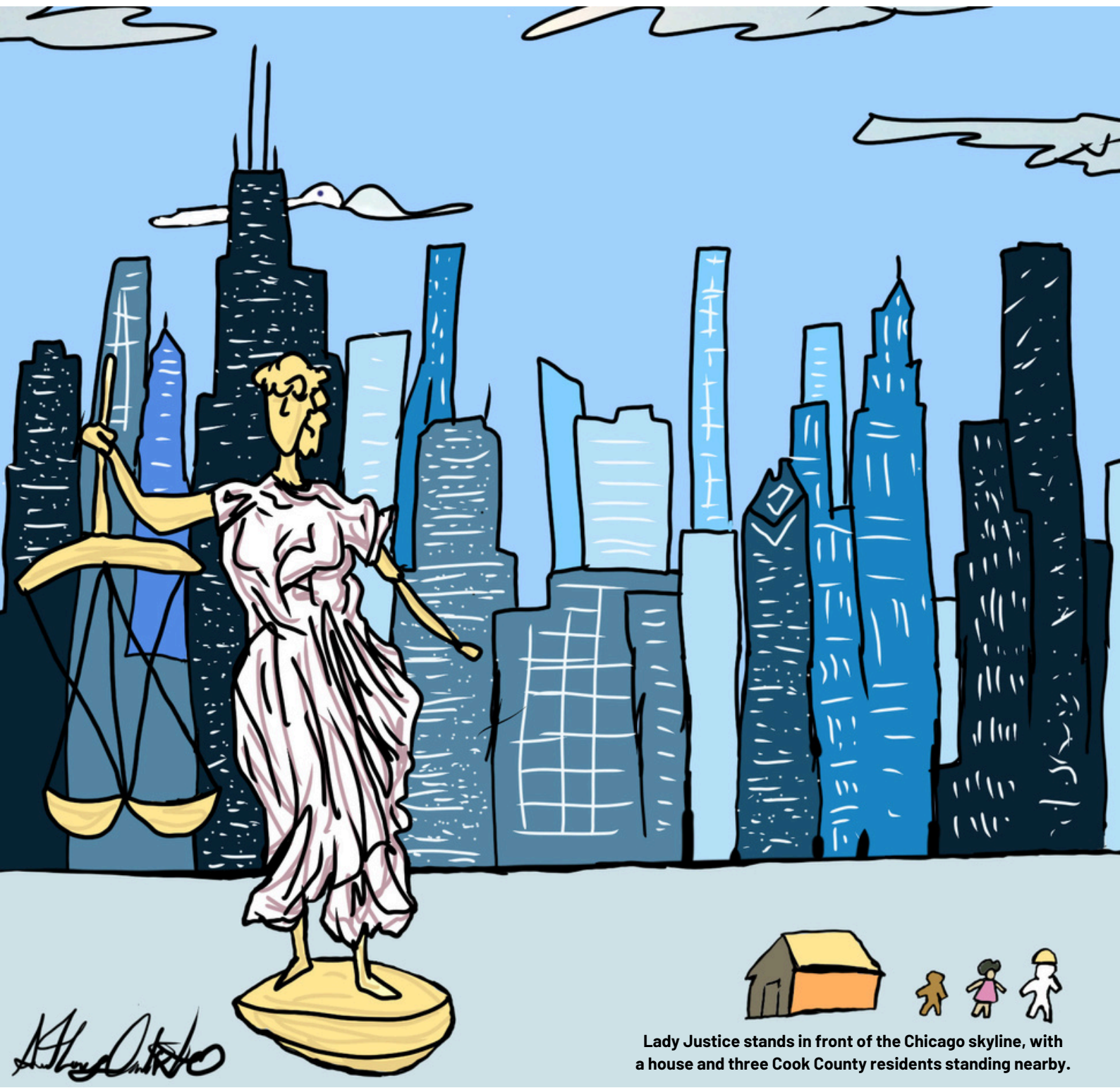




**COOK COUNTY**  
**Commission on**  
**Human Rights**

Cook County Commission on Human Rights

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Lady Justice stands in front of the Chicago skyline, with a house and three Cook County residents standing nearby.

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# FROM THE CHAIR



Greetings,

The Cook County Commission on Human Rights (CCCHR) experienced a year of transitions, momentous policy priorities, and incredible outreach efforts. The 2023 fiscal year's annual report is a testament to the amazing work done by the Department of Human Rights and Ethics staff and my fellow Commissioners to further its mission to protect the people in Cook County from discrimination and harassment.

