

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**



**Responses to Fiscal Year 2023-2024  
Performance Oversight Questions**

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**Submission to  
Committee on Public Works and Operations  
Council of the District of Columbia  
The Honorable Brianne K. Nadeau, Chairperson**

**January 26, 2024**

**John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20004**

## COMMISSION OVERVIEW

**1. What are the Commission's top five priorities in FY 24? Please explain how the agency expects to address these priorities in FY 24.**

### RESPONSE:

The Commission's priorities are derived from its two main objectives: First, to serve as an effective and efficient adjudicatory body under the DC Human Rights Act (DCHRA) and help protect the 23 human rights traits in the District; and second, to promote awareness of the human rights protection that the DCHRA affords.

We have several priorities under each of these two overarching objectives and they are discussed in turn below.

#### **a. Effective and Efficient Adjudication under the DCHRA**

- i. Improving the operation of tribunals
  - Ensuring the full Commission: In FY 23 and FY 24 to date, five Commissioners have resigned, while three new Commissioners joined us. Currently five positions are vacant. In this FY, we plan to work with MOTA to fill the existing vacancies as quickly as possible so that we are up to 15 Commissioners again. The three new Commissioners who joined in FY 23 have received full training from the Chief Administrative Law Judge and others. We plan to offer similar training to the additional Commissioners who hopefully will join the Commission in FY 24.
  - Commissioner Agreement: In order to ensure that tribunals take place punctually with the full engagement of well-prepared Commissioners participating in regular rotation, we have agreed that each Commissioner will enter into a commissioner agreement that outlines the expectations for Commissioner conduct when participating in tribunals. The agreement merely codifies our current practice, but it serves as a useful reminder of the key protocols for existing Commissioners and provides new Commissioners with a sense of time commitment required for tribunals. The substance of the draft agreement was discussed with the Commission during FY 23. The full agreement will be signed in FY 24 by existing Commissioners, and going forward, new Commissioners who join will be asked to sign it as part of their onboarding process.

**ii. Improving the rules, procedures, tools and practices for rights protection**

- Comprehensive review of rules: The Rule Committee’s efforts were temporarily suspended in FY 23 due to OHR’s limited resources at the time, but the Committee has geared up again to review the entire chapter 4 of Municipal Regulations and expects to prioritize areas in need of attention in FY 24, in collaboration with OHR.
- Mediation services: In view of the high success rate (75%) from mediation in FY 23, the Commission will continue to offer mediation in all cases in FY 24.
- Forms and other help for complainants: The ALJs will continue to offer forms and other help for complainants, as in previous years.
- Case management system: Please see our full response in Section 24.
- Digitization of past cases: Subject to availability of a dedicated intern or a contractor to be made available by OHR, the Commission hopes to make progress on this project in FY 24, starting with an audit of available record for the period between 2013 to 2018 to identify what may be available for digitization and how to digitize them in a cost-effective way. This audit will inform the Commission’s digitization efforts in the future.

**b. Promoting the benefits of DCHRA**

The outreach role of the Commission is just as important as the Commission’s adjudication role. Although each Commissioner is generally responsible for educating the public about the benefits of DCHRA, the Outreach Committee was established in FY 22 to serve as a focal point for many of the Commission outreach activities. In FY 23, the Outreach Committee contributed to the organization of the Human Rights Award Ceremony. Going forward, the Commission and the Outreach Committee can benefit from a more systematic planning process so that our outreach and educational activities are sustained throughout the year. Under the new leadership of the Outreach Committee, the Commission hopes to reexamine the operation and activities of the Outreach Committee and implement new programs in FY 24. Please see Section 25 for a fuller description of our outlook, achievements, and constraints in relation to outreach.

