



VERMONT

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Annual Report

January 2026

FY25

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INTRODUCTION

The **mission** of the Vermont Human Rights Commission is to promote full civil and human rights in Vermont. The Commission protects people from unlawful discrimination in **housing**, state government **employment**, and places of **public accommodation**.

The Commission pursues its mission by:

Enforcing laws through investigations and litigation

Complaints alleging violations of anti-discrimination laws are investigated impartially and decided promptly by the Human Rights Commission.

Conciliating disputes during and after investigations

Complainants and Respondents are offered timely and meaningful access to mediation services or informal means of conciliation that promote mutually satisfactory resolutions to their disputes.

Educating the public, providing information and referrals

HRC staff offer information, referrals, educational programs, and educational training to those who request these services. HRC staff engage with coalitions and in community activities that address the needs of members of underrepresented and historically marginalized groups.

Advancing effective public policies on human rights

The HRC provides leadership in public policy development concerning civil and human rights issues in Vermont and presents testimony to the Legislature on such issues.

The HRC has five Commissioners appointed by the Governor for five-year terms. They meet 10-12 times per year to hear cases, approve settlements, and guide organizational decisions. Kevin “Coach” Christie has served as the HRC Chair since 2018.

OUR AGENCY

During FY25, the Vermont Human Rights Commission had 7 positions. In order to meet demand for our services, the legislature created 2 new positions at the start of FY26, for a total of 9 full time State employees.

Current Staff

as of January 2026

Executive Director & General Counsel

Big Hartman, Esq., hired 9/13/21
(current position since 7/19/23)

Senior Counsel

Mitchell Rotbert, Esq., hired 10/23/23

Director of Community Engagement

Kate Paarlberg-Kvam, hired 7/21/25
(formerly Director of Policy, Education
and Outreach, Amanda Garcés)

Staff Attorney Investigators

Daniel Flynnjac, hired 6/27/22
Kelly Poupore, hired 9/11/23
Eric Nickel, hired 2/15/25
Vanessa Kranz, hired 8/12/25
(new position created in FY26)

Executive Staff Assistant

Vanessa Bonebo, hired 8/25/24

Intake Coordinator

John McKelvie, hired 8/10/25
(new position created in FY26)

Commissioners

Kevin “Coach” Christie, Chair
Nate Besio
Bruce Wilson
Joan Nagy
Aditeei Lagu

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12 Baldwin Street

Montpelier, Vermont 05633-6301

Phone: (802) 828 - 2480

[Website: hrc.vermont.gov](http://hrc.vermont.gov)



OUR PROCESS

Human Rights Commission complaint processing has four stages.

01 Intake Processing



HRC staff respond daily to Vermonters reporting discrimination. Many of these individuals suffer from trauma and are in crisis. Our staff take time to hear their stories, provide information and referrals, and explore the facts. The HRC may accept complaints for investigation if they state a “prima facie case” of discrimination. HRC staff will draft the complaint if it is accepted. Intake processes can take several weeks or months depending on staff workload and cooperation with the complainant. Beginning in FY26, all intake matters are handled by the new Intake Coordinator position.

03 Commission Meetings



The HRC Commissioners meet monthly. They hold informal hearings in executive session, reviewing investigation reports and hearing from the parties. After a hearing, they decide in the public session whether there are reasonable grounds to believe discrimination occurred. If reasonable grounds are found, the names of the parties and the determination become public; if not, all case information remains confidential.

02 Complaint Investigation



HRC’s Staff Attorney Investigators conduct neutral, thorough investigations of complaints. The investigation process includes gathering documents, interviewing witnesses, and performing legal research. Investigators may do site visits and seek third-party information. They also work to help parties resolve the matter if at all possible. Investigators draft detailed reports summarizing evidence and analyzing each legal claim. High caseloads mean complex investigations can take over two years. The investigative file is available to the parties but is otherwise confidential by law.

04 Settlement & Litigation



Following a reasonable grounds determination, the HRC statute allows six months for HRC staff to attempt to find a resolution through settlement. Settlement can include both individual and public interest relief. If the parties do not settle the case, the HRC may file an enforcement action in court. HRC does not represent the complainant. HRC can ask the court for an order to stop the discriminatory practice, compensating the complainant for harm, and penalties and legal costs to be paid by the defendant.

FY25 CASE DATA

Below is a summary of complaint and determination data from FY25. Consistently, HRC initiates more complaints than it closes each year - leading to a backlog of cases.

OVERVIEW		
New Formal Complaints	57 Complaints	• 28 Housing • 19 Public Accommodations • 5 Employment • 5 Housing and Public Acc.
Complaints Resolved through Conciliation	26 Total Settlements	• 11 pre-determination • 7 post-determination • 3 after lawsuit filed by HRC • 5 withdrawals with settlement
Determinations by the Commission	35 Determinations	• 15 Reasonable Grounds • 20 No Reasonable Grounds
Reasonable Grounds Determinations	7 Fair Housing 5 Public Accommodations 3 Employment	• 11 cases based on disability • 2 cases based on race • 3 cases based on receipt of public assistance (housing) • 1 case based on sex • 1 case based on national origin
Total Investigations	53 Investigations Completed	• 35 Investigative Reports • 16 Pre-determination resolutions • 2 Administrative Dismissals

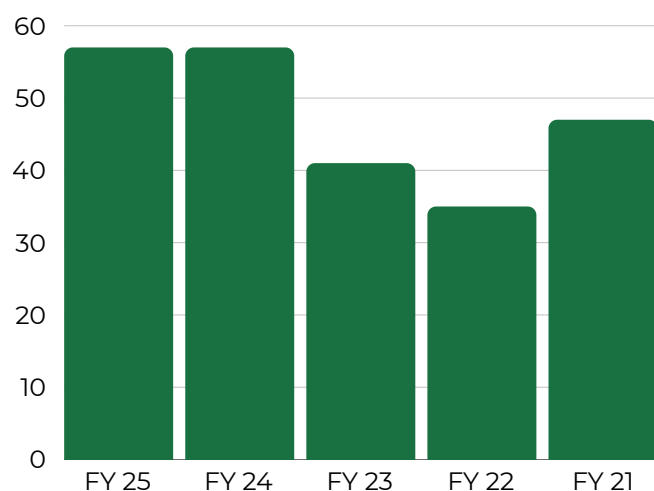
FY25 INTAKE DATA

Every day, members of the public who have questions about discrimination or who are interested in filing a complaint contact the HRC. People contact the HRC by phone, email, regular mail, through the website, and in person. Also, HRC receives complaint referrals from Vermont Legal Aid and Central Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity. HRC's Executive Director and the Executive Staff Assistant shared intake duties in FY25, such as fielding inquiries, conducting intake meetings, and drafting complaints.