In 2023, former Chair S. Mayumi Grigsby and Commissioner Anjali Waikar concluded their tenure as CCCHR Commissioners. I am so appreciative of their service and unyielding commitment to human rights. Additionally, in July, Director Sisavanh Baker transitioned from the Department of Human Rights and Ethics to a new role. CCCHR is grateful for her leadership and wishes her continued success. Shortly thereafter, Deputy Director Jennifer King made a seamless transition to Director of the Department, and I am thrilled to have her leading the Commission and its invaluable work.

During the 2023 fiscal year, CCCHR advanced and supported several Cook County policy priorities. We prioritized several amendments to the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance, that passed on May 25, 2023, and July 20, 2023. The first added protections of bodily autonomy and pregnancy status. Bodily autonomy and pregnancy status protections apply to housing and employment discrimination and harassment. The second added protections for traits associated with one's race, ethnicity, and caste. We are so proud that Cook County is a jurisdiction with some of the most inclusive protections in the nation.

CCCHR continued its outreach efforts, focusing on building new relationships and deepening our existing relationships with community organizations. A few highlights include organizing the July 2023 Minimum Wage press conference, providing trainings on the Just Housing Amendment to individuals with justice involvement, hosting a delegation of human rights professionals from 24 countries to discuss gender rights, and sharing information regarding CCCHR's new protections. Many CCCHR Commissioners supported outreach efforts by serving on a panel during Racial Equity Week, tabling at community events, and serving on working groups.

Acknowledging the timing of this report's release, I want to recognize one significant change that occurred shortly after the end of the fiscal year. On December 14, 2023, the Cook County Board of Commissioners approved the shift from the Earned Sick Leave Ordinance to the Paid Leave Ordinance. The Paid Leave Ordinance allows employees in Cook County to take time off for any reason, a critical protection for the County's most vulnerable workers. The Department of Human Rights and Ethics staff is working diligently to share information and resources regarding paid leave throughout the County.

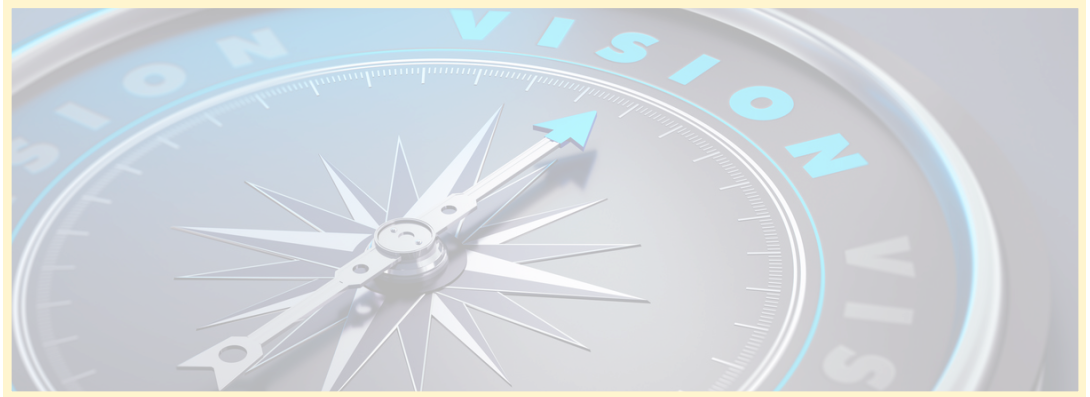
I want to express how honored I am to serve in this role and highlight the efforts of Vice Chair Gia Orr and my fellow Commissioners. We thank Director King and the staff at The Department of Human Rights and Ethics for their tireless work and passionate commitment to human rights. We are also grateful for the 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 2023 Annual Human Rights Report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Sohel', written over a light blue horizontal line.

**Sufyan Sohel**  
Chair, CCCHR

# ABOUT THE COMMISSION



A compass points in the direction of the word "VISION."

The Cook County Commission on Human Rights ("the Commission") 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.

The Commission enforces several human rights and labor ordinances, including:

- Human Rights Ordinance;
- Minimum Wage Ordinance;
- Earned Sick Leave Ordinance (until 12/31/2023);
- Paid Leave Ordinance (beginning 12/31/2023);
- Living Wage Ordinance; and,
- COVID-19 Vaccination Rights for Employees and Employer Obligations Ordinance.

