



Cook County Commission on Human Rights 2022 Annual Report

DECEMBER 2021 THROUGH NOVEMBER 2022

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Letter from the Chair

Greetings,

It has been a productive year for the Cook County Commission on Human Rights (CCCHR) where we at CCCHR saw increased public engagement and recognition. The 2022 fiscal year's annual report is a testament to the Commission's necessity with increasing inquiries and cases opened. Notably, the Just Housing Amendment to the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance has continued to have a significant number of associated complaints, showing the need from Cook County Residents.

CCCHR has ramped up outreach efforts over the past year, broadening our public presence through the support of the community, press conferences, various Countywide resource fairs, and participation in several interagency groups. CCCHR's increased visibility has made us recognizable to people seeking a resolution to harassment and discrimination in our jurisdiction. We also prioritized strategic enforcement during 2022, as demonstrated by our work with TransUnion® to ensure its background check technology aligned with Just Housing Amendment procedures.

Additionally, we hosted several listening sessions on Human Rights and Housing issues generally. We are grateful to Professor Martha Davis and community organizations and advocates for educating Commissioners and the Public on pressing issues. We are also grateful to all of the notable dignitaries and elected officials who helped us celebrate Human Rights' Day in 2022.

CCCHR's heightened engagement with the public, its peer agencies, and Cook County government demonstrates that our agency is entrusted to champion human rights and equity across the region. The information in this report speaks not only of the strides we have made to protect and advance the human rights of all Cook County residents, but it will be used to guide our work for the current reporting period.

I want to express how honored I am to have served as Chair of the Commission. I extend gratitude to former Commission Chair Angie Cowan Hamada, under whose leadership we ushered in the 2022 reporting period. Also, I want to highlight the efforts of Vice Chair Gia Orr and the entire Human Rights Commission - Jack Block, Ceylan Eatherton, Michael Lapinski, Amber Smock, Sufyan Sohel, Reverend Richard Tolliver, and Anjali Waikar - all of whom work diligently to protect the human rights of Cook County's diverse population.

The Commission is grateful for Director Sisavanh Baker's leadership, staff and continued support from President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Finally, I want to thank Cook County residents, to whom we are accountable. On behalf of the Cook County Commission on Human Rights, I am proud to present the 2022 Annual Human Rights Report.

Sincerely,



S. Mayumi Grigsby
Chair, Cook County Commission on Human Rights*



*Note: S. Mayumi Grigsby resigned from the Chair position to accept a position with the City of Chicago to avoid any potential conflicts of interest shortly before the release of the 2022 Human Rights Annual Report.

About The Commission

The Commission on Human Rights is responsible for enforcing several human rights and labor-related ordinances, including:

- **Human Rights Ordinance ("HRO")**
 - **Just Housing Amendment to the Human Rights Ordinance ("JHA")**
- **Minimum Wage Ordinance ("MWO")**
- **Living Wage Ordinance ("LWO")**
- **Earned Sick Leave Ordinance ("ESL")**
- **COVID-19 Vaccination Rights for Employees and Employer Obligations Ordinance.**

Vision Statement

The Cook County Commission on Human Rights seeks to champion equity, accessibility, and accountability by way of ensuring Cook County residents are aware of and equipped with resources provided through the Department of Human Rights and Ethics.

These ordinances prohibit unlawful discrimination and harassment in **employment, housing, public accommodations, credit transactions, and access to Cook County facilities and services** based on an individual's protected class status, including:

- **Race**
- **Color**
- **Sex**
- **Age**
- **Religion**
- **Disability**
- **National Origin**
- **Ancestry**
- **Sexual Orientation**
- **Marital Status**
- **Parental Status**
- **Military Discharge Status**
- **Source of Income**
- **Housing Status**
- **Gender Identity**
- **Criminal History**
- **Bodily Autonomy***
- **Pregnancy Status***

*Note: these protections apply as of May 25, 2023.

