

# Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities



## *At a Glance*

**TANYA A. HUGHES, Executive Director**

**Cheryl A. Sharp, Deputy, Director**

**Established – 1943**

**Statutory Authority – CGS Chapter 814c**

**Central office – 450 Columbus Blvd, Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103**

**Website – [www.portalct.gov/chro](http://www.portalct.gov/chro)**

**Toll free telephone - (800) 477-5737**

**TDD – (860) 541-3459**

**2019 - 2020 Budget: \$6,289,530**

**(\$5,761,999 in Personal Services; \$274,617 in Other Expenses)**

**Number of positions filled - 72 full-time;**

**Authorized positions - 84 full-time.**

***Organizational structure:* Nine-member commission establishes policy; Executive Director manages administrative office and four regional offices; and, independent Human Rights Referees hear contested cases.**

## **Mission**

The mission of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities is to eliminate discrimination through civil and human rights law enforcement and to establish equal opportunity and justice for all within the state through advocacy and education.

## **Statutory Responsibility**

The statutory responsibility of the Commission is to:

- Eliminate illegal discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and credit transactions through education and law enforcement;
- Monitor contract compliance laws and small contractor set-aside provisions by state agencies, contractors and subcontractors;
- Review and monitor state agency affirmative action plans and compliance with laws requiring affirmative action and equal opportunity in state government; and
- Establish equal opportunity and justice for all persons in Connecticut through education and outreach.

### **Public Service**

The Commission is headed by a policy-making body consisting of nine members. Five of the members are appointed by the Governor and four are appointed by the leadership of the General Assembly. All new appointments require legislative approval through the advice and consent of the House and Senate. The Commission conducts regular monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of the month. The Commission conducts special meetings as it deems necessary.

Eight Commissioners were serving at the end of the fiscal year. They were Chairperson Cherron Payne, Secretary Edward Mambruno, and Commissioners Andrew Norton, Edith Pestana, Joseph Suggs, Lisa Giliberto, Nicholas Kapoor and Neeta Vatti. Currently, one vacancy remains unfilled.

An Executive Director appointed by the Commission oversees the operations of the agency. Executive Director Tanya Hughes was appointed Interim Executive Director on July 13, 2013 and appointed to a four-year term on November 17, 2013. She was re-appointed to a second four-year term in November 2017. The agency's administrative office, also located in Hartford, houses the Office of the Executive Director, Tanya Hughes, the Office of the Deputy Director, Cheryl Sharp, the Legal Division, Charles Krich, Principal Attorney, the Affirmative Action and Contract Compliance Unit, the Fair Housing Unit and the Office of Public Hearings. There are also four regional offices located in Hartford, Bridgeport, Norwich and Waterbury.

The Commission met on the following dates during FY 2019- 2020: 7/10/2019; 8/14/2019; 9/11/2019; 9/18/2019 (Special Meeting); 10/9/2019; 11/13/2019; 12/11/2019; 1/08/2019; 2/19/2020; 3/11/2020; 4/15/2020; 5/10/2020; (no June meeting). The Commission voted on 41 state agency Affirmative Action plans; 6 Requests to Re-Open; 2 Requests for Declaratory Rulings; 15 Housing Election Cases; and 5 Contract Compliance Requests for Exemption. Meeting agendas and minutes can be accessed at the CHRO website [www.PortalCT.Gov](http://www.PortalCT.Gov).

### **Martin Luther King, Jr Commission:**

By statute, the Commission serves as the secretariat for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission (MLK). The State of CT Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission was established in 1986 to ensure that the commemoration of Dr. King's birthday is meaningful and reflective of the spirit with which he lived and the struggles for which he died. The purpose of the statewide Commission is to unify and educate communities within the State of Connecticut and encourage meaningful observations, ceremonies, and activities in commemoration of the federal holiday and state legal holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. throughout the towns, cities, school districts, counties, and local government within Connecticut.