**2. What were the Commission’s top five priorities in FY22? Please explain how the agency addressed those priorities in FY 23.**

RESPONSE:

**a. Moving cases efficiently from certification to closure.**

- i. **Focus on oldest cases:** The Commission successfully closed two long-outstanding cases, one certified to the Commission in 2015, and another in 2018. These cases were unfortunately caught up in the change of staffing at the Commission in 2019. On average, in FY 23, cases were closed within 19.5 months. Please also see Section 22 for a full discussion on the length of time needed to close cases.
  - ii. **Encouraging more dispute resolution:** The Commission offers mediation as a voluntary process once a case is certified. In FY 22 and in FY 23, 75% of the cases that were mediated with a settlement judge resulted in a settlement.
  - iii. **Ensuring effective operation of the Case Management System:** The Case Management System is being used by all litigants in all cases pending before the Commission. Some upgrades were made to the system in FY 23 to make it more effective.
- b. **Making it easier for unrepresented litigants to bring complaints.** The Commission continues to create and utilize fillable forms to ease the burden on self-represented litigants to bring their cases.
  - c. **Collaborating with OHR to revise the procedural rules in chapter 4 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations.** Although the Commission fully reconstituted its Rules Committee with a formal chair and three Commissioner members in anticipation of the procedural revisions, the Committee was unable to move forward on this priority in FY 23, as OHR lacked sufficient resources at the time to assist. The Commission seeks to renew its efforts to revise rules in FY 24.
  - d. **Collaborating with OHR to digitize past Commission cases for online access.** This activity is an outgrowth from our FY22 inquiry into the state of past Commission cases. In FY 23, it was expected that OHR would hire a dedicated intern to investigate how best to digitize the archived files and make the fully digitized cases available to the public. Although in FY 23 the Commission compiled a list of all adjudicated cases dating back to 2012, neither OHR nor the Commission had the resources to hire an intern to help with physical retrieval and digitization of these cases. Subject to availability of a dedicated intern or a contractor to be made available by OHR, the Commission hopes to make progress on this project in FY 24, as noted above.
  - e. **Reaching out to DC residents about the protection that the DC Human Rights Act affords.** Please see Section 25 for a full description of the Commission’s outreach activities in FY 23.

**3. Please describe any new initiatives or programs that the Commission implemented in FY 23 and FY 24, to date, to improve the operations of the Commission. Please describe**

**any funding utilized for each initiative or program and the results, or expected results, of each initiative.**

RESPONSE:

In FY23 the Commission began a rotation schedule for the assignment of Tribunals. Previously, Tribunals were assigned on a voluntary basis resulting in a disparity in the number of cases being handled by each Commissioner and placing a higher burden on certain Commissioners. Through a rotation schedule Commissioners must opt out of Tribunals rather than opt into Tribunals and the cases are evenly spread among the Commissioners.

The Commission also engaged in a series of discussions about the need to ensure that tribunals take place punctually with the full engagement of well-prepared Commissioners participating in regular rotation. As a result of these discussions, the Commission proposed a Commissioner Agreement to codify the existing protocols in relation to tribunals. In FY 24, each new and existing Commissioner will enter into a Commissioner Agreement.

Finally, the Commission also formalized its public meetings policy as part of its effort to be more open to the members of the public and encourage exchange of views.

**4. Please explain any significant impacts on the Commission, if any, of any legislation, regulations or judicial decisions at the federal or local level during FY 23 and FY 24, to date. Highlight any actions which have created or expanded the rights of complainants before the Commission or the factors considered during an evidentiary hearing and final decision.**

- **B25-0319- Fairness in Human Rights Administration Act** was introduced on June 18, 2023, and a hearing was held on December 6, 2023, at which OHR provided testimony.
  - This Bill, if passed, has a significant impact both on the process before the Commission and the rights of litigants, particularly in public sector cases, which are not handled by the Commission. In private sector cases, which are heard by the Commission, the Bill would allow the Commission to award punitive damages which are currently not available unless a litigant files their case in a traditional court. The Commission whole-heartedly supports this amendment.
  - However, the Bill also contains a provision that would have the impact of taking the cases heard by the Commission outside the realm of “contested cases” under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), significantly dilute the hearing process, and delay finality for litigants. At issue is the following change in language:

**Current Language in DCHRA (D.C. Code § 2-14-3.13(b)):**

(b) If, upon all the evidence, the Commission finds that a respondent has not engaged in any unlawful discriminatory practice, the Commission shall issue and cause to be served on the complainant, an order dismissing the complaint as to such respondent.