These ordinances protect people in Cook County from discrimination and harassment in the areas of **employment, housing, public accommodations, credit transactions, and access to Cook County facilities, services, and programs.**

The Commission on Human Rights enforces these ordinances through investigating and mediating complaints made by members of the public, which may result in compensatory damages and other relief. The Commission supports improved compliance and policies through community outreach, training, and collaboration with local organizations.

## ***Vision***

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.



# MEET THE COMMISSIONERS



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



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



**S. MAYUMI GRIGSBY**  
Chief of Staff, Chicago Foundation for Women  
(Ended service on Commission in May 2023)



**MICHAEL LAPINSKI**  
Legal Counsel, Morningstar, Inc.



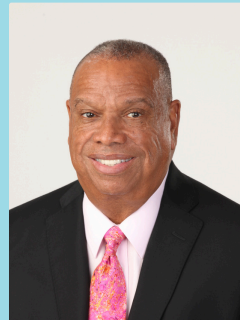
**GIA ORR, VICE CHAIR**  
Principal, Michael Best Strategies LLC



**AMBER SMOCK**  
Vice President of Advocacy, Access Living



**SUFYAN SOHEL, CHAIR**  
Social Impact Consultant



**REV. RICHARD TOLLIVER**  
Retired Episcopal Priest, Founder/Chief Executive Officer, St. Edmund's Redevelopment Corporation



**ANJALI WAIKAR**  
Senior Director, Legal Operations/Litigation, Natural Resource Defense Council

# COMMISSION TRENDS

The Commission tracks metrics related to the complaint and investigation processes and outreach and training efforts. The chart below includes metrics on the Commission’s work since Fiscal Year 2020.

<i>Performance Metrics</i>	<i>FY 2020</i>	<i>FY 2021</i>	<i>FY 2022</i>	<i>FY 2023</i>
<b>Inquiries</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>576</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>1,036</b>
<b>New Cases Filed</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Cases Closed</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Reported Settlement Amount</b>	<b>No data*</b>	<b>\$7,500</b>	<b>\$39,500</b>	<b>\$1,500</b>
<b>Trainings &amp; Community Meetings</b>	<b>No data*</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Training Attendees</b>	<b>No data*</b>	<b>1,002</b>	<b>2,072</b>	<b>1,045</b>
<b>New &amp; Refined Guidance Documents</b>	<b>No data*</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>

- 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 - complaints filed with the Commission, using the Commission’s complaint forms designed for individuals to seek investigation of claims of discrimination, harassment or other violations of the ordinances enforced by the Commission.
- 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.