In FY25, HRC staff logged 694 inquiries from the public. The vast majority of these inquiries took place by phone and email, but a small portion were by mail and in-person. HRC recieved 35 referrals. Many inquiries present issues that are outside of HRC's jurisdiction, and staff provide referrals whenever possible.

HRC conducted 113 intake meetings in FY25. During intake meetings, the Executive Director or the Executive Staff Assistant take time to discuss a person's allegations of discrimination and the HRC complaint process. Based on the information gathered, HRC's Executive Director decides whether to accept the case for investigation.

HRC initiated 62 complaints for investigation. Five of the 62 accepted complaints in FY25 were "informal complaints" which did not result in formal investigation. HRC declined 106 requests for investigations in FY25.



**Number of Formal Complaints
by Fiscal Year**



**FY25 Intake Activity Compared
to Total Inquiries Logged (694)**

- Inquiry Files Created: 273
- Intake Meetings Held: 113
- New Complaints Accepted: 62

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Fair Housing cases made up the majority of HRC cases in FY25.

What are unfair housing practices?

Unfair housing practices occur when someone is treated differently or unfairly because of their membership in a legally protected category.

Common examples include:

- refusing to rent, sell, or negotiate for housing
- imposing different terms or conditions for housing
- making discriminatory statements
- falsely representing availability or steering
- redlining, denial of lending, or unfavorable lending terms
- harassment or creating a hostile housing environment
- refusal to make reasonable accommodations or allow reasonable modifications for individuals with disabilities
- retaliation against someone exercising their rights under fair housing laws

Legally protected categories in housing

Race and
Color

National
Origin

Religion

Disability

Sexual
Orientation

Gender
Identity

Sex

Marital Status

Age

Minor Children

Receipt of
Public
Assistance

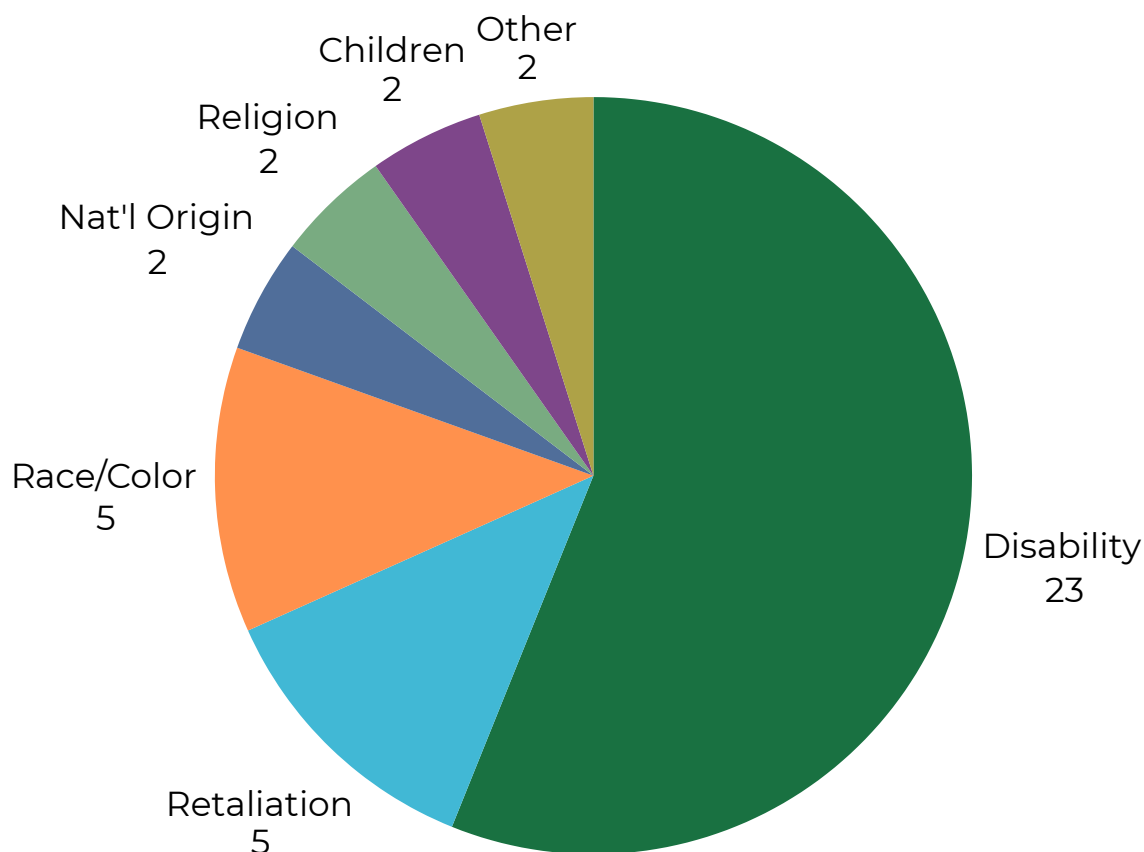
Victim of
Domestic and
Sexual Abuse

Note: Effective July 1, 2025, immigration status and citizenship became legally protected categories in housing.