**Proposed Language in B25-0319 (D.C. Code § 2-14-3.13(b)):**

(b) If, upon all the evidence, the Commission finds that a respondent has not engaged in any unlawful discriminatory practice, the Commission shall issue and cause to be served on the complainant, ~~an order dismissing the complaint as to such respondent~~ **an order dismissing the complaint as to such respondent and a notice of rights to file a civil action pursuant to section 316.**

**(section 316 allows for administrative dismissal or voluntary withdrawal of a case to go to a hearing in Superior Court).**

- The impact of this change is that after having a full evidentiary hearing before the Commission, which includes full discovery and all of the processes a litigant receives in Superior Court, if the Complainant loses the case before the Commission, the complainant will be allowed to file a brand a new de novo case in DC Superior Court as if the proceedings before the Commission never occurred – the proverbial second bite at the apple. This certainly calls into question the purpose of the Commission’s adjudicatory role in the first place, and arguably, raises a question if it is a good use of Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) and Commissioner time.
- The even larger impact of the amendment is that these cases would no longer be “contested cases” under the APA because the APA, D.C. Code § 502(8)(A): provides:

The term “contested case” means a proceeding before the Mayor or any agency in which the legal rights, duties, or privileges of specific parties are required by any law (other than this subchapter), or by constitutional right, to be determined after a hearing before the Mayor or before an agency, **but shall not include:**

**(A) Any matter subject to a subsequent trial of the law and the facts de novo in any court;**

- As such, the Commission questions the proposed change to D.C. Code § 2-1403.13 and believes that litigants are better served by keeping the existing language and process as there is no reason why a complainant would be entitled to a new, de novo, hearing in Superior Court after a full hearing before the Commission. This would add

years to the adjudication process, as once the case is heard by Superior Court, it would then be appealable to the D.C. Court of Appeals. It is also notable that the proposed Bill offers no similar remedy to a Respondent who does not prevail before the Commission.

**5. Please provide a current list of all Commissioners, including:**

- a. The date of appointment;**
- b. The date their term expires;**
- c. Whether they are a District resident and, if they are, the ward in which they reside.**
- d. The number of hearings or meetings attended by each Commissioner in FY 23 and FY 24, to date;**
- e. A brief description of the demonstrated background or interest in human rights that justified their appointment to the Commission pursuant to D.C. Code § 2–1404.03; and**
- f. Whether there are any vacancies and how long the seat has been vacant.**

RESPONSE

The full responses to (a) - (d) and (f) are in the chart below. Please note: Commissioners may, but are not required to, attend hearings. Hearings are conducted by the Administrative Law Judges. A Tribunal of three Commissioners is empaneled to review the recommendation of the Administrative Law Judge and make a final decision. In response to (e), please see **Attachment A** which contains the Commissioners’ biographies.

Pursuant to D.C. Code § 1403.13(a), the Commission shall consist of 15 members, appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council. As of January 2024, there are ten Commissioners and five vacancies. Commissioners are appointed for staggered three-year terms. If a commissioner resigns mid-term, the new Commissioner serves out the rest of that term and is then eligible to be reappointed for a new three-year term. Thus, those Commissioners whose initial appointments were mid-term as reflected in the below chart will have expiration dates of less than three years. The Commission meets every other month and therefore holds six public meetings each fiscal year. The number of meetings attended below are out of the 8 meetings held between November 2022 (FY 23) and January 2024 (FY 24).

<b>Commissioner Name</b>	<b>a. Date of Appointment</b>	<b>b. Term Expiration</b>	<b>c. Ward</b>	<b>d. Tribunals Attended</b>	<b>e. Meetings Attended</b>
Motoko Aizawa Acting Chair Pending Chair Appointment	10/03/2023 Eff. 12/31/2022	12/31/2025	3	6	8
Wynter Allen Resigned 4/28/23	07/20/2021 Eff. 12/31/2020	12/31/2023	6	2	1

