



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: APRIL 19, 2020

CONTACT: Alicia McCauley, amccauley@cchr.nyc.gov, 212-416-0105

**NYC COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS ANNOUNCES FORMATION OF COVID-19
RESPONSE TEAM TO ADDRESS INCREASED HARASSMENT AND
DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO THE VIRUS**

*The response team, comprised of staff across the agency's law enforcement and community outreach teams, has taken action in 148 matters and is currently investigating 18 COVID-19-related cases**

NEW YORK—The New York City Commission on Human Rights today announces the formation of a COVID-19 Response Team to handle reports of harassment and discrimination related to the outbreak. The response team is comprised of staff from the Law Enforcement Bureau and the Community Relations Bureau working in coordination to quickly and efficiently track and respond to the sharp increase in reports of harassment and discrimination connected to the pandemic.

Since February, the agency has recorded 248 reports of harassment and discrimination related to COVID-19, over 40% (105) of which identify incidents of anti-Asian harassment or discrimination. By comparison, during this same time period in 2019, the Commission received just five reports of anti-Asian discrimination. The COVID-19 Response Team has taken action in 148 cases including conducting early or emergency intervention, providing information on how to request a reasonable accommodation, referring the individual to another service or agency, or commencing an investigation. The 18 matters currently under active investigation span discrimination in housing, public accommodations, and employment on the basis of race, national origin, disability, and lawful source of income. Additionally, the Response Team has successfully resolved 9 matters of COVID-19-related harassment and discrimination.

The Commission has launched several targeted response units in recent years, including a Source of Income Discrimination Unit (2017) and a Gender-Based Harassment Unit (2019). Like the COVID-19 Response Team, these units were created to ensure that dedicated staff with specific expertise can provide rapid response and strategically engage with impacted communities.

“In this time of unparalleled crisis, the NYC Commission on Human Rights is dedicated to responding to and investigating reports of bias, harassment and discrimination related to the COVID-19 outbreak in our city,” **said Chair and Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights, Carmelyn P. Malalis.** “In order to best serve New Yorkers during these uncertain times, we have created a dedicated COVID-19 Response Team. Our team of Law Enforcement Bureau and Community Relations Bureau staff are synchronizing their efforts to track and respond to these reports quickly, intervening immediately where possible, and filing cases where necessary. All New Yorkers are facing extraordinary levels of stress right now;

discrimination and harassment should not be among them. Even in the midst of a pandemic, human rights cannot be violated, and we encourage anyone who has experienced COVID-19-related discrimination to report it to us.”

New York City is home to one of the strongest anti-discrimination laws in the nation, the New York City Human Rights Law, which prohibits harassment and discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations. The Commission has the authority to award injunctive relief as well as compensatory damages to victims, including emotional distress damages and other benefits, and can deter future violations by ordering civil penalties of up to \$250,000 for willful and malicious violations of the law. The Commission can also order trainings on the NYC Human Rights Law, changes to policies, and other forms of relief, such as community service and mediated apologies.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Commission has been working with community organizations to track and monitor reports of discrimination. The Commission’s Community Relations Bureau (CRB) has also held bystander intervention trainings with the Center for Anti-Violence Education. The trainings provide techniques to safely de-escalate a bias incident in real time. In early March, CRB co-sponsored community forums in Sunset Park, Brooklyn and Manhattan’s Chinatown educating Asian communities of their rights and protections under the law. The Commission also held a virtual town hall, in partnership with the NYC Health Department, the Department of Worker and Consumer Protection, and the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, highlighting workplace rights related to COVID-19.

The Commission continues to produce and promote content to provide key information to impacted communities on their rights in several languages, including those spoken by Asian New Yorkers facing heightened harassment and discrimination due to COVID-19 stigma (Cantonese, Fujianese, Korean, Mandarin, and Tagalog). Commission staff currently speak over 30 languages. Shortly after the outbreak began, the Commission also launched an [online resource page](#) outlining New Yorkers’ rights and protections from COVID-19 related discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

Not every report received by the Commission falls within the legal jurisdiction of the agency. Where appropriate the Commission connects callers to appropriate resources, such as other City agencies, legal services providers, and community groups. Instances that may be criminal violations of the law, including hate crimes, are referred to the New York City Police Department Hate Crimes Task Force and the Mayor’s Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes. Instances that do not violate the New York City Human Rights Law, such as name-calling on the street, are handled by CRB, which conducts training and education for community members on the law.

If you believe you have been the victim of discrimination based on membership in a protected category, please call 311 and say, “human rights” or visit www.NYC.gov/HumanRights to report your experience. If you have been the victim of or witness to a hate crime call 911.

**All data accurate as of April 16, 2020*

###