The MLK Commission, with assistance from the CHRO, sponsored the 32nd annual awards event commemorating the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 20, 2020 from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission met weekly from October 2019 through January 10, 2020 to finalize plans for the January 20, 2020 Bell Ringing and Awards Ceremony. Festivities included a continental breakfast, served at 10 a.m., an awards program at 11 a.m. and the Liberty Bell Ringing was rung at noon. The event was free and open to the public with attendance of individuals from across the state, as well as Governor Ned Lamont, Constitutional officers and other state officials. This celebration is held annually in

remembrance of Dr. King's efforts towards the advancement of civil rights. This year's awards were presented to the following individuals:

Leadership Award — Theophilus "Ted" Meekins, Bridgeport

Humanitarian Award — Phil Gordon, Hartford

Community Service Award — Jaylee Caries, Manchester

Distinguished Service Award — CT Youth Forum.

The annual budget for this commission is \$5,977.

### **Improvements/ Achievements 2019- 2020**

Under the direction of Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp, our education and outreach activities continue to flourish with a heightened focus on training, and providing analysis related to the #TimesUp and the new laws to strengthen sexual harassment training in the private and public sectors. In the 2019 legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed Public Acts 19-16 and 19-93, which together constitute the Time's Up Act. It made multiple changes to the CHRO statutes. Among other changes to the CHRO process, this legislation established new rules and requirements regarding sexual harassment training and education. These provisions and requirements went into effect October 1, 2019. The language, which applies to employers which have three or more employees, includes:

- Employers are required to provide to a new employee a copy of information regarding the illegality of sexual harassment and remedies available to victims.
- Employers were required to provide all existing employees with two hours of training by October 1, 2020.
- Employers were required to provide two hours of training and education to new employees hired on or after October 1, 2019 within six months of their start date.
- Employers with fewer than three employees must provide two hours of training and education to all existing supervisory employees by October 1, 2020 or within six months to new supervisory employees.
- Employers must provide periodic supplemental training not less than every ten years.

The Time's Up Act requires the CHRO to post information concerning sexual harassment and remedies available. The CHRO is currently in the process of developing and updating these materials and will make them available as they are completed.

The Act also required the agency to develop an online training and education video and to make that available to employers at no cost. The CHRO successfully completed this project and made the video available to the public via the CHRO website by October 1, 2019 when the training requirements became effective for employers.

As of August 31, 2020, over 125,000 certificates have been issued. This is currently the best metric we have, but it does not represent the full number of people who had completed the training. Several large organizations have incorporated the training into their own learning management systems which would qualify as taking our training but would not result in a certificate. The number of certificates also does not capture those who may have taken the training in a group setting and had their completion recorded internally without needing a CHRO

certificate afterward. While the number of certificates is therefore the most accurate number we can provide to measure how many people have taken the training, it is important to keep in mind that the true number is significantly higher. Specifically, it does not take into account those who took it in a group training or those who took it internally and did not request a receipt

### **The Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities and the Covid-19 Pandemic**

On March 13, 2020, all in person meetings and hearings with the CHRO and the Office of Public Hearings were cancelled, and operations became electronic and telephonic. Mediations or fact-finding conferences begun taking place over the phone or via video conferencing where possible.

In accordance with the Governor’s Executive Order No. 7F, in which he ordered that “any requirement for in-person meeting, hearing or screening is waived and meetings, hearings, or screenings may take place by any other method that allows for the participation of the interested parties;” Executive Order No. 7M, authorizing agency heads to “...extend, as they deem reasonably necessary to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic or its effects, any statutory or regulatory time requirements, decision-making requirements, hearings, or other time limitations or deadlines, procedure or legal process pertaining to matters under their respective jurisdiction...;” and Executive Order No.7H in which he ordered restrictions on the workplaces of non-essential businesses until at least April 22, 2020 the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities issued the following orders regarding:

Extension Requests

Notarization and Signature Requirements

Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Requirements

Affirmative Action/Contract Compliance requirements

#### **COVID-19 RELATED EXECUTIVE ORDERS FROM GOV. LAMONT**

Governor Lamont issued a number of executive orders related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The following orders are of particular importance for the concerns of the CHRO:

- Executive Order 7X: Puts in place protections for renters and those in vulnerable housing circumstances.
- Executive Order 7DDD: Agencies can provide 90-day extensions to October 1, 2020 deadlines if the request is received by September 9, 2020.