<b>Commissioner Name</b>	<b>a. Date of Appointment</b>	<b>b. Term Expiration</b>	<b>c. Ward</b>	<b>d. Tribunals Attended</b>	<b>e. Meetings Attended</b>
Stuart Anderson	07/12/2022 Mid-term appt	12/31/2024	8	0	4
Robert Baldwin, III	07/12/2022 Mid-term appt	12/31/2024	6	1	8
Maria E. Burnett <b>Pending Reappointment</b>	07/13/2021 Mid-term appt	12/31/2023	1	2	5
Charlotte Clymer	07/12/2022 Mid- term appt	12/31/2024	7	0	7
Eleanor Collinson <b>Resigned April 2023</b>	07/12/2022	12/31/2024	3	4	4
Henry Floyd Jr.	10/03/2023 Mid- term appt	12/31/2025	1	0	3
Lauren A. Lowery <b>Resigned 10/5/2023</b>	07/13/2021 Eff. 12/31/2020	12/21/2023	8	5	1
Adam Maier <b>Pending Reappointment</b>	07/13/2021 Eff. 12/31/2020	12/31/2023	6	6	8
Karen Mulhauser <b>Resigned 12/23/23</b>	10/03/2023	12/31/2025	6	2	5
Teri J. Quinn	10/03/2023	12/31/2025	5	3	8
Colin Rettammel	10/03/2023 Mid- term appt	12/31/2025	5	0	2
Anika Simpson <b>Resigned 10/4/2023</b>	07/20/2021 Eff. 12/31/2020	12/31/2023	4	5	6
Toni Wiley	10/03/2023 Mid- term appt	12/31/2025	5	0	3
Vacant (Collinson vacancy)		12/31/2024			
Vacant (Allen vacancy)		12/31/2026			
Vacant (Lowery vacancy)		12/31/2026			
Vacant (Simpson vacancy)		12/31/2026			
Vacant (Mulhauser vacancy)		12/31/2028			

**6. Please provide the dates of any Commission meetings held in FY 23 and FY 24, to date, and the dates and times of any future scheduled Commission meetings.**

<b>FY 2023 Meeting Dates</b>	<b>FY 2024 Meeting Dates</b>
November 9, 2022	November 8, 2023
January 11, 2023	January 10, 2024
March 8, 2023	March 10, 2024



May 10, 2023	May 8, 2024
July 12, 2023	July 10, 2024
September 13, 2023	September 11, 2024

**7. For every meeting of the Commission in FY 23 and FY 24, to date, please provide the agenda, the minutes, a list of all members in attendance, and whether a quorum was present.**

RESPONSE

Please see **Attachment B** for the meeting agendas and minutes. A quorum was present at every meeting of the Commission in FY23 and FY24, to date. The minutes contain the list of Commissioners in attendance, a list of Commissioners absent, and whether a quorum was present.

**8. Please list all reporting requirements in the District of Columbia Code or Municipal Regulations that the Commission is required to complete in FY 23 and FY 24, to date. For each requirement, please list the date the report was required and the date it was produced. If the Commission did not produce the report on the mandated timeline, please explain why.**

RESPONSE:

The Commission is not a separate agency from the Office of Human Rights and has no specific reporting requirements. However, the Mayor, under D.C. Code § 2-1403.01(g)(1), is required to submit an annual report to the Council regarding the progress of enforcement of the Human Rights Act. To satisfy this requirement, OHR publishes and submits to the Council OHR’s Annual Report, which includes information about the Commission’s work. See OHR’s responses for full information responsive to this question.

**9. Please list and describe any ongoing investigations, audits, or reports on the Commission or any employee of the Commission that were completed during FY 23 and FY 24, to date.**

RESPONSE:

The Commission is not aware of any investigations, audits or reports conducted on the Commission or its members or employees.

**10. Please provide a list of all studies, research papers, reports, and analyses that the Commission prepared or funded during FY 23 and FY 24, to date. Please submit a hard copy to the Committee of any study, research paper, report, or analysis that is complete.**

RESPONSE:

The Commission did not prepare or fund any studies, research papers, reports or other analyses in FY23 or FY24 to date, other than to compile a list of all adjudicated cases since 2012, as mentioned above. For information on OHR, please see OHR’s responses.

