



**Commission On  
Human Rights**

New York City Commission on Human Rights

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**Testimony of Chair and Commissioner Christine Clarke  
New York City Commission on Human Rights  
Before the Committee on Civil and Human Rights & Committee on Finance  
March 13, 2026**

Good afternoon Chair Lee, Chair Nurse, and members of the Committees on Finance and Civil and Human Rights.

My name is Christine Clarke, and I serve as Chair and Commissioner of the New York City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the Commission's work and the role it plays in ensuring that all New Yorkers can live, work, and thrive free from discrimination. Joining me today are Katherine Carroll, Deputy Commissioner for Law Enforcement, and Mariela Salazar, Deputy Commissioner of Administrative Services.

The New York City Commission on Human Rights first and foremost enforces and educates the public about the New York City Human Rights Law (NYCHRL), one of the most comprehensive civil rights laws in the nation. It protects New Yorkers from discrimination across broad swaths of life, including protections against discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations. But these rights are meaningless in a vacuum. Rights only become reality when they are broadly recognized and enforced. One person's rights are another person's obligations, and unless those obligations are undertaken, whether voluntarily or through governmental enforcement, the rights cannot be fully realized.

The rights protected by the New York City Human Rights Law are fundamental to an equitable society—the right to live, work, and participate in society free from discrimination on the basis of one's national origin, citizenship, religion, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, disability, criminal history, and more.

These rights are currently under attack—broadly in society, fueled by a political atmosphere that encourages and incites hate and isolation, as well as with the tacit and even overt approval of the federal government. Moreover, as inequality

has increases over the past few decades, those with the least suffer the most. Discrimination affects people in all walks of life, but the toll is unquestionably the greatest for individuals and families who have the least. And those who have the least access to financial resources also often find that they have the least access to justice.

These are precisely the issues that I intend to make the focus of the Commission on Human Rights during my tenure as Chair and Commissioner.

I am privileged to work with a small but dedicated team at the Commission on Human Rights, who have been successful at moving mountains with limited resources. Our team of eight intake staff field over 15,000 inquiries per year. Our dedicated team of civil rights enforcement attorneys then single-handedly investigate and/or conciliate every case that falls within our jurisdiction and prosecute cases at the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH) where we find probable cause for discrimination and the parties do not settle. After trial, and after receiving OATH's report and recommendation, I, along with a small handful of colleagues, work to write final decisions and orders.

Our small but dedicated team also works hard to create updated and accessible trainings, know your rights materials, legal guidance on the provisions of the Human Rights Law, FAQs, and communications strategies and campaigns, as well as to engage in outreach with communities across the city.

From the moment I walked through the door at this agency, the dedicated staff at CCHR have made clear they share my vision and my priorities and are willing to embrace change to make that vision a reality.

Together, we are dedicated to making the Commission a place that will survive the Trump administration's retreat from federal civil rights enforcement, to ensure that whatever happens at the federal level, the City Human Rights Law will continue to be enforced to ensure that all New Yorkers have the opportunity to thrive in our great city.

Together, we are dedicated to engaging all New York City communities, including small business owners and landlords, to ensure that every New Yorkers understands their rights *and* their obligations, and to ensure that small businesses have the help they need to comply with the law *before* a civil rights violation occurs.

Together, we are dedicated to ensuring that our services are accessible to people who cannot afford lawyers, and for whom we are the only shot at justice they have. That means taking a hard look at what works well and doubling down. This includes our Pre-Complaint Intervention program, where we are often able to intervene in a situation before too much damage has been done. This includes our Project Equal Access, where we make on-site visits to ensure that buildings are accessible to people with disabilities.

That also means ensuring we make real impact whenever we can. When the Commission settles discrimination complaints, we ensure that those settlements include provisions that will prevent future civil rights violations. For example, we require virtually every Respondent in a conciliation to agree that their staff will be trained by CCHR staff in the NYCHRL and to create and implement nondiscrimination policies. We also frequently find creative solutions to ensure impact. For example, in housing voucher discrimination cases, we will agree with landlords that they will set aside some number of their apartments for voucher holders in the future. We recently conciliated a case with a broker who agreed to create a fund to help voucher-holders pay apartment rental application fees. Recent decisions have provided redress for gender-based harassment in the workplace through policy and practice changes at a food chain, as well as disability discrimination in a well-known clothing store.

We also, of course, seek compensation for victims of discrimination, both in conciliations and in litigation. Where a case is taken all the way through to a decision and order, we frequently order damages and civil penalties, either of which can frequently reach six figures, alongside those same kinds of trainings and policy changes discussed already.

New York City has long been a national leader in civil rights protections. The Human Rights Law reflects our city's belief that diversity is a strength and that fairness must be actively defended.

The Commission is proud to carry forward that legacy.

In closing, I want to thank the Council for its partnership in supporting the work of the Commission and for its continued commitment to protecting the rights of all New Yorkers.



I look forward to working together to ensure that the promise of the Human Rights Law remains real and meaningful for every person who calls this city home.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today at the beginning of this budget cycle. I welcome your questions.