



1/29/2021

The Honorable Muriel Bowser, Mayor
1350 Pennsylvania Ave. NW #300
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mayor Bowser:

We write to ask you to not cut any funds from the Office of Human Rights (OHR) as you amend the FY21 budget and prepare the FY22 budget. Specifically, we ask that you maintain the funding increase for the agency which the Council approved for FY21, at a minimum. These funds are critical to helping the agency make progress on its long backlog of cases and improving its ability to effectively analyze and handle claims. In addition to urging you to maintain those FY21 funds, we also seek an enhancement for the agency's FY22 budget, to further these same goals.

We are a coalition that advocates on behalf of those subjected to discrimination who seek help from OHR. OHR enforces multiple laws, including the D.C. Human Rights Act, one of the strongest human rights laws in the country. It is the primary agency responsible for enforcing the civil rights of D.C. residents and workers, and its mission of eradicating discrimination could not be more critical. Since 2018, we have worked together to bring attention to OHR's inefficiencies and advance its mission to safeguard human rights in the District. We know that you share our commitment to a future where OHR more successfully helps to stamp out discrimination in our communities.

Insufficient funding has been a significant impediment to OHR's success. The agency's chronic understaffing has resulted in its struggling to manage its caseload in a time efficient manner and handle its increased responsibilities due to recently enacted laws. In response to these problems, the Council approved almost one million dollars in FY21 to reverse cuts in your proposed budget to five positions at the agency and to enhance its investigative unit with four new positions as well as another million to fund enforcement of the new paid leave law. We ask that you leave this funding intact and ensure that OHR spends it as expeditiously as possible to better accomplish its mission. In putting together your budget proposal for FY22, we advise that further enhancements are needed for the agency to truly, effectively accomplish its mission.

We appreciate the difficult budget situation facing the District. Simultaneously we face resurgent forces of white supremacy, homophobia and transphobia, sexism, and other types of prejudice. We are reeling from four years of systematic dismantling of federal protections against discrimination. In this context, funding for OHR should not be on the chopping block. Let us ensure that D.C. stands as a beacon against the powers of hate with OHR as the effective champion for human rights that it has the potential to be.

Sincerely,

AARP District of Columbia
Amara Legal Center
Casa Ruby



DC Fiscal Policy Institute
DC Kincaid Alliance
Eliot & Hartnett at Law PLLC
Equal Justice Under Law
Equal Rights Center
Fund for Community Reparations for Autistic People of Color's Interdependence, Survival, & Empowerment
G III Associates, LLC
Georgetown Law Civil Rights Clinic
Gertrude Stein Democratic Club
GLAA
HIPS
HME Consulting & Advocacy
Jews United for Justice
Latinx History Project
Mary's House for Older Adults, Inc
Metropolitan Washington Employment Lawyers' Association
Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC)
No Justice No Pride
SMYAL (Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders)
The DC Center for the LGBT Community
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
Woodhull Freedom Foundation