**11. Please provide the number of FOIA requests for FY 23, and FY 24, to date, that were submitted to the Commission. Include the number granted, partially granted, denied and pending. In addition, please provide the average response time, the estimated number of**

**FTEs required to process requests, the estimated number of hours spend responding to these requests, and the cost of compliance.**

RESPONSE:

Because the Commission is not a separate agency from OHR, any FOIA requests related to the Commission are submitted to OHR and addressed by OHR; thus, please see OHR's responses for information responsive to this question.

**12. Is the Commission currently party to any active non-disclosure agreements? If so, please provide all allowable information on all such agreements, including the number of agreements and the parties within the Commission associated with each agreement.**

RESPONSE

The Commission is not currently party to any active non-disclosure agreements.

**13. Does the Commission require non-disclosure agreements for any Commissioners, employees or contractors?**

RESPONSE

The Commission does not require non-disclosure agreements for the Commissioners. The Commission does not have any employees or contractors. However, OHR requires that all employees, interns, law clerks, and contractors working with the Commission sign a confidentiality statement.

**14. Please list all pending lawsuits that name the Commission as a party. Identify which cases on the list are lawsuits that potentially expose the District to financial liability or will result in a change in Commission practices and describe the current status of the litigation. Please provide the extent of each claim, regardless of its likelihood of success.**

RESPONSE

There are currently no lawsuits pending that name the Commission as a party.

**15. Please list all settlements entered into by the Commission or by the District on behalf of the Commission in FY 23 or FY 24, to date, and provide the parties' names, the amount of the settlement, and if related to litigation, the case name and a brief description of the case. If unrelated to litigation, please describe the underlying issue or reason for the settlement (e.g., administrative complaint, etc.).**

RESPONSE

Neither the Commission nor the District on behalf of the Commission has entered into any settlements in FY 23 or FY 24 to date.

COMMISSION ACTIVITY

**16. How many cases of unlawful discrimination were heard by the Commission in FY 23 and in FY 24, to date? Of those, please list the number of cases that alleged discrimination in:**

- a. Employment;**
- b. Real estate transactions;**
- c. Public accommodations;**
- d. Educational institutions;**
- e. Criminal background check; and**
- f. Fair Criminal Records Screening Act.**

RESPONSE

The below chart reflects all cases that were pending with the Commission on Human Rights between October 1, 2023, to January 19, 2024.<sup>1</sup>

	<b>10/1/2023 To 1/19/2024</b>
Employment	14
Real Estate Transactions	7
Public Accommodations	0
Educational Institutions	1
Criminal Background Check	4
Fair Criminal Records Screening Act	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>

**17. In how many cases was an allegation of an unlawful discriminatory practice substantiated by the Commission in FY 23 and FY 24, to date?**

RESPONSE

In FY23 through the first quarter of FY 24, the Commission closed 13 cases as follows:

<b>Disposition</b>	<b># Cases</b>
Approved Settlements	5
Final Order	2
Voluntary Withdrawal	2
Involuntary Dismissal	2
Remand to OHR	1

None of the Commission cases substantiated an allegation of an unlawful discriminatory practice.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Administrative Law Judges adjudicate public sector cases where the final decision is made by the Director of OHR. As of January 19, 2024, there are also 6 public sector cases pending with the Administrative Law Judges.

**18. Please provide a quantitative summary of the types of remedies ordered by the Commission in FY 23, including aggregate amounts of compensatory damages and civil penalties.**

RESPONSE

- Compensatory Damages/Backpay <sup>2</sup>	\$590,450
- Civil Penalty	\$ 0
- Attorney's Fees	\$83,500

**19. How many respondents failed to answer a complaint before the Commission in FY 23 and FY 24, to date?**

RESPONSE

In FY23 and to date there have been no Respondents who failed to answer the complaint.

**20. In how many cases was an order or decision of the Commission appealed in FY 23 and FY 24, to date? In how many of those cases was the order or decision overturned?**

RESPONSE

No decisions of the Commission were appealed or overturned in FY 23 or FY 24, to date.

**21. In how many cases did the Commission certify a matter to another agency due to the failure of a respondent to comply with a Commission order?**

RESPONSE

The Commission has not certified any matters to another agency in FY23 or FY 24 for failure of a respondent to comply with a Commission order.