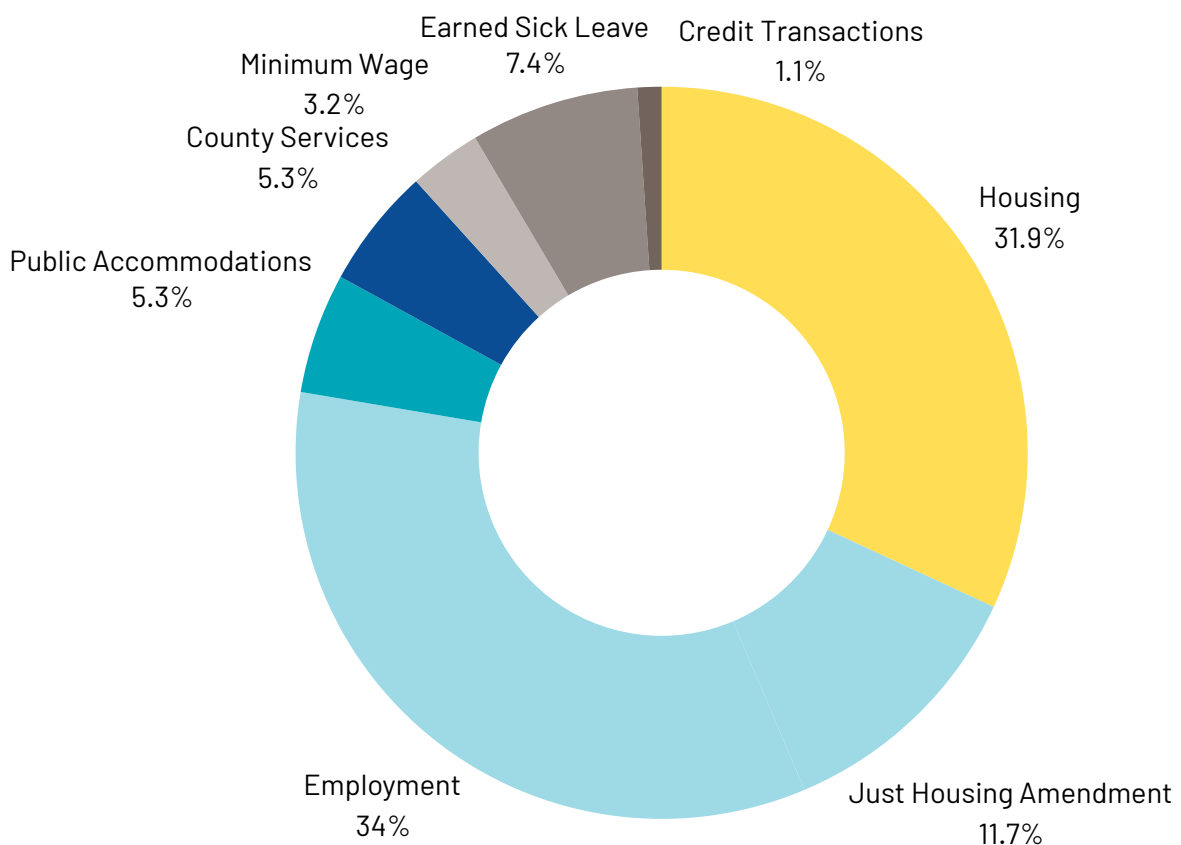
\*Outreach data was not tracked prior to July 2021, when the department first hired an Outreach & Training Coordinator.

# COMMISSION TRENDS

The Commission was pleased to receive a significant increase in the number of inquiries, suggesting continued growth in agency recognition and the importance of the Commission in referring individuals and supporting complaint filing. The Commission also experienced a leveling off in the number of complaints filed and consistent document refinement and resource development. Complaints filed in FY 2023 were still significantly higher than FY 2020 and FY 2021, and it is anticipated that there will be additional filings in FY 2024 because of the new protections within the Human Rights Ordinance and shift from Earned Sick Leave to Paid Leave.

For the third consecutive year, the three most frequent complaint types were regarding employment, housing and specific violations of the Just Housing Amendment.

Outreach to County residents is exceedingly important to increase awareness of the Commission and provide information about rights and responsibilities under the ordinances enforced by the Commission. Staff transitioning among departmental roles, the development of a new policy-oriented role and the need for several onboarding periods are the primary reasons for a difference in training and community meetings from FY 2022 to FY 2023. The Commission anticipates that these values will return to FY 2022 levels in FY 2024, as the Cook County Board of Commissioners approved additional Outreach & Training Coordinators in the FY 2024 budget cycle.



