



State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 450 Columbus Blvd., Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Testimony to the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee Lisa Giliberto, Commissioner – September 21, 2016

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Lisa Giliberto and I am a Commissioner and former Human Rights Referee of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. Our Executive Director, Tanya Hughes, has already spoken to you about Case Processing and Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp has talked about some of the other work our Commission does, so I would like to give a view from the perspective of a Commissioner.

As you have heard, the mission of the CHRO is broad. We are charged with the difficult goal of eliminating discrimination from our state. This makes the Commission's task unlike that of any other state agency. When we receive a complaint of discrimination, we are not able to quickly look at a few forms, make a decision, and move on. Instead we have to determine whether a person has been discriminated against based on their protected class in violation of the law. This requires careful consideration and sober judgment. A determination can only come about after a thorough and complete investigation by investigators trained to pick up on the subtleties of discrimination. This will often involve multiple witness interviews, document requests and credibility determinations. Anything less would be a disservice to those who come before us whether they are the Complainant who feels wronged or the Respondent who stands accused.

It is important to remember whom our organization serves. We are here for those who believe they have had the deck stacked against them. Those who file with us are the people who believe they have been treated differently than others because of the color of the skin, their religion, their sex, age, disability, or any protected class status. But we are also here for Respondents. Our process ensures complaints not supported by the evidence are processed and resolved quickly without clogging the court system. By having the expertise to make determinations in an efficient and cost effective manner while also making the process open to anyone whether they are rich or poor, we have created a system that balances efficiency with accessibility.

At our core, the CHRO is about progress. Our Executive and Deputy Directors have done a phenomenal job over the past few years in making the Commission more efficient, effective, and uniform. As you've heard, our aged inventory has plummeted. Despite taking in more complaints than any other time in the history of our agency, we have been able to close more cases than ever before as well. A large part of that are a result of the legislative changes of Public Act 11-237 and 15-5 which you've heard of, but it has also been due to the tremendous dedication of our staff. Whether it is in the timely processing of complaints with complex issues or the proactive steps the Commission has taken through outreach, those working for the CHRO have done an excellent job despite budget cuts and staff shortages that have made their jobs even harder.

I'd like to thank this Committee for the work it is doing. The Commission welcomes this review as it gives a chance for the Commission to showcase the strides we have taken in improving our service to the state. I speak on behalf of all the Commissioners in saying we are proud of what the CHRO has accomplished and look forward to seeing how the Commission will continue to improve and work for a better tomorrow. Thank you.