CHRO established a [Questions.CHRO@ct.gov](mailto:Questions.CHRO@ct.gov) email address to address concerns related to COVID-19, sexual harassment and others. This account is managed by the legal department and the calls are dispersed to other units as needed. Direct links were established to address the following topics:

- Affirmative Action and Contract Compliance Requirements During Covid
- Extension Requests During Covid
- Notarization Requirements During Covid
- Fair Housing and Covid
- Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Requirements During Covid

## Information Reported as Required by Statute

The following reports were required to be submitted to the Governor, General Assembly and Judiciary Committee by September 1, 2020. They were timely filed electronically on August 28, 2020 to the designated authorities.

- Annual Report to the Connecticut Judiciary Committee pursuant to CONN. GEN. STATUTE Sec. 46a-82e
- Annual Report to the Connecticut General Assembly (Contract Compliance and Small and Minority Owned Business Utilization FY 2019/20)
- Annual Report to the Connecticut General Assembly (Affirmative Action Plan Data Report FY 2020)
- CHRO Annual Case processing Report
- State Agency SBE/MBE Attainment Goals FY 19/20

## CHRO COVID-19 INFORMATIONAL WEBINARS

The CHRO hosted a series of live webinars to provide information about discrimination as it relates to the pandemic. This will be an opportunity for the public to ask questions of CHRO staff and get immediate responses.

April 21, 2020	CHRO Processing and the Covid-19 Pandemic
April 28, 2020	Discrimination, Education, and the Covid-19 Pandemic <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CSDE Special Education Website</li><li>• CPAC's FAQs for Families</li><li>• CT State Dept. of Education Covid-19 Resources Page</li></ul>
May 5, 2020	Discrimination, Education and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Special Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentation and Resources</li></ul>
May 12, 2020	Discrimination, Education and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Racial Disparities <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SERC Covid-19 Resources Vol. 4</li><li>• Online Learning and Other Resources for the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic</li><li>• Assistive Technology for Distance Learning Library Guide</li><li>• Information regarding PA 19-12</li></ul>
Aug 20, 2020	Surviving the Pandemic: Employment, Unemployment, Wages and Tips
Aug 31, 2020	Housing and the Pandemic <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Desegregate CT</li><li>• New Haven Legal Assistance Association</li></ul>

CHRO was awarded approximately a \$49,000 grant from OMP for COVID-related items.

**Complaints Against Agency Heads and Affirmative Action Officers:** Pursuant to CONN. GEN. STAT. § 46a-68(b)(4)(B), the Commission receives any complaint alleging that the executive head of a state agency or department, any member of a state board or commission or any affirmative action officer engaged in discriminatory conduct to determine whether it should

be forwarded to the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) for investigation. If the complaint is filed against DAS, the Commission conducts the investigation. The purpose of this legislation was to eliminate the conflict that may arise if an affirmative action officer has to investigate allegations against his/her supervisor, as EEOs report directly to the appointing authority. In this fiscal year, the Commission has not received or forwarded any such complaints to DAS.

**Diversity and Education:** The Diversity & Inclusion committee was established during FY 2017-2018. In furtherance of our mission, the D&I committee drafted its own mission statement wherein the “Commission pledges to foster a culture committed to affirming the identities of all people, embracing and accepting their differences, hearing their voices, and acknowledging their contributions.

The Commission is committed to growth and is open to new ideas. We recognize that achieving our mission is an ongoing process. Therefore, we will continue to assess our policies, practices, and office environment to ensure we can best serve our colleagues and the people of Connecticut.”

To fulfill our mission, we have identified the following goals:

- Implementing practices designed to identify and eradicate implicit bias
- Advancing diversity and inclusion within our agency
- Respecting the diversity of the public whom we serve
- Developing cultural competency as wide-ranging as our constituencies
- Improving vertical access to information
- Fostering mentorship and positive pipelines for the next generation of civil rights leaders
- Maintaining vigilance to the needs of our citizens
- Continuing the advancement of civil rights
- Collaborating with organizations with whom we have shared goals
- Providing comprehensive outreach to Connecticut residents

CHRO Diversity and Inclusion Committee Members:

