

**Testimony of Sapna Raj, Deputy Commissioner, Law Enforcement Bureau
New York City Commission on Human Rights
Before the Committee on Civil and Human Rights & the Committee on Public Safety
May 3, 2022**

Good morning Chair Williams and Chair Hanks and members of City Council. I am Sapna Raj, the Deputy Commissioner of Law Enforcement at the NYC Commission on Human Rights.

The Commission on Human Rights

The Commission on Human Rights is tasked with addressing and investigating violations of the New York City Human Rights Law, which is a civil, not criminal law. The agency's bias response team meets the needs of communities and victims who experience bias and discrimination, and works to contact victim(s) to inform them of their rights and provide guidance on possible responses. Today's testimony offers a brief description of complementary work of the Commission's Community Relations Bureau and the Law Enforcement Bureau.

Community-Centered Prevention and Responses

The Commission's Community Relations Bureau fosters inter-group relations, the core founding mandate of the agency, and works daily to prevent bias and discrimination, and to offer a rapid response whenever any acts of bias occur in New York City. In FY 22, the Commission revamped its approach to Bias Response from a reactive approach – responding to incidents after they occur – to a more holistic approach that focuses on prevention, solidarity, and community building. This is complementary to our ongoing business corridor outreach, which included materials on the hate impacting AAPI communities, as part of the Commission on Human Rights' "I Still Believe in Our City campaign." The Human Rights Commission adopted new tools of engagement like the multi-lingual Bystander Intervention Trainings and Restorative Justice Circles, and the Commission engaged in conversations and events to emphasize preventive work in communities. The Commission also continued to do significant outreach to build trust in communities so that it could be more effective in responding to potential harms. In FY 21, the Community Relations Bureau worked together with community-based organizations to host nearly 50 bystander intervention trainings in English, Mandarin, Korean, and Cantonese, empowering New Yorkers with the tools to be upstanders against bias and violence. During the same fiscal year, the Commission organized in-language Town Halls with other partners such as the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, NYPD, and DA's offices. These events helped demystify the process of reporting bias incidents and hate crimes and improved the trust between communities and government.

Prohibitions on Discriminatory Harassment: The Role of Law Enforcement Bureau

The most well-known protections within the City Human Rights Law are the prohibitions on discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. The Human Rights Law also has protections against discriminatory harassment. The discriminatory harassment provision creates a **civil cause of action** for any individual who is threatened or injured because of the individual's protected status. Claims under this provision do not require that a specific relationship – such as worker/employer, tenant/landlord, or customer/business owner – be established. As a result, individuals that face bias-motivated violence and harassment have the option of bringing civil claims to the Commission – in addition to reporting to the police – to assert their rights and obtain remedies.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the ways the Commission, and the Adam's Administration, are working to prevent and respond to bias and hate in New York City. We look forward to continuing this work in collaboration with NYPD, MOCJ, and the Council.