Meet the Commissioners

The Commission on Human Rights is an eleven-member board appointed by the President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, subject to the advice and consent of the Cook County Board of Commissioners.



JACK BLOCK

Adjunct Professor and Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, Loyola University of Chicago School of Law



MICHAEL LAPINSKI

Legal Counsel, Morningstar, Inc.



CEYLAN EATHERTON

Attorney, Mediator, and Adjunct Professor, Loyola University of Chicago School of Law



AMBER SMOCK

Director of Advocacy, Access Living



S. MAYUMI GRIGSBY CHAIR

Chief of Staff, Chicago Foundation for Women



SUFYAN SOHEL

Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel, Resilience Force



GIA ORR VICE CHAIR

Director of Community Relations, Resources, and Legislative Affairs, Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission



REV. RICHARD TOLLIVER

Retired Episcopal priest, Founder/Chief Executive Officer of St. Edmund's Redevelopment Corporation



ANJALI WAIKAR

Senior Director, Legal Operations/Litigation at the Natural Resource Defense Council

Working Group Goals

The Commission on Human Rights created three working groups to establish long-term strategies in May 2022—**Litigation, Outreach and Strategic Planning**. With the support of staff, each working group seeks to achieve the following goals:

Litigation

Commissioner Block, Commissioner Waikar, Commissioner Eatherton

- In accordance with the Commission’s procedural rules, review information related to an active investigation, including written arguments from all parties and the Hearing Officer’s final proposed decision and recommend to the full body of Commissioners a final determination.
- Collaborate with Commission staff and other working groups on active and imminent litigation.

Outreach

Commissioner Sohel, Vice Chair Orr, Commissioner Lapinski

- Support the Outreach and Training Coordinator’s initiatives to enhance the Commission’s public presence.
- Align outreach plans with Commission priorities.

Strategic Planning

Vice Chair Orr, Commissioner Smock

- Identify concrete goals and policy priorities.
- Develop action items with timeframes to meet goals and policies.

Commission Trends

The Commission on Human Rights tracks data related to complaint and investigation processes and outreach and training efforts. This chart compares the Commission’s work between the 2021 and 2022 reporting periods:

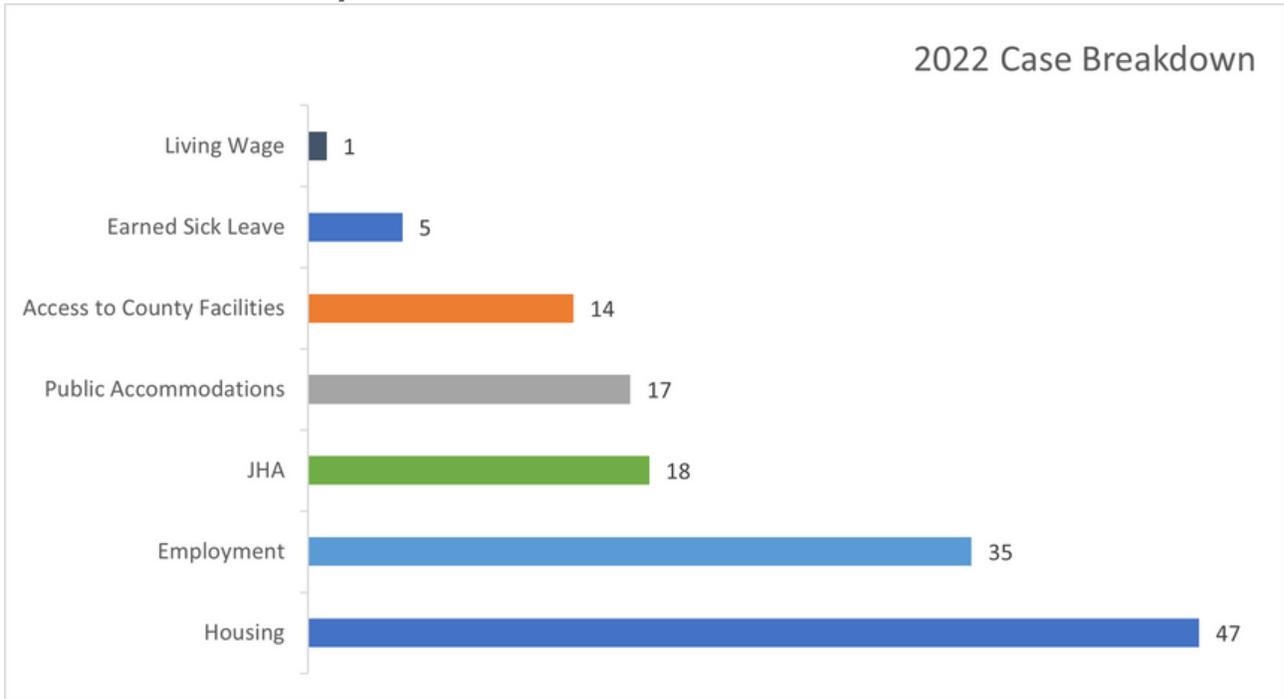
Performance Metrics	FY 2021	FY 2022
Inquiries	576	659
New Cases Filed	59	137
Cases Closed	30	112
Total Reported Settlement Amount	\$7,500	\$39,500
Trainings	10	172
Training Attendees	1002	2072
New or Refined Guidance Documents	22	26