Hughes, Tanya	Committee Chair, Executive Director
Walker-Smith, Jody	Committee Co-Chair, Legal Division
Chao, Patrick	Eastern Region Office
Dryfe, Cynthia	Housing Discrimination Unit
Guadalupe, Arnaldo	Capital Region Office, Hartford
Kent, David	Legal Division
Kohut, Jessica	Southwest Region Office
Morris, Kimberly	Office of Public Hearings
Perry, Charles	Legal Division
Roberts, Michael E.	Legal Division
Wheeler, Lori	West Central Region Office
Yeomans, Jennifer	Affirmative Action/Contract Compliance Unit

**Federal Revenue:**

The CHRO has workshare agreements with both the Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). For every complaint dual-

filed with both the CHRO and either EEOC or HUD, the federal government remits payment to the CHRO to process and investigate the complaint on their behalf. To ensure fair and impartial processing, this money is not contingent on the outcome of the complaint. As a result of this arrangement, approximately 22% of the commission's budget is covered by federal vouchers for case processing. This revenue is directly deposited into the General Fund. In FY 2019-2020, the CHRO vouchered for \$1,193,430 from the EEOC for case processing and \$118,458 from HUD for case processing. An additional \$15,000 grant was received from HUD plus another \$7,795 from HUD for training and travel. Additional funding was obtained from HUD to a part-time Office Assistant in the Fair Housing Unit to assist with administrative tasks in support of investigations. This hire was eventually converted to a full-time position. As a result, CHRO was able to improve its performance in the area of completing the Housing investigations within the prescribed 100-day timeframe. During the biannual performance review, of the sample files selected for audit, performance improved from 39% closed within 100 days during the prior review period to the current rate of 71% closed within 100 days.

**Public Hearings:** The Office of Public Hearings (OPH) conducts contested case proceedings in discrimination cases brought by the Commission and in whistleblower retaliation cases filed with the Chief Human Rights Referee pursuant to CONN. GEN. STAT. § 4-61dd. The average number of cases pending litigation at OPH continued to show increase in FY 2019 - 2020, ending with the highest number of pending cases in recent history at over 170 cases. This remains largely due to an extended vacancy in referee appointments. This division operates autonomously and is slated to consist of three appointed referees. It is significant to note that one of the positions has remained vacant since June of 2014. Current CHRO Referees include Chief Referee Michelle Mount and Alissa Wright. Currently, a vacancy remains. Unless the third vacancy is filled, cases will continue to languish at public hearing and become severely aged.

## **2019 Legislative Session Summary**

The CHRO testified on 29 bills this session and kept a close eye on several dozen more. While we were supportive of many of those bills, there were also a number with which we had serious concerns. We submitted public hearing testimony and discussed our concerns with legislators and staff, and ultimately none of the more problematic bills passed. Five of the bills that we supported did pass into law, though sometimes in different forms than when we had testified on them in committee.

- PA 19-141 (HB 6666): An Act Requiring the Prompt Payment of Contractors
- PA 19-12 (HB 7082): An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Black and Latino Studies in the Public-School Curriculum
- PA 19-27 (SB 58): An Act Concerning Gay and Transgender Panic Defense
- PA 19-94 (SB 857): An Act Concerning Expedited Approval of Affirmative Action Plans Submitted by Contractors to the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities
- PA 19-69 (SB 359): An Act Extending Whistleblower Protections to Employees of Businesses Receiving Financial Assistance from the State

CHRO provided public testimony for Bill 6004: An Act Concerning Police Accountability, and as a result, now serves on the Logistics Subcommittee for the Police Training & Accountability Task Force under the chairmanship of Rep. Joshua Hall.

## **Freedom of Information**

The Commission takes seriously its responsibility to comply with the provisions of the state's Freedom of Information Act. The Legal Division is responsible for responding to all freedom of information (FOI) requests, except those received directly in a regional office requesting a file being processed by that office. The Legal Division also responds to subpoenas for documents and testimony related to agency procedures and documents. Support staff handles most requests; complex requests and hearings are referred to the Executive Director. The Executive Director ensures that all regular and special Commission meetings are properly noticed and filed with the Office of the Secretary of State in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act.

Additional Information: Individuals seeking more information about the Commission, the laws it enforces or its services and programs are encouraged to contact the Commission's website (<http://www.portalct.gov/chro>) or call our toll-free number (800) 477-5737.