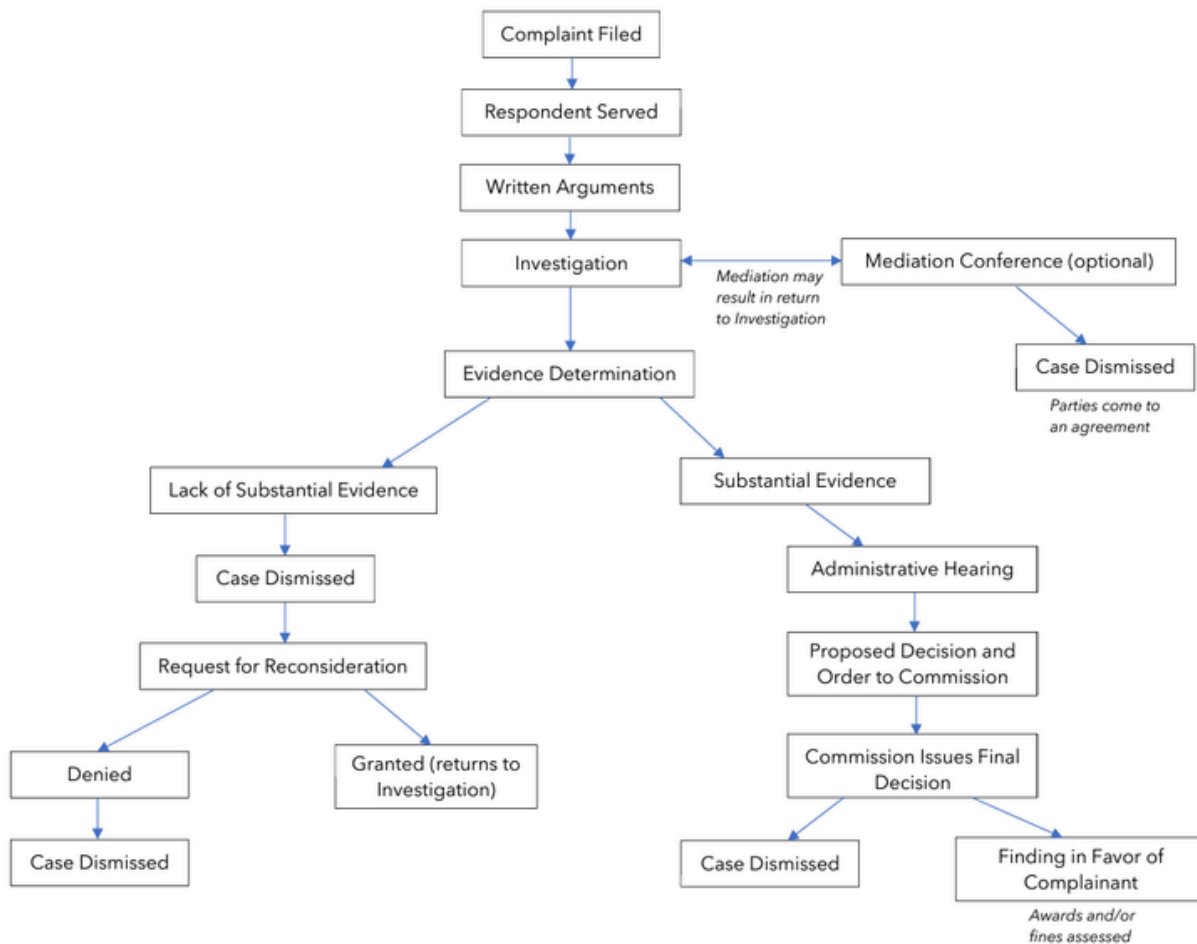
# REPORT ON INVESTIGATIONS

## **Human Rights Investigations Overview:**

A complaint is filed with the Commission. The Commission notifies the Respondent and requires a response to the complaint allegations from the Respondent. The complaint is assigned to an Investigator, who conducts a neutral fact-finding investigation and evaluates pertinent evidence. It is possible that the Complainant and Respondent agree to attend a mediation conference, in which they may come to an agreement.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Commission determines whether there is substantial evidence that a violation of the associated ordinance occurred. If the Commission finds substantial evidence of an ordinance violation, the Commission will hold an administrative hearing with a hearing officer.

Much like a civil court case, the administrative hearing ensures that the Respondent has received due process before the Commission orders any remedies or relief. At the end of this hearing, the Commission can order any party found to have violated an ordinance to provide remedies and/or pay assessed fines.



Click on the flow chart to open a larger version on the Web!



## Facilitating the Complaint Process:

In late 2022, the Commission added a “Representative” field to its complaint forms, at the request of community organizations and legal aid which support individuals to file complaints with the Commission. This gave Complainants the opportunity to share alternative contact information, which helps ensure complaints are not dismissed for lack of responsiveness.

## Guidance Materials

The Commission continued its efforts to remove barriers to complaint filing and demystify the complaint process by producing several guidance materials that were requested by community organizations.

### Your Human Rights in Cook County

The Commission released *Your Human Rights in Cook County: A Guide to CCCHR* in June 2023. This guide gives an overview of the Commission’s work, protections and investigative process. Its development and publication were the direct result of requests and advocacy from housing and labor community organizations.

*Your Human Rights in Cook County* covers:

- Cook County’s human rights and worker protection laws;
- Where to file a complaint;
- The complaint filing process; and,
- The Commission’s role in Cook County.