**22. Please provide an update on the Commission's case processing timelines and the Commission's plans for addressing any remaining workflow challenges.**

RESPONSE:

On average, in FY 23, cases certified to the Commission were closed within 19.5 months (in this context, a case is closed when a Final Decision and Order is issued.) Along these lines, more cases continue to be resolved at the Commission than were certified in FY 23, resulting in a clearance rate of 200% in FY 23. In FY 22, the Commission's clearing rate was 146%. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Commission remains committed to resolving cases efficiently and fully in ways that positively serve the interests of parties. The Commission's case aging rate measures the extent

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<sup>2</sup> The amounts in the settlement agreements are not broken down by back pay and compensatory damages. Rather, the parties generally agree to a lump sum that covers both back pay and compensatory damages.

to which our pending caseload fails to meet our case closure standards. (The target rate for most courts is less than 10% for civil cases.) While our data specifies case closure over an average period of 19.5 months, even in using an abbreviated 15-month standard, our coverage rate in FY 23 was: 29% for Quarter 1; 21% for Quarter 2; 31% for Quarter 3; and 52% for Quarter 3. Importantly, this rate increased over time and is skewed, due to the Commission closing its oldest and second oldest cases in FY 23. These cases were pending 93-months and 63-months respectively for many extraordinary reasons.

Although there may be perceived “delays” in the adjudication process, they are not due to the case processing; rather, they are due to the parties’ actions. The discovery process in some cases can take a substantial amount of time, which we are trying to reduce through disputes resolution and other services; in addition, there is a high rate of requests for continuances and extension of time from attorneys representing the parties. The Commission, with the leadership of the Chief ALJ, Acting Chair, and Director of OHR, is preparing Commission Orders which will decrease delays caused by discovery.

Moving forward, the Commission maintains its commitment to not only fairly and thoroughly resolving cases, but also—as set forth above—looking for and addressing workflow challenges if and when they arise.

### **23. Please describe any current threats to ALJ retention and job satisfaction.**

#### RESPONSE

As stated previously, threats to ALJ retention are low pay and having two ALJs instead of three.

The Commission is supported by OHR ALJ’s, who are non-Union employees. The ALJs believe their pay pales in comparison to other unionized judges with similar duties. For example, in FY 22, a Grade 9 ALJ in the District’s Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), who is a Union employee, earned a salary of \$176,642. In contrast, one of the Commission’s ALJ’s is currently a Grade 14 Step 7, with a salary of \$131,138. Even more compelling, in FY 22, a Grade 14 Step 7 attorney for D.C. Government, who was in the Union, earned a salary of \$151,575, which is \$20,000 more than a judge.

Prior to 2019, the Commission was staffed with three ALJs. Since 2019, there have been only two ALJs at the Commission. The Commission’s current caseload, however, remains comparable to the pre-2019 caseload managed by three ALJs; in addition, the ALJs are under an ongoing pressure to reduce the amount of time to adjudicate cases to closure. And the Chief ALJ, in addition to adjudicating cases, serves as the administrative point of contact for the Commissioners and has numerous administrative responsibilities, yet she does not carry a reduced caseload as in other courts.

OHR and the Commission have amicably discussed the above and the Commission hopes that OHR will take note of the salary discrepancies and take appropriate action to ensure fair compensation for the ALJs. To relieve the ALJs of their excessive administrative duties, the

Commission will take on additional record keeping, onboarding, internal communication, and other administrative responsibilities; in addition, OHR has also offered to explore additional human resources, such as contractors and law clerks to ease the pressure on ALJs' caseload management.

**24. Please describe the status of the Commission's case management systems, including any changes to those systems made in FY 23 and FY 24, to date, and any outstanding needs or deficiencies with those systems.**

RESPONSE

The Commission's Case Management System (CMS) was created in 2014 by Synergy International Systems. In 2020, the CMS was migrated from Synergy's servers to OCTO's server because it was cost prohibitive for Synergy to continue hosting the system on its servers since they do not have other local clients. As a result, there are additional costs to have Synergy maintain the system on OCTO's servers including maintenance and security patches as well as technical support to the Commission and ALJs. Synergy has upgraded its CMS to a new more advanced platform and the Commission is not its only client still using the existing system. As such, there is very little support for the system and OHR recently paid \$10,000 to implement some upgrades to the existing system. However, the cost of migrating to Synergy's new platform (more than \$100,000) is cost prohibitive particularly in light of the number of cases before the Commission. OHR is currently in the process of searching for a new case management system for the entire agency. As part of this procurement, OHR seeks to have the Commission included in the new CMS so that two separate systems will not be necessary. The Commission supports this initiative.