FY25 HOUSING COMPLAINTS

HRC accepted 29 new formal complaints in FY25 that alleged discrimination in housing. Of these 29 complaints, 23 are against a tenant's landlord or property owner. Many also include a property manager or property management company. Others are filed against neighbors, a condo association, and prospective landlords. 6 of the 29 housing complaint include allegations of harassment in housing. Note that complaints may allege discrimination based on multiple legally protected characteristics.

New Fair Housing Complaints by Protected Class



Nearly all of these complaints are dual-filed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) pursuant to a cooperating agreement between HRC and HUD. That agreement provides that HUD will pay HRC a set amount for each housing case it closes each year, in addition to funding for staff training and administrative costs.

PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS DISCRIMINATION

HRC has jurisdiction to enforce state anti-discrimination protections in places of public accommodations. Under the Vermont Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act, it is illegal for someone to be treated differently because of their membership in a legally protected category.

This includes:

- refusing or withholding services or benefits
- offering less favorable services or benefits
- denying access to someone with a service animal
- refusing to make reasonable accommodations and modifications to individuals with disabilities
- failing to take practicable steps to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the services or benefits of the place of public accommodation
- engaging in harassment, or failing to take reasonable measures to prevent harassment

What is a place of public accommodation?



Any business that serves the public



Any type of public or private school



Any local or state government entity

Legally protected categories

Race and Color

National Origin

Religion

Disability

Sexual Orientation

Gender Identity

Sex

Breast-feeding

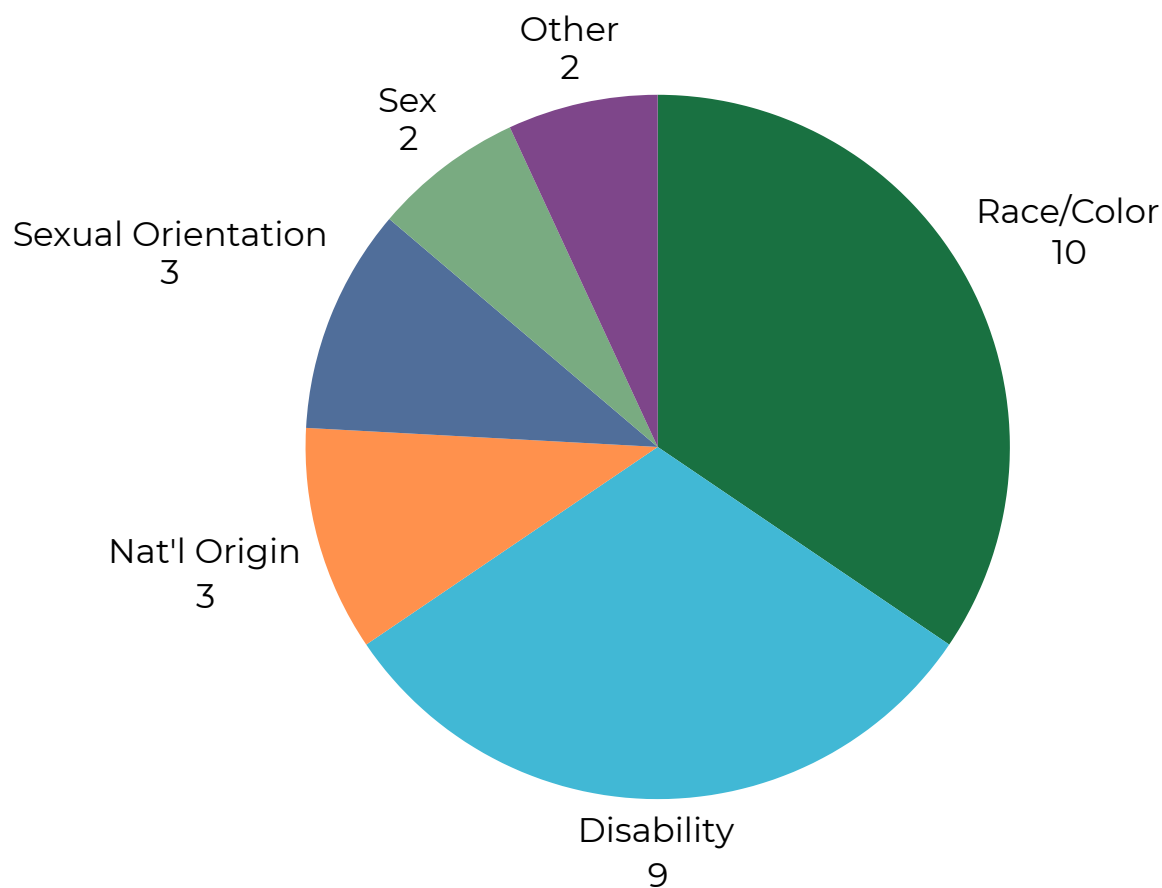
Note: Effective July 1, 2025, immigration status and citizenship became legally protected categories in housing.

FY25 PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS COMPLAINTS

HRC accepted 20 new formal complaints in FY25 that alleged discrimination in a place of public accommodation. This figure is on par with FY24 and FY23 totals. Of this year's 20 complaints:

- 9 were filed against schools (7 of those allege harassment)
- 6 were filed against retail establishments; 3 of those involved denial of entry due to a service dog
- 3 were filed against state or local government entities
- 2 involved allegations of discrimination by law enforcement

New Public Accommodations Complaints by Protected Class



Note that complaints may allege discrimination based on multiple legally protected characteristics

FY25 STATE EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

The HRC is responsible for enforcing Vermont's Fair Employment Practices Act as it applies to State government employees. The Vermont Attorney General's Office Civil Rights Unit addresses FEPA complaints involving all other employers in the state.