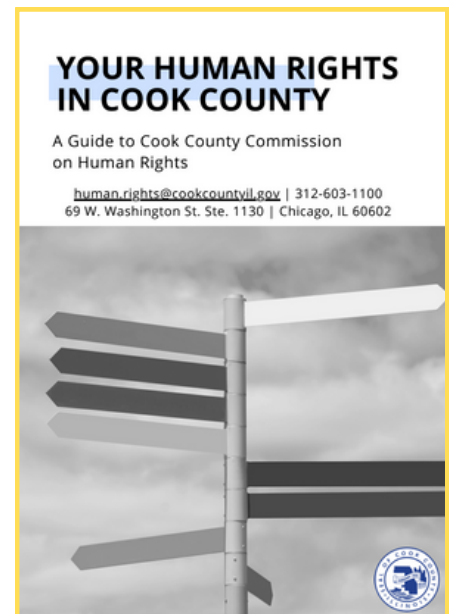
The Commission thanks the Clear Language Lab at Literacy Works for supporting efforts to make this guide plain language and accessible.



Click on the image of the cover to open *Your Human Rights in Cook County*!



**Paper that reads “Investigation Report” with a gavel, pen and eyeglasses lying on top of the report.**



**Your Human Rights in Cook County report cover, which includes an image of signs pointed in various directions.**

### Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement Guidance

In January 2023, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security made process enhancements under Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement, or DALE, to streamline the investigative process for labor complaints. These enhancements are particularly important for migrant workers who do not have U.S. citizenship, as they protect individuals from deportation and retaliation if they work for an employer under investigation for workplace violations.

The Commission responded to requests made by community organizations and began including in its complaint process a procedure for individuals who have filed labor-related complaints at the County-level to request a Statement of Interest. The Commission released its own “DALE Procedure and Information” document and complementing video to discuss the procedure.

# POLICY

## Updates to the Human Rights Ordinance

On May 25, 2023, the Cook County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to amend the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance to include protections of **bodily autonomy and pregnancy status** and to add definitions for reproductive health care, assisted reproduction, and gender-affirming care. Bodily autonomy and pregnancy status protections apply to housing and employment discrimination and harassment. Other ordinance amendments included shifting definitions of gender identity and sexual orientation away from a binary understanding of gender.

On the topic of the amendments, Cook County Commissioner Kevin Morrison, Human Relations Committee Chair, said "Through this legislation, we make it known loud and clear that Cook County welcomes all who exercise their right to their own bodily autonomy, whether that be to receive gender-affirming care or in making their own reproductive healthcare choices. This ordinance also validates trans lives and takes a critical step toward ensuring Cook County's LGBTQ community feels safe and protected."

On July 20, 2023, the Cook County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted for a second group of amendments to the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance. These amendments include protections for traits associated with one's race, ethnicity, and caste. Some examples of traits associated with one's race include, but are not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles. Based on available information, Cook County is the first county in the United States to enact caste protections.

In addition, ordinance language was amended to better represent racial groups in Cook County. The definition of employer has been amended from "An Indian tribe or a corporation wholly owned by an Indian tribe" to "an Indigenous American tribe, or a corporation wholly owned by an Indigenous American tribe." The amendments provide a greater level of protection for Cook County residents, and more specifically, community members seeking to exercise their right to protections in domains of employment and housing, including through their perceived status, practice, and expression of race, ethnicity, and caste.

### **Human Rights**

#### **Protected Classes:**

Race (including traits associated with 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

Ethnicity

Caste



**Web of lines connecting multicolored pawns, representing network of people.**

# OUTREACH & TRAINING

From December 2022 through November 2023, the Commission hosted a total of 79 training workshops and community meetings in collaboration with its nonprofit partners and peer agencies. Additionally, Commission staff hosted tables at several community events and festivals throughout the calendar year, including Unity Day hosted by the Park Forest Police Department and Fall Nature Fest.



**Summer 2023 training for CHA Property Managers on the Just Housing Amendment.**

The Commission expanded its outreach and training efforts to educate more housing providers in Cook County about the Commission’s fair housing protections. Staff traveled to sites in Skokie and Tinley Park to connect with real estate agents and property managers, encouraging them to uphold the Commission’s fair housing protections in their business. The in-person outreach efforts were complemented by several virtual fair housing workshops that occurred throughout the year, covering topics like the Just Housing Amendment and source of income protections.

The 2023 reporting period built upon the digital and in-person outreach from the previous year, with an estimated impact of 7,700 Cook County residents and workers reached throughout the year. Other outreach and training efforts from the reporting period include:



**Ajike Sumpter, Outreach & Training Coordinator, representing the Commission at CIC’s Fair Housing Month Breakfast.**

- Collaboration with Cook County Office of the President to plan activities for the Fifth Anniversary of Cook County Racial Equity Week, which included a “Where to File” virtual panel discussion hosted by the Commission.
- Pursuit of digital outreach regarding modernization of the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance, including newsletter announcements, creation of a video training, and updated presentation materials highlighting the new protections.
- Participation at the inaugural Social Justice Resource Fair at Governors State University in October 2023.

