



Human Rights Commission
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The Human Rights Commission performs essential functions in Vermont on an extremely modest budget. We conduct all discrimination investigations involving housing, places of public accommodations, and State employment with only three investigators. While we are able to engage in significant policy work throughout the state, we do not have a position solely dedicated to outreach. We operate with only one administrative support person, fielding all calls and emails to our office about possible human rights violations. Our staffing levels are untenable, leading to employee turnover and citizen dissatisfaction. Sadly, our budget does not enable us to meet the needs of Vermonters involved in complaints of discrimination. In addition to fully funding our expected operating budget, salaries and benefits in FY25, we recommend the creation of the new positions described below, and as envisioned by H.725.

Staff Attorney Investigator

- HRC currently has 3 Staff Attorney Investigators. We need a fourth investigator to help us meet the needs of Vermonters involved in discrimination complaints.
- The HRC is facing a mounting and unsustainable backlog. We accept more cases than we close each month. The stress of this backlog, and the demands of the investigator duties, has led to turnover and a perpetual backlog.
- In FY2023, the average investigation took 649 days to complete. This is not a reasonable timeframe for parties to wait for a determination. Prolonged investigations can result in lost or destroyed evidence, decreased witness recollections, and inability to locate or contact witnesses.
- HRC Rules envision a 6-12 month investigation at most. HUD expects most investigations to be completed in 100 days. This has become nearly impossible to achieve in most cases.
- A fourth investigator would enable HRC to complete more investigations in a timely manner and reduce the overall amount of time that investigations are taking.

Intake Specialist

- This position would be responsible for all aspects of the complaint intake process, fielding inquiries via phone, email, and mail. HRC currently receives about 50-100 inquiries per month. Historically, all of HRC's intake work is performed by a single Executive Staff Assistant, who performs many other administrative and support functions for the office.
- A position dedicated solely to conducting intake is crucial to the HRC being able to meet the needs of Vermonters. Callers would be able to speak to a staff member more reliably, instead of waiting days or weeks for a reply. Pressure and overload for the current Executive Staff Assistant would be reduced, and the HRC would be able to process new complaints more quickly
- HRC's Executive Staff Assistant role is a high turnover position due to the overwhelming duties, workload and pressure. Creation of this position would enable HRC's Executive Staff Assistant to provide more effective administrative support to the office, including oversight of contracts, grants, and budgetary matters, case data and recordkeeping, and Commission meeting coordination.

- This position would enable the HRC to provide a higher level of customer service and assistance to people who feel that they have been discriminated against and wish to initiate a complaint.

Outreach and Communications Specialist

- This position would coordinate and carry out all of HRC’s community outreach activities
- This position would enable HRC to engage in more effective outreach and education for Vermonters. HRC would distribute a monthly newsletter about current events, civil rights, and HRC activities, and maintain a strong, up-to-date website and social media presence.
- This staff member would handle planning, logistics, and implementation of HRC events and trainings. This position will enhance and support the outreach work of the HRC by putting real “boots on the ground” in community events on a sustained basis.
- The HRC has never had annual outreach budget. It is essential to the effectiveness of this position that some outreach funds be made available. This will allow HRC to undertake impactful marketing campaigns promoting civil rights and host free events for community engagement.

Approximate Cost of Benefits and Salaries for Full-Time Positions

Staff Attorney II (Attorney Pay Plan):	\$	130,000
Intake Specialist (Pay Grade 22):	\$	97,000
Outreach & Communications Specialist (Pay Grade 22):	\$	<u>97,000</u>
	Total \$	324,000
 Additional Proposed Outreach Budget:	\$	26,000
 Total Request:	\$	350,000