Employment discrimination claims in Vermont can include:

- different treatment in hiring or terms and conditions of employment
- discriminatory discipline or termination
- harassment based on legally protected categories
- unequal pay
- refusing to make reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities
- retaliation against someone for making a complaint of discrimination

Legally protected categories in employment

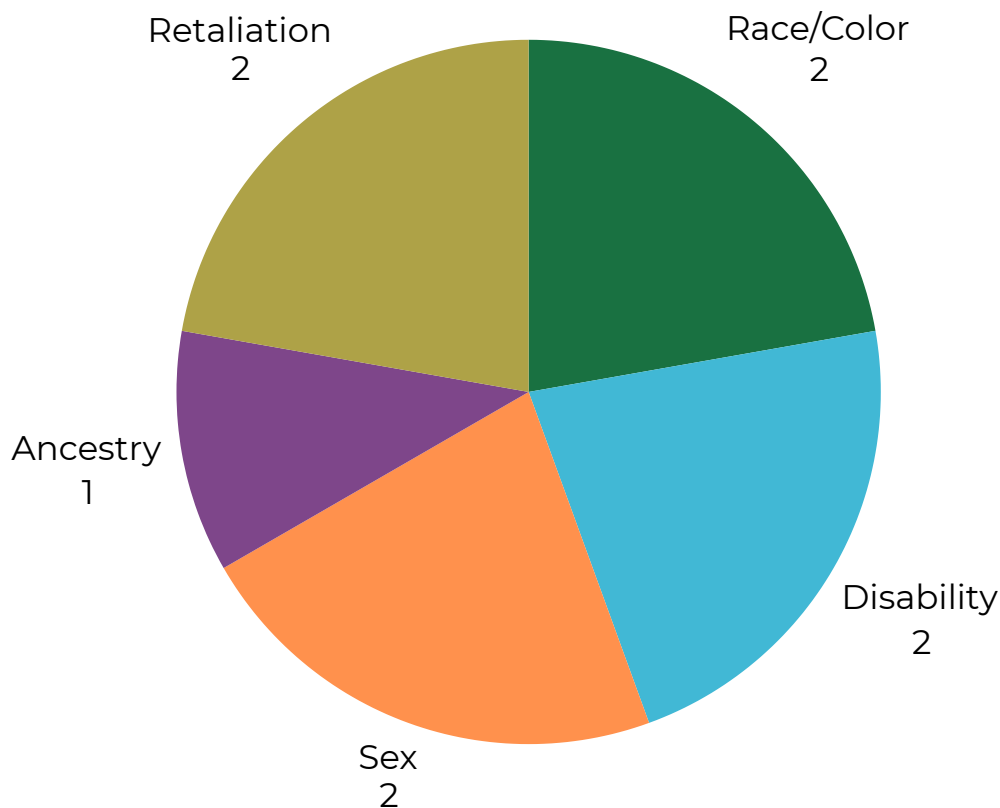
- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Race & Color | • Sexual Orientation |
| • National Origin | • Gender Identity |
| • Ancestry & Place of Birth | • Sex |
| • Religion | • Pregnancy Accommodation |
| • Disability | • Credit History |
| • Age | • Crime Victim |
| • Family/Parental Leave | • Victim of Domestic or Sexual Abuse |
| • Retaliation | • Worker's Compensation |
| • Flexible Work Arrangements | |

FY25 STATE EMPLOYMENT COMPLAINTS

HRC accepted 5 new formal complaints in FY25 that alleged discrimination in State government employment. This figure is on par with FY24 and FY23 totals. Of this year's 5 complaints:

- 3 alleged sex-based discrimination
- 2 alleged discrimination based on race and color
- 2 alleged disability-based discrimination
- 1 alleged discrimination based on ancestry
- 2 included retaliation claims

New State Employment Complaints by Protected Class

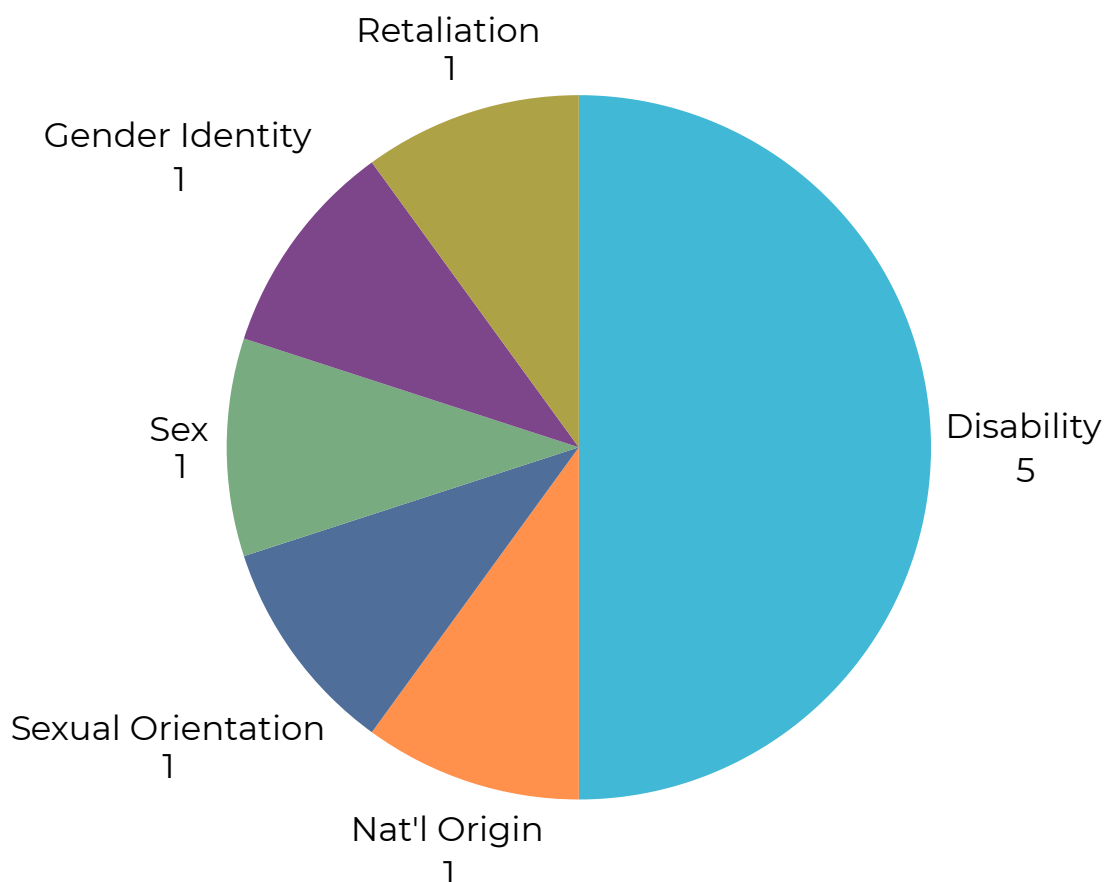


Note that complaints may allege discrimination based on multiple legally protected characteristics

