigators to conciliate and identify cases suitable for mediation because they understood the law and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the complaint. When the HRC is unable to settle a complaint, investigators provide thorough investigative reports whether or not they find cause. These reports give the parties a sound legal framework that can be used to determine next steps, including litigation. In sum, their skills as attorneys help prevent lawsuits and encourage resolution of claims which in turn saves the State money and sometimes adverse publicity.

For thirty years, our agency has been doing its best to react to discrimination by investigating and finding liability, where appropriate. This is not the most effective strategy to bring about cultural and work-place climate changes. The alarming stories of explicit racial discrimination and intimidation this past year reflect a State and agency far from what Legislators envisioned when it created the Commission. This State needs a comprehensive strategic outreach plan and on-going campaign to promote inclusion, diversity and educate the public on anti-discrimination laws and provide them the tools they need to be effective bystanders in the face of explicit discrimination. To do this work and to fully realize the legislative intent, the HRC needs the support of the Governor and Legislature.

Thank you.

Sincerely,


Bor Yang
Executive Director and Legal Counsel