Definitions:

- **Inquiries** - general questions or calls to the Commission including how to file a complaint, where to file a complaint, or if the Commission has legal authority to accept a complaint. Investigators process inquiries as the potential starting point of a formal complaint.
- **New Cases Filed** - formal complaints filed with the Commission, using the Commission’s complaint form and alleging discrimination, harassment, or other violations of the ordinances enforced by the Commission.
- **Number of New or Refined Guidance Documents** - any documents or forms that have been created or updated throughout the fiscal year. This includes the Commission’s Complaint forms, Commission-issued reports, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents and flyers related to specific ordinances and foreign language translated workplace postings.

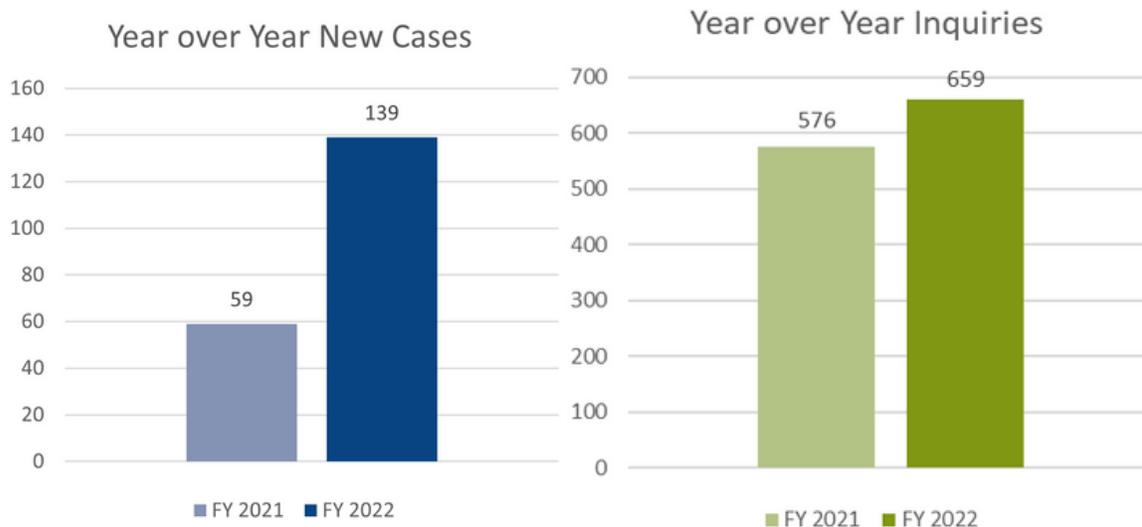
Commission Trends

2022 Data Snapshots



Similar to the previous reporting period, the three protection areas that received the most complaints were:

Housing - 47
Employment - 35
Just Housing Amendment - 18.