FY25 COMPLAINTS INVOLVING BOTH HOUSING AND PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS

HRC accepted 5 complaints that allege discrimination in both housing and places of public accommodations. This is to address situations in which a place of public accommodations is also housing individuals, such as in student housing, correctional facilities, and the hotel/motel emergency housing program. In the past, these types of complaints have been categorized as *either* housing or public accommodations, or HRC assigned two separate complaint numbers if both were alleged. This year, HRC created a new case numbering system to account for these types of complaints (“HVPA”).

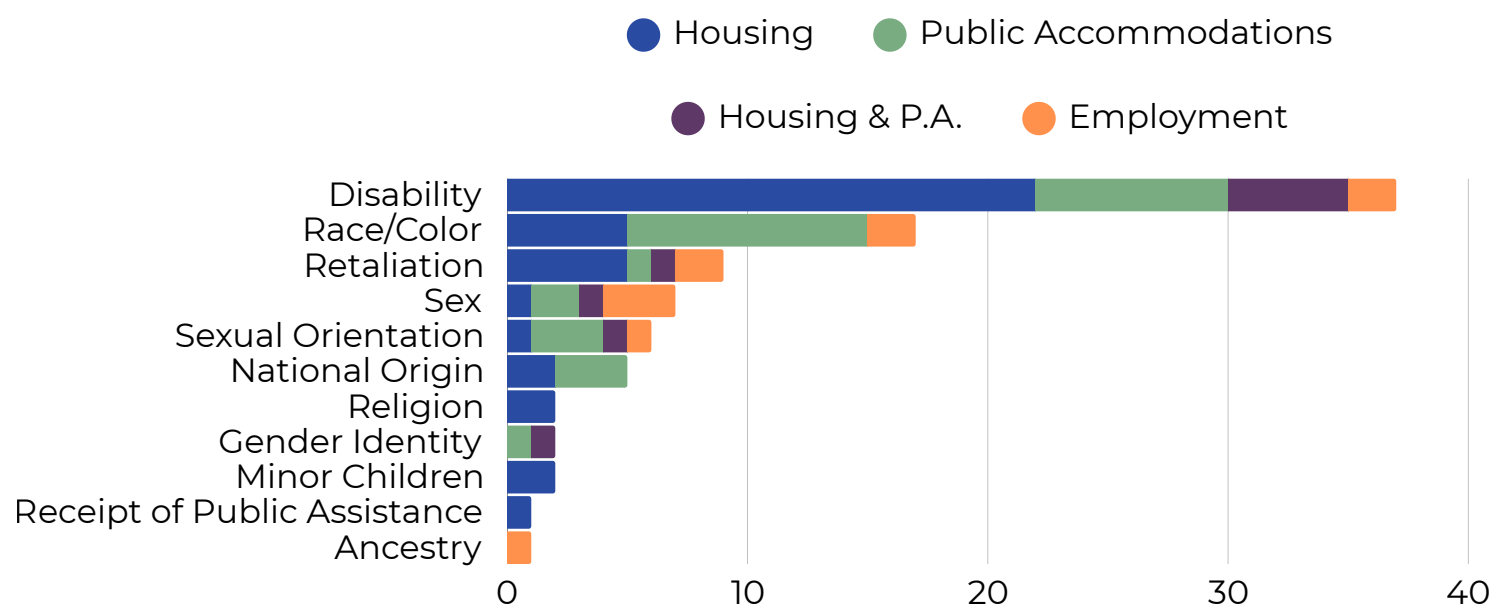
New HVPA Complaints by Protected Class



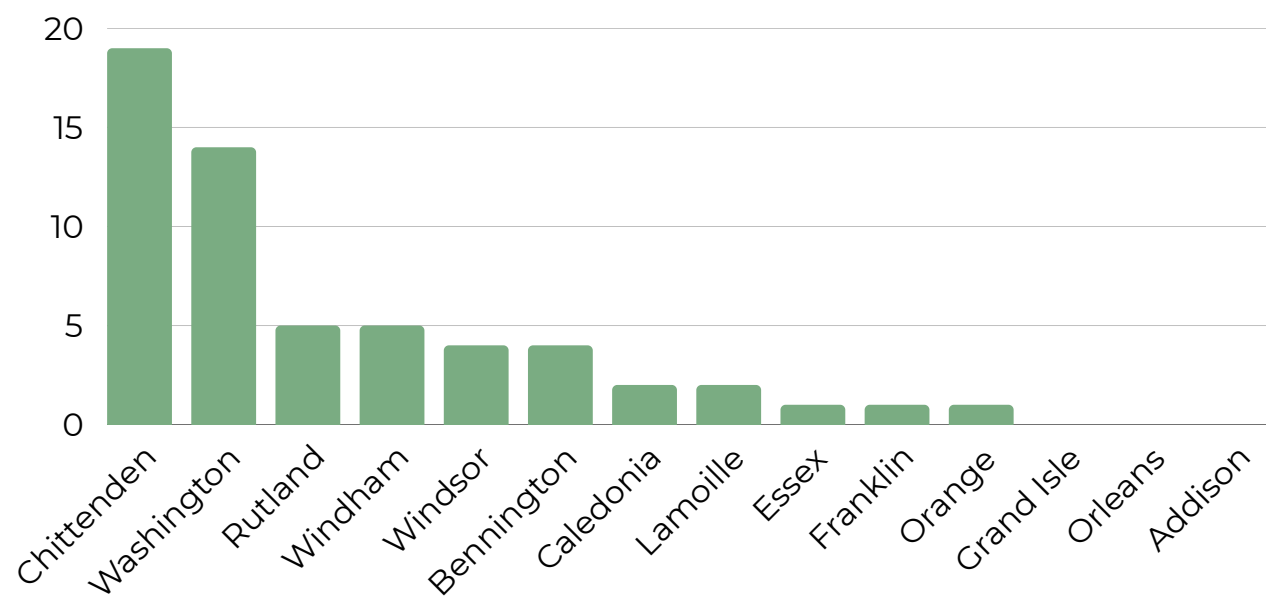
All of these complaints alleged disability-based discrimination, and four out of five alleged discrimination based on other legally protected characteristics

