



INVEST IN HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL VERMONTERS

# RESPONDING TO THE NEED FOR ROBUST HUMAN RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT IN VERMONT

The Vermont Human Rights Commission (VHRC) is an independent State agency that investigates complaints of discrimination in housing, places of public accommodations, and state employment. In 2024, the demand for VHRC investigations has skyrocketed. With funding for only 7 staff members, and a backlog of cases, VHRC is not able to meet the current demand. A significant increase in funding to the VHRC is needed to ensure that Vermonters have access to justice under Vermont anti-discrimination laws.

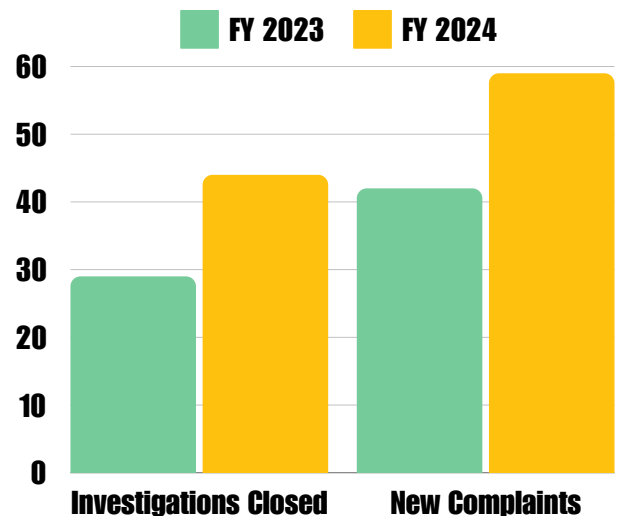
## WHY THIS MATTERS

VHRC's investigations often involve life-altering issues that require a trauma-informed approach, such as:

- Fair Housing Discrimination: Evictions, refusal of housing, voucher denials, refusal to allow assistance animals, and harassment.
- Public Accommodations Discrimination includes students being denied equitable education, people with service dogs being denied access, and individuals being discriminated against by businesses or public agencies.
- Workplace Discrimination: State Employees who are subjected to discrimination or harassment.

*Without the VHRC's enforcement, Vermonters have no meaningful access to justice for these claims, as private attorneys are often unavailable and legal services are extremely limited.*

## RISE IN COMPLAINTS



Requests for new complaints in 2024 and 2025 are steadily increasing each month.

## THE IMPACT ON STAFFING CHALLENGES

- Fair housing cases consume the majority of HRC's time and are increasing. These cases generate about 10% of HRC's budget from federal HUD funds.
- The HRC process often results in resolutions ensuring justice and fairness, yet these results are not achieved when we have to turn away new complaints due to capacity.
- Complex investigations may take up to two years or longer, far exceeding the 6 months outlined in HRC's rules and the 100 days HUD expects for processing fair housing cases.
- A backlog of intake cases delays justice for Vermonters experiencing discrimination.

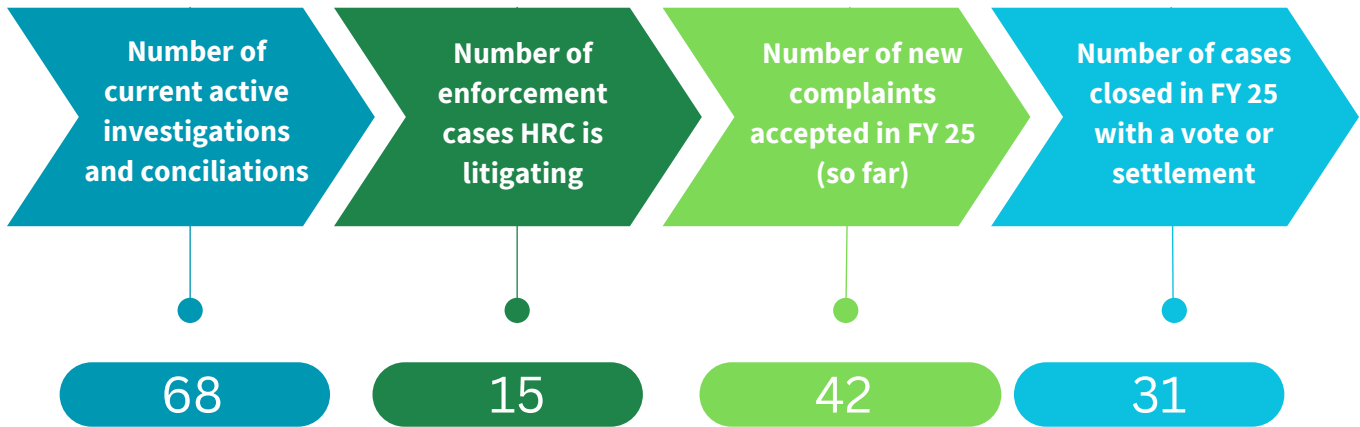


# VHRC NEEDS MORE RESOURCES TO ACCEPT AND PROCESS MORE COMPLAINTS

VHRC’s small team of 7 staffers is insufficient to conduct all the outreach and preventive education that is needed, while responding to new inquiries, conducting investigations, and litigating cases.