More broadly, the year-to-year increases in inquiries and cases are due, in part, to the result of greater Commission visibility and access. Commission staff hosted **172 trainings and workshops** throughout 2022, which increased public engagement and resource sharing. Legal aid and non-profit partners began distributing the Commission's printed materials and contact information. Additionally, the Commission revised its process to eliminate the intake complaint form, which was previously required prior to the investigation process.

Report on Investigations

Case Highlights

The Commission receives complaints with varying factual scenarios. The following represents two:

2021C001

In 2021C001, the Complainant's credit card application for a furniture store was denied without explanation. The Complainant contacted the store (the Respondent) directly to ask about the denial. According to the Complainant's statement of facts, he reported that the Respondent's employee stated the denial of his application was based on his sources of income-- social security and supplemental veterans' benefits. The Human Rights Ordinance protects individuals from being discriminated against in credit transactions based on their source of income. In this instance, social security and supplemental veterans' benefits are the Complainant's sources of income.

Through the investigative process, Commission staff determined this individual's rights were violated under the Ordinance. The parties were able to compromise without having to proceed to an administrative hearing. The Complainant was awarded a \$500 settlement paid to him by the furniture store.

2021E009

In 2021E009, a Complainant based in suburban Cook County worked remotely for a large, Texas-based firm that provides medical technology to hospitals around the United States. Despite evidence of satisfactory work performance, the Complainant's employer fired her without notice or cause. This individual suspected she had been terminated due to age and filed a complaint with the Commission.

As a protected class under the Human Rights Ordinance, using an employee's age as cause for termination is a form of workplace discrimination. After reviewing the case details, the Commission found substantial evidence that the Complainant had experienced age discrimination resulting in her termination. Instead of proceeding to an administrative hearing, both parties agreed to a mediation conference. The mediation proved successful, as the Respondent (the medical technology firm) paid the Complainant damages for an undisclosed amount.

Outreach & Training

The Commission's outreach efforts greatly increased during the 2022 reporting period. From December 2021 through November 2022, the Commission successfully hosted **172 training workshops and community meetings** in collaboration with its non-profit partners and peer agencies. The Commission also hosted tables at several community festivals throughout the calendar year, such as Fiesta del Sol and Fall Nature Fest at LaBagh Woods.

The Commission grew its digital outreach, created an e-mail newsletter and increased its social media engagement. The Commission's biweekly newsletter gathered more than 1,000 subscribers during 2022. CCCHR shared information about the Just Housing Amendment across its three social media accounts. Commission staff also partnered with the Bureau of Technology to create the Fair Housing Video Library, a series of eight short videos informing the public of the complaint process and Source of Income and Just Housing Amendment ("JHA") protections.



The combination of in-person and digital outreach efforts had widespread community impact, with an estimated **10,000 Cook County residents and workers reached** through the course of the calendar year.

Outreach & Training

Just Housing Amendment

The creation of the Fair Housing Video Library is just a portion of the larger Just Housing Amendment outreach campaign that occurred during 2022. As the latest addition to the Human Rights Ordinance, the Just Housing Amendment (“JHA”), protects County residents with conviction and arrest records from discrimination in the housing application process since February 2020. Since the COVID-19 pandemic halted the Commission’s JHA-related outreach efforts, Commission staff revived JHA-related outreach plans and collaborated with community partners to develop a creative outreach strategy. These efforts included landlord trainings, Facebook advertising, and including a QR code on property tax assessments that linked to the JHA webpage on the Commission’s website.