FY25 NEW COMPLAINT DETAILS

As shown below, the majority of new complaints filed in FY25 involved an allegation of discrimination based on disability. The next most common basis for the complaint was race and color.



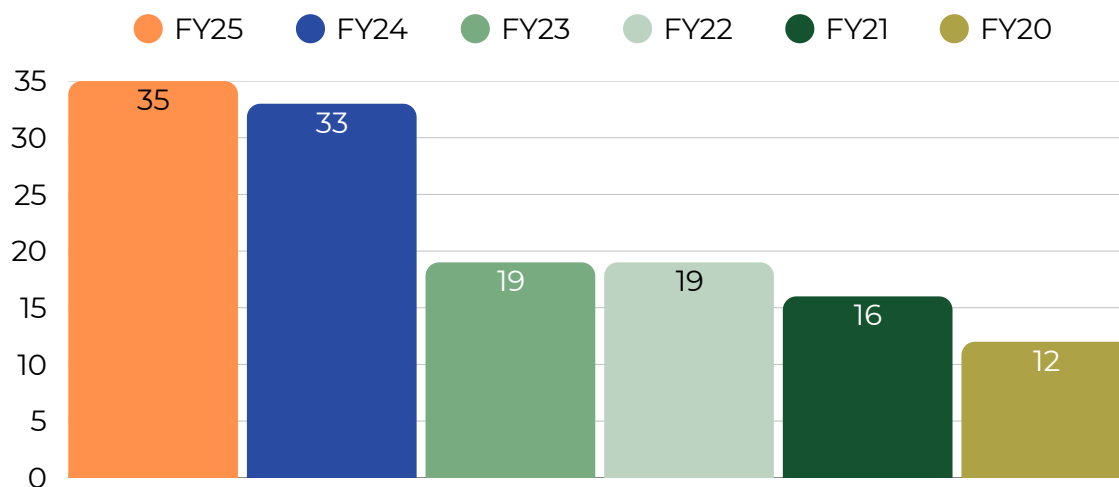
Above: FY25 new complaints by type and protected class



New complaints organized by county

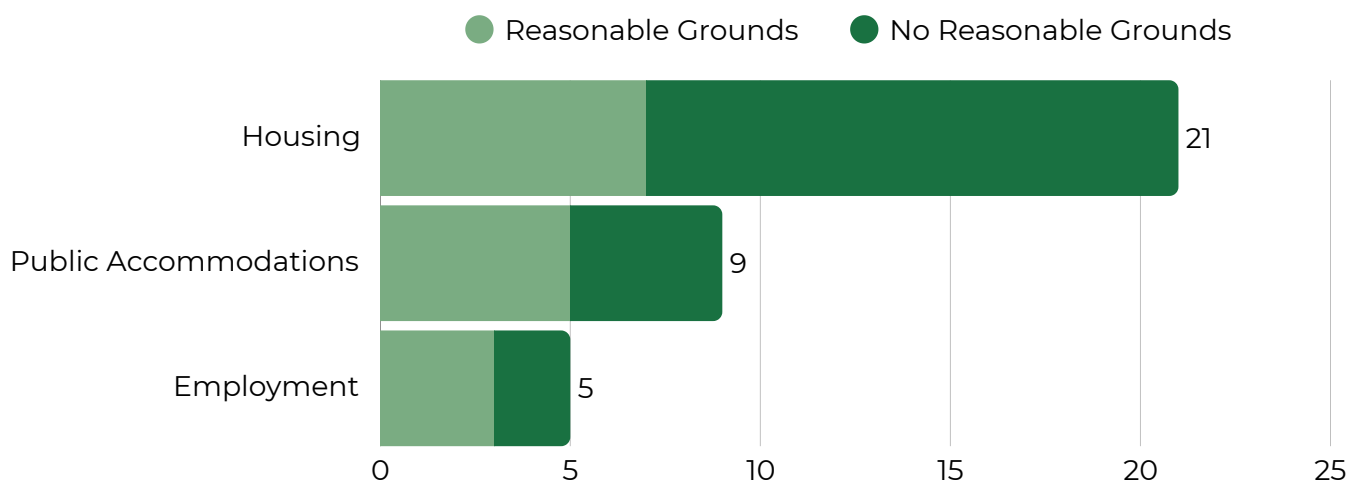
FY25 CASE DETERMINATIONS

As shown in the chart below, the HRC made a record number of determinations.



Total Determinations by Fiscal Year

To keep pace with incoming cases in FY25, investigators managed to complete more investigative reports than ever before, even despite a vacancy in one position for several months.



