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**State of Vermont**  
**Human Rights Commission**  
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Judiciary Committee  
FROM: Big Hartman, Esq. HRC Executive Director & General Counsel  
DATE: April 8, 2025  
RE: FY26 Budget Requests

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Throughout FY24 and FY25, the Human Rights Commission has been experiencing an unmanageable influx of new requests for complaint investigations. Under my leadership, our team acted quickly to respond to this high level of need by:

- onboarding a low-cost case management system to store all of our intakes and complaint data and investigative files;
- creating a [Guide for Complainants and Respondents](#), a plain language document that addresses the most common questions parties ask our staff about the HRC process, reducing the need for staff to discuss those matters with parties;
- streamlining and revamping our processes for intake and inquiry review, to better track new requests for complaints and organize information submitted by people seeking to file complaints; and
- significantly simplifying our investigative reports to reduce case processing times and increase total case closures.

These improvements to our operations have yielded measurable results in a short period of time. Compared to FY23, we processed 50% more complaints in FY24, and we completed 40% more investigations. Already in FY25, we have accepted more complaints for investigation and completed more investigations than we did in FY24. Unfortunately, we still cannot meet the high volume of new demands upon our office. We have declined nearly 100 complaint requests so far this fiscal year due largely to a lack of capacity.

In cases that have been accepted for investigation, there are significant delays in the processing of their complaints. It takes an average of 3 to 6 months for an inquiry to even become a formal complaint. Many new complaints that have been initiated in the past year were not assigned an investigator for several months due to low staffing levels. As of today, 14 investigations are on hold because they do not have an investigator assigned to work on the case. We have also delayed drafting new complaints due to these constraints. We continue to receive more complaints each month than we are able to close.

If the HRC is going to continue to accept complaints and serve Vermonters effectively, we require additional staff to field new intakes, conduct investigations, and support our work. Below is a list of the positions requested and a brief explanation for each.

- **1 Intake Specialist** is needed to staff the phones, review new complaint questionnaires, respond to a large volume of email inquiries, and schedule/conduct intake meetings with a trauma-informed perspective. HRC lacks a single position dedicated to processing intakes, and this has resulted in significant delays for new inquiries. Salary and benefits for this position for FY26 are estimated at \$100,000.
- **3 new Staff Attorney Investigators** are needed immediately to address the backlog of new complaints, allow us to process cases much more quickly, and continue to accept new cases at the pace of intakes. The three investigator positions currently allocated to the HRC are insufficient to meet the needs of the state and disproportionate to staffing levels of other human rights commissions. The number of HRC investigator positions has levelled at three for far too long, while the number of new complaints has significantly increased in the past two years. Salary and benefits for one Staff Attorney Investigator position are estimated at \$130,000 for FY26.
- **1 Paralegal** is needed to enable us to process complex cases, index and review large volumes of documents and data, and support enforcement actions in court. The HRC is currently a plaintiff in 16 court cases, and our litigator requires a paralegal. It is standard practice for Human Rights Commission offices in other states to have the services of a paralegal on staff. Salary and benefits for this position for FY26 are estimated at \$100,000.
- **1 Communications and Outreach Coordinator** is needed to modernize the HRC website, build a social media presence, support outreach work, and assist education efforts about anti-discrimination laws statewide. This is crucial to enable the HRC to get the word out about Vermonters' rights and responsibilities under the Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act. Salary and benefits for this position for FY26 are estimated at \$100,000.
- **1 part-time Mediator position** is needed to effectuate settlement conversations at the outset of every case and support the parties in finding resolutions to their complaints in lieu of investigation or litigation. This will allow us to process more complaints in an efficient and positive manner for all parties. Salary for this part-time position is estimated at \$52,209 for FY26.
- **1 part-time Social Worker/Case Manager** is needed to assist new inquiries and parties in our cases. Many complainants and some respondents require services and referrals to address housing insecurity, mental health crisis, trauma, disability-related barriers, and other supports in order to participate meaningfully in our process and minimize re-traumatization. Salary for this part-time position is estimated at \$52,209 for FY26.

An increase in staffing levels will also necessitate additional operating expenses such as computers and office space, estimated at \$68,000 for FY26. The total additional amount we have requested above the Governor's recommended base budget is approximately \$880,000.