

**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
May 27, 2026**

My name is Christine Clarke, I'm the Chair and Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights. Thank you to the Chair and the Committees for holding this hearing on the annual budget for our agency.

Since taking office as part of the Mamdani administration, I have worked hard to do the most I can with the resources we have at the Commission, supported by the talented and hardworking team I was lucky enough to inherit, to show up for New Yorkers every single day, and to make real the hopes and dreams of the civil rights movements, ensuring that all the rights and privileges that come with being a resident of this great city are shared equally among all.

While the Department of Transportation fills potholes, we make sure that New Yorkers who use wheelchairs and service dogs are able to utilize the buses that drive over those now-patched potholes. While HRA provides housing vouchers for people, we work to ensure that landlords do not turn those people away so that the promise of those vouchers are fully realized into stable, affordable tenancies. While HPD fights to create affordable housing in this city, we fight to make sure that people can keep the jobs they need to pay for that housing; and that families can actually access that housing regardless of their race, religion, national origin, disability, pregnancy, and more. Under the leadership of Mayor Mamdani, we are working hand-in-hand with other agencies and community partners to make this city more affordable, more equitable, and more liveable for all New Yorkers.

Since I took office earlier this year, we have obtained over \$1 million dollars in restitution for victims of discrimination, almost all of whom are struggling to make ends meet in this city, and to put food on the table every night, as well as over \$200,000 in civil penalties. We have obtained almost \$350,000 in damages for victims of disability discrimination in housing while also ensuring that their landlords actually build the accessibility rails and ramps that are necessary to allow people with disabilities to stay in their homes. We have obtained over \$600,000 in damages for victims of employment discrimination from race discrimination to pregnancy discrimination to sexual harassment and more. We also reached a settlement with the MTA that applies to every public bus in this city that ensures that people with service animals are able to ride the bus without fear of harassment or intimidation.

Since I took office earlier this year, we have also secured long term affordable tenancies for 31 households who experienced discrimination by landlords because of their housing voucher. Given that the cost of housing one family in shelter for one year in this city costs on average \$95,000 a year, by keeping these 31 families housed, we've saved the City nearly \$3 million in averted shelter costs this year.

We have secured another 70 set aside apartments just in this year, that landlords have agreed as part of settling an enforcement action with the Commission, to hold exclusively for rental by voucher holders. Each of those apartments and set asides expands and preserves the stock of affordable housing in this city for the entire life of that tenancy. Another almost 1,000 apartments are currently either occupied by voucher holders or being held exclusively for such renters as a result of prior settlements with the Commission. Again, had those families ended up in shelter, as happens to far too many housing voucher holders every year, due to unlawful discrimination, the City would be paying over \$100 million a year in shelter costs. The Commission's enforcement actions have saved the City costs while, most importantly, ensuring stable, long-term, affordable housing for families in need.

Since I took office four months ago, we have also begun systematically overhauling this agency's approach to handling complaints from soup to nuts. We have restructured the agency to move every available resource into intake, enforcement, and training, making sure that we dedicate as many resources as we can to enforcing complaints, obtaining justice for New Yorkers, and preventing future unlawful acts.

In so doing, we are streamlining our intake and enforcement process to ensure that as many complaints are resolved as quickly as possible and furthermore ensuring that we and our processes remain accessible to all people, no matter what language they speak and what resources they may have. We are investing in our intake staff, moving more resources into that department but also frontloading much of the investigatory work there, to ensure that we are able to move faster and get people the answers they are seeking from us more quickly. Similarly, we continue to invest in our spectacularly successful pre-complaint interventions team, which focuses on resolving source of income discrimination and disability access issues before litigation is initiated. These are some of our most successful programs, where we resolve someone's situation entirely, including getting voucher holders fully leased up, on average within 3.5 weeks after they first reach out to us.

We are also looking for ways to speed up our case investigation processes and ensuring that we are bringing compassion, cultural competency, and community or industry-specific expertise into our investigations processes. As a result, we've moved some of our community relations experts into our enforcement division, as non-attorney case specialists. This allows people with specialized talent in speaking to the public to lean into these talents in case investigations, and allows our attorneys to lean into their expertise in litigation and trials.

Overall, it will allow us to move cases better, communicate more frequently and more accessibly to complainants, and allow us to better meet people where they are and provide them with the timely answers they're looking for.

We are also growing our mediations program, and are in the process of hiring a new Director of Mediations who will lead the work of expanding and re-thinking our mediations program to allow more people to receive just resolutions more quickly.

Finally, we are investing in providing more targeted and accessible trainings with a specialized trainings team, as well as creating deeper partnerships of trust with movement- and community-based organizations to allow us to engage in more strategic outreach to specific industries and communities experiencing a disproportionate amount of unlawful discrimination.

In every change we've made, we've looked closely at the skills and expertise of our staff, as well as their civil service titles. We have an incredibly skilled and dedicated team here, across the agency, and we do not intend to let one ounce of their talent go to waste.

Each and every one of these moves is aimed at ensuring that we can squeeze more enforcement and more justice out of every resource we have, while providing better, more compassionate and accessible services to New Yorkers.

We are re-thinking the way we write, the way we talk, the kinds of notices we provide, ensuring that at every step of the process when people interface with us, they feel heard, they feel respected, they understand what is happening and what our process looks like, they know what to expect, and they feel included in the process. Of course not everyone will get the answer they are hoping for – many terrible things that happen to people are not illegal, as any lawyer can attest. But the number one thing that everyone is looking to government to provide is to know that they are taken seriously, that their concerns have been looked into, and, where possible, that they receive restitution. We are overhauling this agency to ensure that everyone who comes to us gets that. We certainly could do a better job with more budget, reaching more people faster. That's just math. But we will do a substantially better job than we have done in the past with whatever budget we are given.