Click on the image of the envelope with the cursor to subscribe to our e-newsletter!



# 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

## NACo Just Housing Amendment (JHA) Outreach Award

In 2023, DHRE received its **first National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award in Civic Education and Public Information for its JHA Outreach Program**. Related to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary in 2021 to launch the JHA Outreach Program – a program to educate landlords, housing providers and potential tenants regarding their rights and duties within JHA. The program included trainings, social media campaigns, and other strategic communications. Information and sample notices were shared with landlords and housing providers through direct mailing and in property tax assessments. The program also involved collaboration with a prominent screening company to ensure compliance in more than 7,000 housing applications per month. DHRE is grateful to NACo for this honor.



Hand holding a gold star.

## July 2023 Minimum Wage Update Press Conference

On June 30, 2023, the Commission, led at that time by Director Sisavanh Baker, joined Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, the City of Chicago’s Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) and Arise Chicago for the “Check Your Check” Press Conference. These agencies came together to announce the minimum wage increases and to urge workers to ensure their employers paid the newly increased rates.



President Toni Preckwinkle, representatives from BACP, Arise Chicago and the Commission at the “Check Your Check” Press Conference.

The press conference was a great success, receiving coverage from CBS, Chicago Sun-Times, NBC, Journal & Topics, Univision, WGN, and WTTW. Press conferences like the July 2023 Minimum Wage Update are an important outreach tool to ensure residents are aware of the latest policies in Cook County.



# CONCLUSIONS & GOALS



**A laptop is next to even scales.**

From our yearly review, the Commission on Human Rights presents the following conclusions:

1. The Commission deepened its relationships with community organizations, peer agencies and other County agencies, resulting in several formal recognitions and large-scale events.
2. The Commission prioritized policy initiatives this year, resulting in a significant number of added protections to the Human Rights Ordinance.
3. The Commission continues to encourage County residents to file complaints if they experience discrimination or harassment, and Commission Investigators work tirelessly to thoroughly investigate complaints and support settlement between Complainants and Respondents, where appropriate.



**"GOALS:" is written at the top of a notebook page above a ballpoint pen.**

The Commission presents the following goals for the next year:

1. The expansion of the Commission's outreach efforts through continued relationship-building and development of guidance documents regarding worker protections within the Human Rights, Paid Leave, Minimum Wage, and Living Wage Ordinances.
2. The implementation of a data-driven Case Management System, which will increase efficiency in our investigative process and data integrity.
3. The enforcement of the Paid Leave Ordinance and new protections within the Human Rights Ordinance, supported by a coordinated outreach and training campaign and ongoing collaboration with County stakeholders and peer agencies at all levels of government.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not be possible without the efforts of the Cook County Board President, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, Cook County elected officials, Cook County employees and the people of Cook County.

## Commissioners of Human Rights:

Jack Block, Esq.

Ceylan Eatherton, Esq.

S. Mayumi Grigsby, Esq.

Michael Lapinski, Esq.

Gia Orr, M.S., M.Ed, Vice Chair

Amber Smock, M.F.A.

Sufyan Sohel, Esq., Chair

Rev. Richard L. Tolliver, Ph.D.

Anjali Waikar, Esq.

## Staff\*:

Jennifer King, Esq., Director

## For inquiries regarding this report:

Julia Epplin-Zapf, Policy Analyst

[julia.epplin-zapf@cookcountyl.gov](mailto:julia.epplin-zapf@cookcountyl.gov)

**The Commission extends sincere gratitude and credit for the original cover art to Anthony Calixto, Spring 2024 Outreach Intern.**

***We thank you for your efforts in making Cook County a place free of discrimination and harassment.***



**United States flag hangs outside of Cook County Central Building.**

## Contact

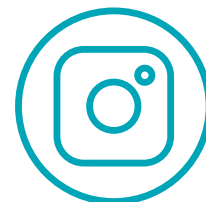
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[human.rights@cookcountyl.gov](mailto:human.rights@cookcountyl.gov)



\*Sisavanh Baker, Esq. served as Director until July 2023.