

TO: APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
FROM: Cheryl A. Sharp, Human Rights Attorney III, P-2, Local 2663 Steward  
DATE: March 8 2012

Good Morning Senator Toni Harp and Representative Toni Walker and other members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Cheryl Sharp, an Attorney with the CHRO, and a union steward with AFSCME authorized to speak on behalf of the CHRO and local 2663 of the P-2 bargaining unit at CHRO regarding the Governor's Bill Number 5016.

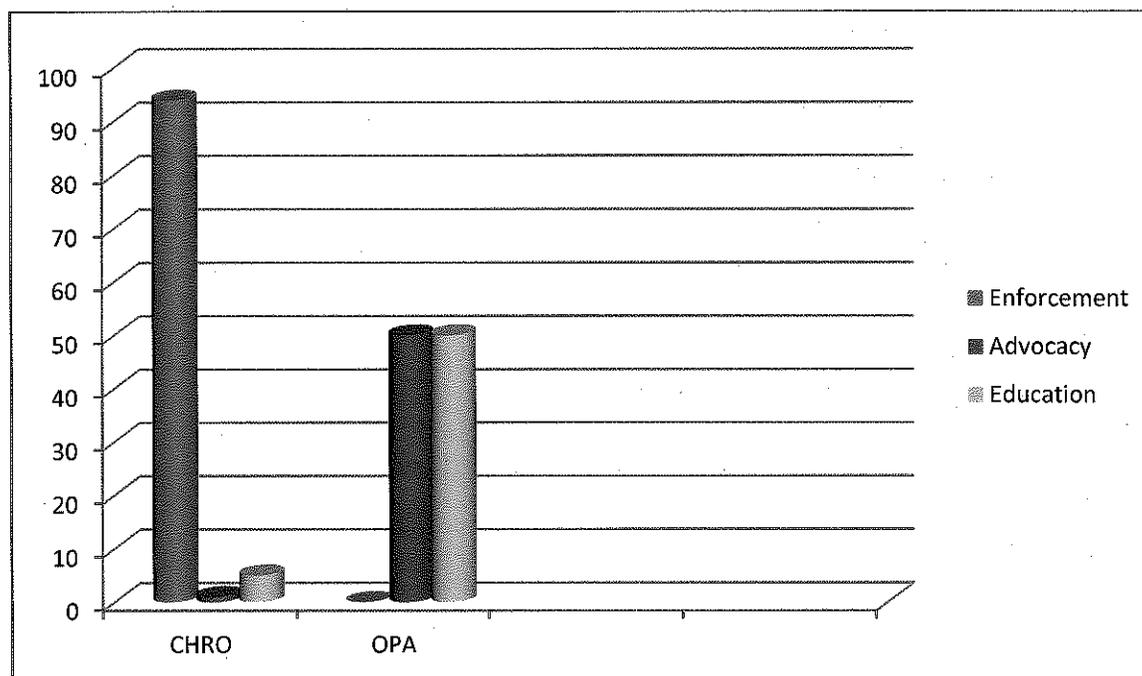
House Bill number 5016 proposes the consolidation of the CHRO with the Office of Protection and Advocacy and strips away the insulation intended to protect the CHRO from the volatility of the political process. The language of HB 5016 dictates that the executive director's term shall be conterminous with the term of the Governor-politicizing the position and inviting uncertainty, instability and a diversion of attention from the agency's mission to a perpetual campaign to stay in the favor of the Governor. The CHRO was established as an enforcement agency. As a watchdog agency, the CHRO is charged with eliminating discrimination in employment, housing, places of public accommodation, and credit transactions on the basis of about 27 protected classes, most of which are not related to disability. The CHRO meets its mission by investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating cases, monitoring state affirmative action, monitoring contract compliance and providing education and outreach to the 3.3 million Connecticut residents. The CHRO is struggling to accomplish this with a total 64 employees. The Office of Protection and Advocacy has a different mission and a distinct charge from that of the CHRO. OPA is charged with providing information, referrals, advocacy services and legal representation to individuals with disabilities. Further, OPA investigates allegations of abuse and neglect that arise in specific service settings. It is apparent that the charges of the CHRO and OPA are not the same.

