



NEW YORK
CITY BAR

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS

May 14, 2014

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Re: The New York City Commission on Human Rights' Budget ("The Commission")

Dear Mr. Fuleihan, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Councilwoman Mealy, Ms. Ryan, and Ms. Wiley,

We write on behalf of the Civil Rights Committee of the New York City Bar Association, to discuss the Commission's dire need for a budget increase this fiscal year.

The Commission is charged with enforcing the New York City Human Rights Law ("City HRL"), one of the strongest civil rights laws in the nation. The Commission has the authority under the City HRL to hear and investigate discrimination cases in housing, employment and public accommodations. The Commission is a crucial resource for New Yorkers who face discrimination of all varieties, especially low-income residents without access to private counsel. However, because the Commission was stripped of funding over the past two decades, it has been without adequate resources to enforce the law.

An acute lack of law enforcement staff has rendered the Commission ineffective in that it fails to appropriately investigate and adjudicate discrimination complaints made by New York City residents. In 1991, the Commission had 152 City-funded employees working to fight discrimination. Today, it has only 11 such employees, a drop of more than 90%. In FY 1992,

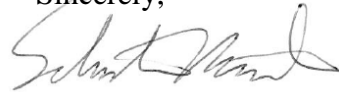
combined City and Federal funding for the Commission was \$10,277,000 which would be approximately \$17 million in 2014 dollars. In FY 2015, that combined budget only amounts to about \$6.5 million. The City currently funds the Commission at the shockingly low level of \$2.5 million.

Without resources to hire staff, the Commission cannot fulfill its obligation to enforce the City HRL. Without proper enforcement, the City HRL becomes a toothless symbol – a law to be complied with in theory, but not in practice. This weakens the law’s deterrent effect and New York City’s message that discrimination will be tolerated within its borders.

The Commission’s budget should reflect the importance of its mission. We urge the Mayor’s office and the Council to substantially increase the Commission’ budget so that it can have the resources to effectively enforce the law. We suggest that you begin with an increase of \$3 million in the current fiscal year, followed by additional increases in each of the consecutive three fiscal years, to raise the Commission’s budget to \$17 million, or in real terms where it was over 20 years ago.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sebastian Riccardi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "R".

Sebastian Riccardi

Chair, Civil Rights Committee