



State of Connecticut  
**COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Central Office ~ 450 Columbus Blvd., Suite 3, Hartford, CT 06103

*Promoting Equality and Justice for all People*

**COMMERCE COMMITTEE**  
**PUBLIC HEARING – THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2017**  
**Testimony in OPPOSITION to S.B. 128 and S.B. 818**

Good morning Senator Hartley, Senator Frantz, Representative Simmons, Representative Yaccarino, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Commerce Committee. My name is Tanya Hughes; I am the Executive Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) and I am here to present our concerns regarding Proposed Senate Bill 128, *An Act Exempting New Businesses from State Regulations*, and Raised Senate Bill 818, *An Act Authorizing the Suspension of Civil Penalties Imposed on Certain Business Entities Pursuant to State Regulations*.

The purpose of these bills seems to be to alleviate the administrative burdens placed on businesses and start-up companies. Senate Bill 128 would allow start-up companies a grace period of two years in which they would be free from all regulatory requirements. Senate Bill 818 would give all businesses one free pass on regulatory violations. While the CHRO supports helping businesses launch and thrive in Connecticut, we do not believe that removing regulatory oversight and penalties is the way to do that.

For many years the CHRO has maintained a Business Training Institute, the purpose of which is to educate and train businesses and their employees regarding their obligations under the law. We have also conducted training events for attorneys who appear and practice before us, providing them with guidance and information about how the CHRO process works. Initiatives and events like these can help businesses, particularly small and newly-formed businesses, navigate the statutory and regulatory requirements of Connecticut anti-discrimination law and the CHRO's procedures. Supporting and promoting such education and outreach efforts can accomplish some of the same goals as these bills, without taking away the ability of state agencies to fulfill their missions.

The CHRO also sees the potential for problems with suspending or exempting businesses from regulations or penalties. For one thing, many of our regulations are coextensive with, or expound on, our statutes. Exempting certain businesses from the regulations would create a patchwork of requirements for which we may need to alter our complaint process. It would also create inequality among the Connecticut businesses within our process.

These proposals could also result in the loss of federal funding to our agency. We currently have work-sharing agreements with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). These agreements, which result in money being generated to the General Fund by the CHRO's processing of cases, are predicated upon the CHRO having procedures that are substantially equivalent to those of our federal counterparts. While Senate Bill 818 has an exemption for penalties required as a condition of federal funding, Senate Bill 128 does not. Without such an exemption, it is possible that over a million dollars of federal funding generated to the General Fund every year could be lost.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.