**25. Please describe the Commission's public education efforts in FY 23 and FY 24 to date. Please explain any barriers identified to conducting this outreach.**

RESPONSE:

**a. The Commission's Outlook on Outreach**

The Commission considers its outreach and educational role of the Commission to be just as important as the Commission's adjudicatory role. Although each Commissioner is generally responsible for outreach, the Outreach Committee was established in FY 22 to act as the Commission's focal point of outreach activities. In FY 23, the Outreach Committee, in collaboration with the Awards Committee, contributed to the success of the human rights award ceremony. Looking forward, the Commission and the Outreach Committee can benefit from a more systematic planning process so that the outreach and educational activities are sustained throughout the year. Under the new leadership of the Outreach Committee, the Commission hopes to reexamine the operation and activities of the Outreach Committee and implement new activities in FY 24.

**b. Key Achievements in FY 23 and FY 24 to date**

The Commission's most prominent outreach event takes the form of annual human rights awards given to individuals and organizations that tirelessly pursue human rights protection in the District. In December 2023, the Commission with significant support and coordination by OHR, organized yet another successful Human Rights Awards Celebration (the event name was changed from 'human rights gala' to ensure that it conveys an accessible image to the public). We chose disability as this year's event theme (disability is the third most common basis for discrimination complaints, following race and gender) under the banner of 'Protecting and Celebrating Bodies and Minds of All Abilities' and partnered with three relevant DC agencies to the Office of Disability Rights, the Mayor's Office of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing, and the Department of Behavioral Health. The Commission's main human rights award, the Cornelius Neil Alexander Humanitarian Award, went to Tony Brunswick of Art Enables, the District's only art gallery and studio solely dedicated to amplifying the careers of artists with disabilities. Approximately 100 participants attended the event. We will be gearing up our planning for this year's human rights award ceremony to ensure yet another successful event in December 2024.

In FY 23, OHR took steps to formalize the 'Youth Human Rights Ambassadors' program by allocating staff and resources to work with young persons and youth organizations to spread awareness of human rights issues, especially those occurring in young persons' lives. In FY 24, the Commission plans to designate one or more Commissioners to act as a counterpart to this program to support educational outreach toward young persons.

In addition, the Commission enjoyed other opportunities in FY 23 to be represented in human rights gatherings to explain the DCHRA. For example, the chair of the Commission participated in a three-day conference on Human Rights Cities Leadership Summit in Atlanta in May and spoke out in a panel discussion on how DCHRA is administered in the District. In August, the Commission's Chief Administrative Judge participated in the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IOHRA) annual conference in Bethesda and presented well-received sessions on Adjudicating Human Rights Complaints. In both cases, the Commission received consistently positive feedback from participants on the advanced state of human rights legislation and adjudication in the District. The Commission also enjoyed participating in a meeting of international human rights advocates brought together by the State Department's Distinguished Humphries Fellows program and exchanging information about what official human rights organizations around the world are doing to improve human rights in the respective jurisdictions.

Finally, in FY 23, the Commission formalized its public meetings policy as part of its effort to be more open to the members of the public and encourage exchange of views.

### **c. Constraints**

Occasionally, the Commission's outreach activities are constrained by a lack of funds, as it has no independent budget and is entirely dependent on OHR for financial support. The Commission does not fundraise to avoid any potential conflict of interest that may arise

and interfere with its adjudicatory role. In addition, certain outreach events are dependent on OHR human resources, such as training to prepare Commissioners for interacting with the public.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the Commission was able to deliver its FY 23 education and outreach activities, thanks to the efforts of those Commissioners who stepped up and helped make the activities possible as volunteers, and in some cases generously paying for certain expenses out of pocket. We also acknowledge OHR's financial support for the annual human rights awards ceremony and OHR staff who generously contributed their time and knowledge to the event.