FY25 Determinations by case type and determination type

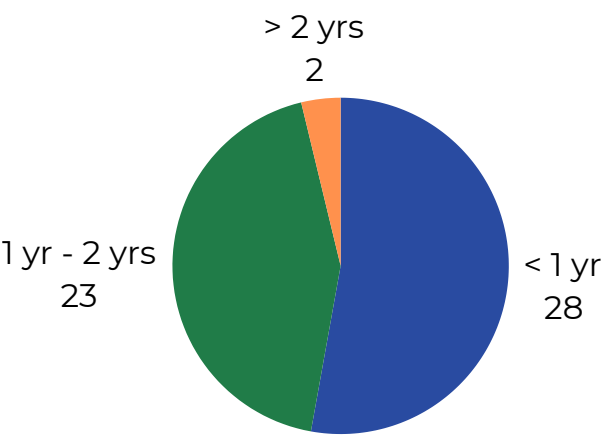
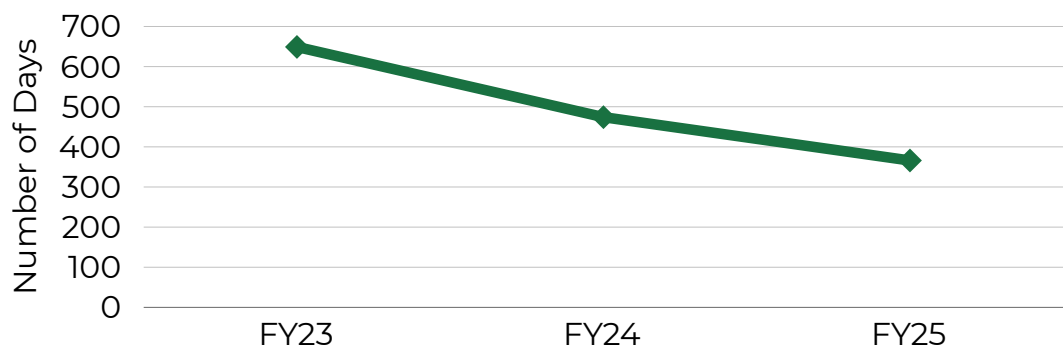
Out of a total of 35 determinations in FY25, 20 cases (57%) were found to have no reasonable grounds to believe that discrimination occurred. This reflects a notable difference compared to FY24, in which only one third of the total determinations found no reasonable grounds.

FY25 COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS

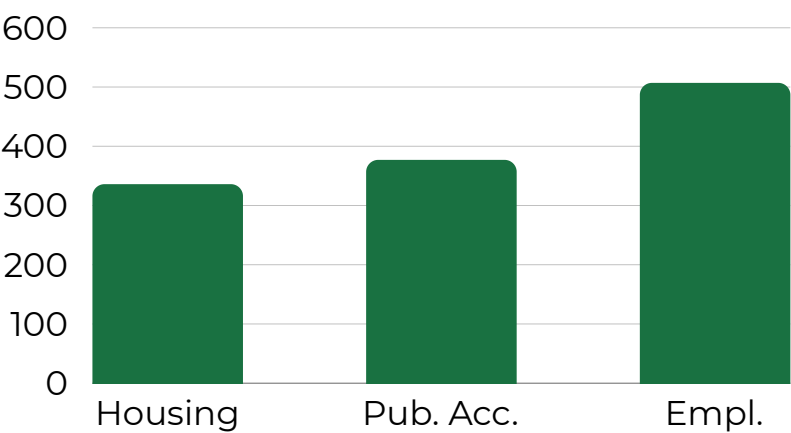
In recent years, HRC has prioritized reducing delays in the complaint process, while ensuring that investigations are thorough and comprehensive. The results are measurable. In FY25, while completing more investigations than ever before, HRC also significantly shortened the average length of investigations.

In FY25, HRC completed a total of 53 investigations, a 29% increase compared to FY24. In FY25, 16 cases closed with a settlement prior to any determination, 2 complaints were administratively dismissed, and 35 investigations concluded with a determination by the Commission. The average length of time it took to complete an investigation in FY25 was 366 days. This is a significant improvement from prior years, as shown below.

Average Age of Completed Investigations



Number of cases grouped by length of investigations



Average length of investigations by type

FY25 SETTLEMENTS

HRC staff are required by law to assist the parties resolve their complaints whenever possible through a process called “conciliation.”

This year, a total of 26 complaints were resolved by settlement. This is a 160% increase in the number of settlements compared to FY24.

- 7 settlements occurred after the Commission determined that there were reasonable grounds to believe that discrimination occurred.
- 11 Pre-Determination Conciliation Agreements were reached, which concluded the investigation before a determination.
- 5 complainants withdrew their complaints due to settlement.
- 3 cases settled after the HRC filed an enforcement action in court.

Not all settlement terms are a matter of public record, depending on the agreement reached by the parties. There are 10 settlements in the public record that resulted in monetary payment to the complainants. A majority of settlements also contained some type of public interest relief, such as preventive training or new policies or procedures, to deter future discrimination complaints against the same Respondent.



Types of public interest relief achieved through settlements

All settlements included some type of relief for individual complainants. Monetary payments to Complainants ranged from \$365 to \$78,000.

FY25 OUTREACH & EDUCATION

HRC continues to grow our reach by engaging with stakeholders such as State government managers and employees, legislators, community groups, non-profit organizations, victims' advocates, housing providers, attorneys, service providers, students, and families.

HRC focused our community engagement on educational presentations about the HRC, discrimination prevention, and Know Your Rights events throughout the year. In FY25, HRC staff offered trainings and presentations related to the Fair Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, school and workplace harassment prevention, bystander intervention, the HRC process, and other civil rights topics.

HRC also kept in touch with the community by way of regular newsletters and informative posts on our social media channels.