## SNAPSHOT OF VHRC CURRENT CASELOAD

(as of December 1, 2024)



102

Number of inquiries currently in the “intake” stage (ie., waiting for a file review, intake meeting, decision, or a draft complaint)

50

Number of intake meetings that VHRC has conducted so far in FY25 (estimated)

47

Number of complaints VHRC has declined to accept for investigation so far in FY25

### CURRENT POSITIONS

- 1 Executive Director
- 1 Litigator
- 1 Director of Policy, Education & Outreach
- 3 Staff Attorney Investigators
- 1 Executive Staff Assistant

WITH INCREASED STAFF, VHRC WOULD BE ABLE TO ACCEPT MORE CASES AND COMPLETE INTAKES AND INVESTIGATIONS MORE QUICKLY



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# THE VHRC IS A CRUCIAL LEADER IN VERMONT'S CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS AND ENFORCEMENT

Over the past decade, increases in state budget allocations and innovations in VHRC practices have resulted in significant progress in several key areas:

## INVESTIGATIONS CONDUCTED BY STAFF ATTORNEYS:

In 2019, VHRC changed the positions of “Administrative Law Examiners” to “Staff Attorney Investigators”. This change increased the capacity and quality of VHRC’s investigations, leading to higher-caliber witness interviews, factual development, and legal analysis.

## INCREASED ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY:

In 2023, the legislature created a new litigator position to enable VHRC to enforce Vermont’s anti-discrimination statutes in court more effectively. In just over one year, VHRC’s Senior Counsel has overseen and initiated a total of 15 court cases, several of which have already had favorable rulings creating civil rights precedent for future cases.

## CASE DATA MANAGEMENT:

In 2023, VHRC retired its ACCESS database and implemented a new case management system. This system stores all case files and captures essential data about inquiries and investigations. This contributes to more streamlined processes and more detailed statistical analysis.

## OUTREACH AND POLICY IMPACT:

Since 2020, VHRC has substantially expanded its outreach and policy work with the creation of a crucial position: Director of Policy, Education, and Outreach. The VHRC has served as an important voice and provided leadership on several policy changes at the state level, such as:

- The Act 1 Working Group, creating the Ethnic Studies Framework.
- Education Quality Standards, which will go into effect in July 2025.
- Fair and Impartial Policing Policy, collaborating to develop updates to the policy

The VHRC has also collaborated with coalition groups and non-profits to conduct impactful outreach work, including the Let’s Talk Race Conversation Card deck, Narratives for Change storytelling campaign, and Fair Housing events.

## OTHER PROCESS EFFICIENCIES:

In 2024, VHRC significantly simplified investigative reports in order to reduce case processing times and increase case closures. VHRC also revamped intake processes in order to keep track of all the new inquiries. These improvements are already having a measurable impact on FY25 cases.

THESE CHANGES HAVE INCREASED VHRC'S IMPACT,  
BUT NOT ENOUGH TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF TODAY.



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# SUPPORT A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE VHRC THAT MEETS THE DEMANDS OF OUR TIMES

## ADDITIONAL STAFF NEEDED IN FY2026

The VHRC is essential to Vermont's anti-discrimination protections, but it cannot meet its statutory obligations without additional funding. With these positions, VHRC will reduce case processing times, increase access to justice for Vermonters experiencing discrimination, serve more Vermonters statewide, and expand outreach and preventive education programs.

### INTAKE SPECIALIST

- Handle all new inquiries (approx 60-100 per month)
- Conduct intake meetings and draft complaints
- Ensure trauma-informed support for complainants
- **Impact: more efficient intake process avoiding delays and providing an increased level of customer service to vulnerable populations**

### COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH COORDINATOR

- Modernize and maintain VHRC's website
- Carry out public service campaigns, marketing activities, and Know Your Rights events
- Coordinate preventive outreach and training
- **Impact: Expands public awareness and accessibility of HRC services.**

### PART-TIME SOCIAL WORKER

- Support individuals in crisis, experiencing trauma, or mental health challenges.
- Provide case management support for individuals with disabilities involved in a VHRC process
- **Impact: Ensures equitable participation and minimizes re-traumatization.**

### THREE NEW STAFF ATTORNEY INVESTIGATORS

- Address backlog and maintain healthy caseloads
- Keep up with intake volume and address urgent complaints effectively
- Meet HUD deadlines and HRC goals for case age
- Expand investigation capacity for the first time in over a decade.
- **Impact: shortens case duration and prevents rejection of valid complaints.**

### PARALEGAL

- Manage documents in complex cases
- Support discovery process and trial preparation
- Align Vermont with standard Human Rights Commission practices nationwide.
- **Impact: Enables processing of complex investigation and streamlines litigation work**

### PART-TIME MEDIATOR

- Facilitate settlements early in complaint processes
- **Impact: Resolves more cases efficiently, reducing strain on investigators and allowing more public relief.**

VHRC NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT FOR INCREASED FUNDING FROM THE GENERAL FUND BUDGET!