- CHRO does not lobby on behalf of the disabled,
- CHRO does not provide referral services to the disabled
- OPA does not enforce the anti-discrimination laws
- OPA is not an enforcement agency
- CHRO is not an advocacy agency
- The CHRO does not investigate allegations of abuse and neglect against the disabled
- CHRO does not have the same funding sources as OPA
- OPA does not have the same funding sources as CHRO

What signal would be sent to the stakeholders of the CHRO if a combined CHRO-OPA agency is created where CHRO attorneys represent the state of Connecticut and OPA attorneys represent individual clients before the same Administrative tribunal and the interest of CHRO attorneys differ from that of the OPA attorney before that same tribunal? What signal would be sent if the CHRO and OPA are competing for resources within the same agency? What signal would be sent to stakeholders who file complaints based on age, race, sex, sexual orientation, color, religion, genetic information, workplace hazard, criminal record, national origin, etc.?

If this information is mind boggling or sounds difficult to follow,-it is, because combining these agencies will not work, will create conflict, will serve as a glowing example of the inefficiency of government.

CHRO needs to be a stand-alone agency, insulated, protected and respected for the equality that we have promoted, the lives that we have saved and the young people we have inspired.



The CHRO is not always the most popular agency, we are not always appropriately funded but we have to remain determined to meet our lofty mission, one that can't be aligned with OPA—even though the work that the OPA does is assisting communities and is noble, one that cannot be subject to the volatility of the political machine, one that cannot endure yet another blow.

Look what the CHRO has done with a limited staff, underfunding, disapproval of requests to refill positions and repeated attacks on the CHRO. The CHRO processed

close to 4,000 complaints of discrimination, tracked approximately 40 bills affecting civil rights, whistle-blowers and state employees, worked with the legislature to get Public Act 11-237 passed (the most comprehensive revision to the CHRO's complaint process in recent memory) worked with special interest groups, various task forces and the legislature to have a disparity study funded, responded to dozens of constituent inquiries, proposed a rewrite of the affirmative action regulations (in process), monitored approximately 700 state funded projects per year with project amounts ranging from \$50,000 to \$155 million (Gateway Community College Project), analyzed 84 state agency affirmative action plans, held 9 informational sessions about civil rights, provided technical assistance to thousands of contractors and subcontractors, provided 40 training sessions to approximately 2000 contractors and subcontractors, held three anti-bullying conferences in conjunction with eight other co-sponsors, Co-sponsored the Connecticut Kids Court Competition and Kids Speak to raise the social awareness of CT students regarding civil rights, equality, diversity and discrimination, sponsored a Housing Conference for Housing Authorities, provided 30 training sessions regarding discrimination, sponsored two police/ community forums, provided update training and foundations training to Affirmative action Officers and Attorney General designees, served as panelist at civil rights conferences, won multiple Supreme Court decisions, had legislative victories, helped to shape the law as it relates to lawful source of income, developed and distributed CHROTimes, wrote articles and op-ed pieces on civil rights, mediated cases, negotiated millions of dollars in settlement, provided free training to businesses, expedited case processing, mediated cases in accordance with Public Act 11-237. (Currently, we only have 65 employees).

In a nutshell, we have protected victims of discrimination, enforced the civil rights laws, trained businesses, educated children and adults about discrimination, provided equal opportunity, provided opportunities for small businesses, women owned, disabled owned and minority businesses, saved the State money, generated federal dollars of close to 1.5 million, promoted government efficiency, improved the services that are provided to the public and increased stakeholder satisfaction with the CHRO's complaint processing, although we are underfunded and understaffed. We cannot sustain another blow. We need to rebuild, and recover from the previous years of desecration. Equality has to be as important to each legislator as it is to each of his or her affected constituents-- equality, civil rights and equal opportunity are woven into the fabric of our great state, and now when our state faces such great challenges, is not the time to abandon our progressive government and diminish our hope for equality in the state. We need the disparity study allocation because we need to provide equal access to all businesses to work on state funded projects; we need funded positions that we are allowed to fill because we need to hire additional investigators and attorneys to handle our increasing caseload and awesome statutory responsibilities. We need your continued support and the continued support of the Governor. We implore you not to

combine CHRO-OPA and to create a stand-alone agency that is not subject to the volatility of the political process. Thank you for your time.