Fair Housing Trainings

7 live training events
215 attendees



School Harassment Prevention Trainings

6 live training events
397 attendees



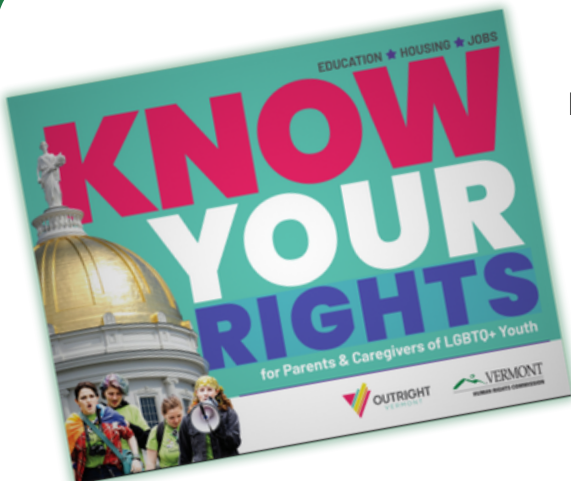
Community Events & Panels

16 events
1,077 attendees



Know Your Rights Events

5 events
175 attendees



HRC partnered with Outright Vermont to create a Know Your Rights Guide for parents and caregivers of LGBTQ+ youth



**Total
Outreach Events**

34 events

**More than
1,850 participants**

FY25 HRC LITIGATION DATA

Since the legislature approved a new litigator position in FY24, the HRC has been able to significantly increase its enforcement efforts in court under the direction of HRC's Senior Counsel, Mitchell Rotbert. In FY25, following "reasonable grounds" determinations, the HRC filed a total of 8 new enforcement actions in Superior Court, listed below:

- **HRC v Stockton Security:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that the security company harassed and discriminated against an individual based on her disability. This case resolved with settlement before the end of FY25.
- **HRC v Kalsang GGT:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that a housing provider refused to rent to an individual because of their receipt of public assistance – a Section 8 housing choice voucher.
- **HRC v Quality Inn Colchester-Burlington:** In this case, involving both housing and a place of public accommodations, the HRC alleged that a hotel providing winter housing discriminated against an individual based on race, color, national origin, and receipt of public assistance. The HRC also alleged that the Defendant retaliated against the individual after he complained about the discrimination.
- **HRC v Avery:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that a landlord discriminated against a tenant based on his race, color, and receipt of public assistance.
- **HRC v Goldenhill & Beckstrom:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that landlords discriminated against a tenant based on disability and receipt of public assistance.
- **HRC v GA Rentals:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that the landlords discriminated against a tenant based on race, color, and receipt of public assistance. This case settled in FY25 after the complaint was filed.
- **HRC v Warner Center Holdings:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that a landlord discriminated against a tenant based on disability and receipt of public assistance.
- **HRC v Vermont Department of Corrections:** In this case, this HRC alleged that DOC discriminated against an incarcerated person who faced harassment based on his sexual orientation.
- **HRC v Franklin County Sheriff's Office:** In this public accommodations case, the HRC alleged that the County Sheriff had discriminated against a person with disability in connection with a traffic stop. The case settled within the month after it was served.

FY25 HRC LITIGATION DATA

In addition to the 9 cases HRC initiated in FY25, HRC Senior Counsel handled 10 other enforcement actions that were filed in Superior Court before the start of FY25:

- **HRC v Vermont Dep't of Human Resources:** In this class action employment case, the HRC alleged that the DHR's long-standing personal leave incentive policy has a disparate impact on females. After the Superior Court denied DHR's motion to dismiss, the case continues.
- **HRC v Windham Central Supervisory Union:** In two related cases involving discrimination and harassment in a public school, the HRC alleged that the school failed to take prompt and appropriate remedial action reasonably calculated to stop harassment based on race, color, or sexual orientation.
- **HRC v Bissonette Properties:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that landlord's managing agent failed to provide a reasonable accommodation to tenants with disabilities. The case settled in FY25.
- **HRC v Campion:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that a landlord discriminated against and harassed a tenant because of her sex and then retaliated against her after she complained to HRC. HRC expects to try this case in FY26.
- **HRC v Landlord in Franklin County:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that a landlord refused to rent to a prospective tenant because she was a recipient of public assistance.
- **HRC v Vermont Agency of Education:** In this public accommodations case, the HRC alleged that the Agency of Education discriminated against a school counselor in its licensing investigation process on the basis of his race and color.
- **HRC v Durkee:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that a landlord discriminated against and harassed his tenant because of her sex, disability, and receipt of public assistance. After being dismissed in connection with the passing of the Defendant landlord, the case is on appeal in the Vermont Supreme Court.
- **HRC v Town of St. Johnsbury:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that the Town failed to grant a reasonable accommodation under the Town's zoning rules to a person with disability. After the Supreme Court reversed the Superior Court's dismissal of the action, the case continues in Superior Court.
- **HRC v South Burlington School District:** In this public accommodations case, the HRC alleged that the public school district discriminated against a student on the basis of race and color. The case continues in Superior Court.
- **HRC v Polak:** In this fair housing case, the HRC alleged that a couple discriminated against and harassed their neighbors because of the neighbors' race, color, and national origin. The case continues in Superior Court.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on HRC staff's observations in FY25, HRC issues the following recommendations for policymakers:

INCREASE HRC CAPACITY AND IMPACT

The federal government has drastically de-prioritized civil rights policy and enforcement in FY25. In response, state human rights agencies across the country must double-down our efforts to ensure that the progress made in the past century is not eroded by hate, bigotry, and xenophobia. The legislature has chosen wisely to increase HRC staffing levels in recent years, but HRC's current capacity is insufficient to meet the demands of these times. HRC requires a full-time Policy Director to guide community-based coalitions, state and local leaders, committees and working groups, and policymakers in the years ahead. HRC also needs to continue to expand its investigation and litigation capacity with an additional Staff Attorney position, and a paralegal position. These three additional positions would enable HRC to more effectively enforce Vermont's anti-discrimination protections and advocate for effective public policy aimed at reducing discrimination and increasing equity in all areas of civil life.

EXPAND LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

Vermonters are rightfully fearful of new and disastrous civil rights violations due to changes at the national level. To protect Vermont's most vulnerable community members, HRC encourages the legislature to move forward with the passage of the Equal Protection Clause in the Vermont Constitution. Also, we urge that the anti-discrimination protections in Vermont law be extended to protect housing status as a new legally protected status.

INVEST IN DISCRIMINATION PREVENTION

HRC does not have any base funding designated for public education and awareness. To effectively inform the public about their rights and responsibilities under Vermont anti-discrimination laws, HRC needs funding for prevention tools, trainings, and materials. In particular, businesses and other places of public accommodation require education about disability rights in order to reduce the instances of disability-related discrimination complaints.