
**Testimony of CCHR
Before the Committee to Combat Hate
February 25, 2026**

Good morning Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam, and Members of the Committee to Combat Hate.

It is my pleasure to join you today to testify regarding the discrimination protections in the City Human Rights Law, as well as Intro 388. I am JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner of Policy and External Affairs of the New York City Commission on Human Rights (“Commission” or “CCHR”). With me today for Q & A is Jose Rios Lua, the Commission’s Chief of Staff.

The Commission welcomes this opportunity to speak about the agency’s efforts to combat unlawful discrimination at work, in housing, and in places open to the public, when that discrimination is on the basis of the more than 25 protected categories in the City Human Rights Law.

For over 50 years, the Commission on Human Rights has been tasked with investigating and resolving complaints of discrimination, as well as engaging in public outreach to raise awareness and prevent violations of the City Human Rights Law.

City Human Rights Law Protections Against Discrimination

The Commission is mandated to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate violations of the New York City Human Rights Law, which is a civil anti-discrimination law. Under the New York City Human Rights Law, it is illegal to discriminate against individuals based on their actual or perceived religion, race, gender, national origin, and sexual orientation, among many other protected categories.

The main areas of reported discrimination to the Commission are in housing, the workplace, and places open to the public (referred to as public accommodations in the Law). Accordingly, housing providers, employers, and business owners are legally obligated not to discriminate under the City Human Rights Law, and are a focus of CCHR’s public facing materials, training, and outreach.

Reporting Discrimination to the Commission

The agency’s Law Enforcement Bureau (LEB) is the part of the agency that intakes, evaluates, and investigates allegations of discrimination brought to the Commission by members of the public. Any individual can contact LEB via our live hotline (known as the Infoline), to report allegations of discrimination that are within our jurisdiction as determined by Law. Agency staff answer calls live during business hours, five days a week. The vast majority of claims come to us via calls to this line.

Year over year, the most commonly reported allegations of discrimination we receive relate to disability, gender, and race, as well as voucher discrimination in housing.

When a member of the public contacts CCHR, the LEB team assesses whether the allegations that are reported to the Commission may violate the Human Rights Law. If they do, then LEB staff can take a range of actions to either intervene proactively or to investigate to determine whether the case should be prosecuted. These actions may include sending cease and desist letters, requesting information on policies and practices, making document demands, and interviewing witnesses. Where a caller's allegation is within the jurisdiction of another city agency, or where individuals are seeking legal assistance, CCHR can refer callers to a range of resources.

If an allegation is determined to be within CCHR's jurisdiction and pre-complaint interventions or conciliation efforts were either not appropriate or not successful, LEB will investigate to determine if it is more likely than not that discrimination occurred, known as finding "probable cause." Thereafter, the Bureau may continue conciliation efforts and can take the case to an administrative trial. Case resolutions can include requiring Respondents to engage in training and other measures to ensure compliance with the City Human Rights Law in the future, including changes to policies and practices, as well as damages for individuals, and civil penalties. Virtually every settlement or order requires Respondents to take a training, which CCHR staff provide. These are interactive trainings, developed by CCHR, in close consultation with community groups, academic institutions, and other subject matter experts.

Because CCHR knows there is widespread underreporting of discrimination, the Commission is continually assessing how to build trust and bridge the gap between communities and government.

Commission Education and Outreach

In addition to mandating trainings in Commission case resolutions, the agency also pro-actively offers trainings to businesses, organizations, and individuals, regardless of whether a complaint has been lodged against them. These include cultural competency trainings, as well as trainings that focus on the rights of New Yorkers and the obligations of business owners, housing providers, and employers.

One example of a cultural competency training is Understanding the Jewish Experience and Antisemitism, which promotes understanding of the City's diverse Jewish communities and elaborates on the City Human Rights Law's provisions that protect Jewish New Yorkers from discrimination. Additional cultural competency trainings, aimed at preventing discrimination and building trust among communities, include:

- Understanding Muslim Experiences and Combating Anti-Muslim Bias;
- Anti-Black Racism, Race, and Color Discrimination; and
- Protections Against Gender Identity and Gender Expression Discrimination.

In 2024, the Commission also launched a training on Protections Against National Origin, Citizenship and Immigration Status Discrimination.

CCHR's trainings are complemented by our outreach work, which is conducted with community and faith partners. The Commission's FY 25 annual report highlights partnerships across diverse New York neighborhoods that allowed us to engage with over 150,000 New Yorkers. I will mention just a few. The Commission has partnerships with Latino organizations, Caribbean community partners and Asian

American and Pacific Islander groups in Queens, as well as collaborations with African Diaspora organizations in the Bronx and Staten Island. CCHR also works directly with faith leaders to participate in engagements ranging from a Racial Reconciliation Roundtable to work with a Jewish-Evangelical Interfaith Group, as well as outreach to individuals at synagogues, mosques, and temples.

Citywide Efforts

These initiatives and the work of the Commission are just one piece of the City's broader efforts to prevent and respond to bias and hate in New York City. Work to combat bias and hate is also core to the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), which was established in 2019. In FY 25, for the third consecutive year, the Commission partnered with OPHC to administer the Community Project Grants, wherein OPHC provides \$10,000 to grassroots efforts aimed at reducing bias. Past awardees include Hindus for Human Rights, T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, Wagner College Holocaust Center, Glow Community Center, and the African International Collaborative Center. The Commission is also part of the interagency taskforce to be led by the Mayor's Office to Combat Antisemitism, which includes OPHC and NYPD.

Turning to Intro 388, the Administration supports the intent of ensuring effective pathways for members of the public to report actionable hate and bias and to connect with resources to vindicate their rights. However, there is an existing city infrastructure to address bias and hate, and there are pathways for the public to report unlawful discrimination to CCHR and to report hate-based violence to the NYPD, as well as data reporting by agencies – which are all disaggregated in different ways. Accordingly, the Administration looks forward to learning more from stakeholders and to further dialogue with Council on how to most efficiently and effectively operationalize Council's objectives, consistent with Constitutional guardrails.

In closing, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the ways the Commission, and the Mamdani Administration, are working to prevent and respond to bias and hate in New York City.

The Commission will continue working to ensure that all New Yorkers receive the protections guaranteed to them under the City Human Rights Law regardless of religion, gender, race or national origin. We look forward to continuing this work in collaboration with sibling agencies, including the NYPD, the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, the Mayor's Office to Combat Antisemitism, and with the Council.

We look forward to your questions.