Commission On
Human Rights

New York City Commission on Human Rights

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NYC COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDS RECORD HOUSING JUSTICE ACHIEVEMENTS AMID FLAWED AUDIT

Office of State Comptroller relied on incorrect legal assumptions, mishandled confidential materials, and ignored record-breaking housing enforcement results.

NEW YORK, NY — The New York City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) today responded to the New York State Office of the Comptroller (OSC) audit, emphasizing that the report is based on a misinterpretation of the NYC Human Rights Law and misunderstanding of CCHR's legal framework and processes, resulting in misleading conclusions about case timelines.

The audit's most fundamental error is its treatment of all incoming housing matters – including general inquiries and web submissions – as if they were formal complaints subject to the same legal timelines. This incorrect definition of 'complaint' does not align with CCHR's Rules of Practice and ultimately distorts both the law and CCHR's process. In doing so, the audit minimizes the seriousness of housing discrimination and overlooks the diligence and care required to investigate these cases thoroughly.

The audit also inflates 'intake delays' by including categories of cases that do not require intake at all. While swift movement on discrimination complaints is essential, the audit disregards how real-world factors shape timelines, including party cooperation, the complexity and scale of housing providers, pandemic-era limitations, and long-standing resource constraints. Internal factors, such as the need for modern case management systems, were considered before the audit even began. In fact, the Commission had initiated the process to procure a new case management system prior to OSC's review as part of broader efficiency reforms.

Throughout the audit process, Commission staff spent countless hours explaining the nuances of the NYC Human Rights Law, our intake structure, and our legal obligations to ensure accuracy. Despite these efforts, auditors repeatedly demonstrated a lack of understanding of our framework and, at times, open disregard for our processes. Staff observed auditors mishandling confidential materials, including leaving sensitive case files unattended and accessible to non-audit personnel, in violation of the Confidentiality Agreement signed with the Commission at the beginning of the audit.

Despite the audit's narrow and inaccurate framing, CCHR's record of accomplishments demonstrate the Commission's real commitment to ending housing discrimination and producing meaningful outcomes for New Yorkers.

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Recent Initiatives and Achievements in Housing:

- **Historic Housing Settlements:** Secured 850 set-aside apartments for voucher holders and $1 million in civil penalties – the largest civil-rights housing settlement in New York City history. This landmark victory continues to provide safe, affordable housing for hundreds of New Yorkers and send a clear message that source of income discrimination will not be tolerated. CCHR also achieved a number of other significant housing settlements, demonstrating a consistent record of protecting tenants' rights.
- **Featured in Award-Winning Housing Documentary:** The Commission's housing enforcement work is highlighted in *Slumlord Millionaire*, which follows New Yorkers facing severe discrimination and tenant harassment. Tenants in the documentary describe their positive experience with the Commission and explain how CCHR's intervention stopped ongoing harassment and helped secure lasting stability.
- **Fair Chance Housing Act Implementation:** Advocated for and implemented the rollout of the Fair Chance Housing Act. The new law prohibits landlords from automatically denying housing based on criminal history, expanding fair access to housing for thousands of New Yorkers.
- **Multilingual Public Education Campaign:** Launched multilingual citywide campaigns across all five boroughs to inform tenants, landlords, brokers, and community organizations about housing rights and responsibilities.
- **Where We Live 2025 Partnership:** Collaborated with the Housing and Preservation Department to implement citywide strategies to fight housing discrimination, promote access, and improve neighborhood quality.
- **Housing Rights Roundtable:** Hosted a community and ethnic media roundtable focused on housing protections for immigrant New Yorkers to promote awareness and strengthen enforcement of fair housing protections.
- **Financial Outcomes for New Yorkers:** In recent years, the Commission secured tens of millions in damages and penalties for New Yorkers who experienced discrimination, including a record $17.4 million last year alone.
- **Reduced Wait Times Through Early Intervention:** Pre-complaint interventions are resolved on average within 25 days, far shorter than the timelines cited in the audit, demonstrating the Commission's commitment to reducing wait times.
- **Case Management System Upgrade:** Began procuring a new case management system prior to the OSC audit to strengthen data tracking, streamline workflows, and improve timeliness of case resolutions.
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Efficiency:** Maintains internal timelines, regularly reviews caseloads, and monitors all matters closely to ensure compliance with regulatory and statutory timelines – underscoring the impact of our work and the potential for greater results with additional resources.

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“New Yorkers deserve a fair, accurate accounting of how their government works, especially when it comes to enforcing human rights. Unfortunately, this audit does not provide that. The Comptroller’s interpretation of our processes is inaccurate, incomplete, and dismissive of the law we are charged with enforcing, said **Annabel Palma, Commissioner and Chair of the NYC Commission on Human Rights.**

Throughout this process, my team made an extensive effort to walk the auditors through the complexities of the NYC Human Rights Law, our processes, and the purpose behind each procedure. Still, the auditors could not grasp the basics and did not respect the safeguards we put in place to protect New Yorkers. Staff witnessed audit personnel handling protected materials carelessly, including leaving confidential case documents in plain view where they could be seen by anyone.

Protecting housing rights is about more than just paperwork — it's about ensuring New Yorkers actually get justice, especially voucher holders and communities historically excluded from housing opportunities. The Commission’s interventionists, attorneys, and staff approach every case with exceptional diligence and care, and our record reflects that commitment. From major source-of-income discrimination cases to strengthened tenant protections our work delivers real protections for New Yorkers. We will continue to uphold the Human Rights Law and stand with every New Yorker who faces discrimination no matter how the audit characterizes our work.”

Anyone in New York City who feels they have experienced or witnessed discrimination can reach out to the Commission by calling 212-416-0197, filling out the online form, or visiting one of the Commission’s offices.

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The New York City Commission on Human Rights is the agency responsible for enforcing the NYC Human Rights Law, one of the most comprehensive civil rights laws in the nation. The Commission works to promote equality and combat discrimination in New York City through law enforcement, community relations, and public education.