Through these targeted actions, Commission staff learned that noncompliance from small landlords was due in part to the technology used to perform background checks not aligning with JHA. This discovery motivated Commission staff to collaborate with credit agency TransUnion® to improve its *SmartMove* background screening tool. By connecting with TransUnion’s leadership, *SmartMove* was updated in June 2022 to limit the lookback period to three years and only pull convictions during the preceding three years, making it compliant with JHA’s two-step screening process.

This collaboration between TransUnion® and the Commission had an estimated impact of more than 7,000 housing applications per month being processed in compliance with JHA. The Commission’s efforts in this area have been called ‘fantastic,’ by community advocates, as it was “a wonderful intervention at the sort-of the meso level. [The Commission is] saying ‘Let’s think about where a landlord turns to make decisions about how they treat an individual.’” The Commission supported a real-world solution to a widespread human rights issue for returning residents.

Human Rights - From Local to Global

The Commission represents the interests of the highly diverse population that lives and works in Cook County. Such representation requires a dedication to continued learning about cultural sensitivity and the relationship between local and global human rights efforts.



2022 Minimum Wage Press Conference

The Commission was invited by its partner Arise Chicago to participate in its annual “Check Your Check” press conference in late June 2022. Each year, the Cook County Minimum Wage Ordinance changes the base wages for tipped and non-tipped workers in opt-in municipalities across Cook County. Chair Grigsby and Vice Chair Orr delivered statements highlighting how an appropriate wage is a human right and that the Commission is one of several government bodies entrusted with upholding worker protections.

2022 Human Rights Day

Human Rights Day honors the 1948 adoption of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights and celebrates the global commitment to advancing human rights. To demonstrate the Commission’s commitment to upholding human rights in Cook County, the Commission organized a social media campaign for Human Rights Day in December 2022. The Commission celebrated by sharing video messages from Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Commissioner Josina Morita, Commissioner Frank Aguilar, Commission Chair S. Mayumi Grigsby, Dr. Alisa Warren, WorldChicago, and Senator Tammy Duckworth. The videos, available on the [Commission’s Facebook page](#), have accumulated 400 views since their release.



Partnership with WorldChicago

Through an ongoing partnership with WorldChicago and the International Visitor Leadership Program, Commissioners and staff hosted a robust roundtable discussion with a U.S. State Department delegation from Pakistan in June 2022. The conversation included insights into gender-based discrimination as a human rights issue and how the Commission protects human rights at the local level.

Conclusion

In 2022, the Commission on Human Rights continued its work enforcing the County's human rights and wage laws. Emphasis was placed on outreach and reviewing processes and procedures to enhance our responsiveness to the public we serve. Through our outreach program, the Commission made an intentional decision to connect with community groups that represent marginalized and underrepresented populations to understand the issues facing this population. From these conversations, the Commission learned that our intake process was a burden for many individuals and, as a result, we eliminated this process. While this has resulted in more complaints, it has also led to greater numbers of dismissed cases. Overall, however, community groups have indicated an ease for individuals seeking to bring complaints to the Commission.

In terms of outreach, in addition to expending greater resources to educate the public, the Commission has also worked to review its website and communications to create more accessible information. We have worked to develop plain language in our forms and guidance documents. We have also started providing forms in English, Spanish, Polish, and Chinese.

These efforts have resulted in a higher number of inquiries and, ultimately, complaints to the Commission. We are proud that the vast majority of cases continue to be settled without the need to engage in lengthy and costly litigation through the Administrative Hearings Department. Finally, we are happy to report almost \$40,000 worth of reported settlements, in addition to agreements for additional training.

Acknowledgments

The 2022 Human Rights Annual Report is a collaboration among Commission staff and the Human Rights Commissioners. As such, we extend gratitude to the Cook County Board President, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, Cook County elected officials, our community partners and Cook County residents for continued support of our work.

Human Rights Commissioners

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