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. HOLIDAY COMMISSION  
450 COLUMBUS BOULEVARD. HARTFORD, CT 06103

## CONTACT

450 Columbus Blvd.  
Hartford, CT 06103  
[dcampersonal@gmail.com](mailto:dcampersonal@gmail.com)  
860.218.4420

## GOVERNOR NED LAMONT

GOVERNOR • ST. OF CT • 210 CAPITOL AVENUE • HARTFORD. CT

August 31, 2020

Dear Governor Lamont,

I am pleased to present the annual report of the State of Connecticut Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission for the year to June 30 2020. It outlines the collaborative work of our Commissioners and individuals across the state.

Congratulations to you and your staff for a successful first year in office! Covid-19 continues to impact the state; however, your leadership has helped to decrease the anxiety of Connecticut's residents in this time of immense change. Your administration has been in the forefront of creating new possibilities, while making public safety a priority for a better outcome in combating the virus.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue providing meaningful initiatives for our communities that align with the mission statement. The Commission continues to meet the challenges of keeping Dr. King's dream alive until it becomes a reality!

Sincerely,

Donna E. Campbell, Chair



EMAIL



TWITTER HANDLE



LINKEDIN URL

TELEPHONE

"LET FREEDOM RING"

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MLK

2019 ANNUAL REPORT  
State of Connecticut  
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.  
HOLIDAY COMMISSION



**The State of CT Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission was established in 1986 to ensure that the commemoration of Dr. King's birthday is meaningful and reflective of the spirit with which he lived and the struggles for which he died. The purpose of the statewide Commission is to unify and educate communities within the State of Connecticut and encourage meaningful observations, ceremonies, and activities in commemoration of the federal holiday and state legal holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. throughout the towns, cities, school districts, counties, and local government within Connecticut.**

**The following events are highlights of some of the activities of the State of Connecticut Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission during fiscal year July 2019 through June 30, 2020.**

Attended the play "The Scottsboro Boys" and a panel discussion that followed regarding the relevance of the play in 2019. A discussion generated about the importance of Dr. Martin Luther King's commitment to justice and equality and its impact on today's society. Attended an exhibit and a panel discussion on the impact of racism in the community, at the CT Historical Society, Hartford.

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Attended a Community Group Discussion of the New York Times 1619 Project — "We've Got to Tell the Unvarnished Truth" was held at a residence in Farmington, CT.

Held Voter Registration drives in the following towns:

New London

Hartford

Manchester

New Britain

Waterbury

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission met weekly from October 2019 through January 10, 2020 to finalize plans for the January 20, 2020 Bell Ringing and Awards Ceremony. In addition, the following meetings were held throughout the fiscal year:

Met with Commissioner Chair, James Williams and Vice Chair Donna Campbell, to discuss the transition of leadership of the commission; curtailing the process of appointing new Commissioners; and creating a rough draft of plans for the 2020 Bell Ringing and Awards Celebration.

Conference call with Ben Arsenault, Deputy COO at the office of the Honorable Ned Lamont re: Commissioner Appointments for eight individuals, including three who have been on hold for over twelve months.

Met with James Williams, Commission Chair, to review resumes of individuals who expressed an interest in becoming Commissioners.

A Commission Meeting was held to meet and greet individuals who had submitted applications to the State of CT for approval to become Commissioners for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission.

**The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission is making the following three {3} recommendations for the next fiscal year:**

**Website Update**

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission is recommending that the MLK Holiday Commission website be updated from its current outdated look to a more updated look that is easy to navigate on multiple devices. It would also be a source of information about statewide MLK commemoration activities and events. The main objective is to have a website that is attractive, easy to navigate, and consistently updated.

**Dr. MLK, Jr. Holiday Commission Brochure**

A committee has been established to create a brochure that will be distributed statewide to community organizations, places of worship, and municipalities in the state to inform them of the Commission's objectives.

**Dr. MLK Holiday Commission Statewide Speakers Bureau**

The Commission recommends a statewide Speakers Bureau consisting of five {5} Commissioners to educate and inform the public about the purpose of the Commission's mission to keep Dr. King's dream alive. We have already received requests for Commissioners to speak at various MLK and Black History Month programs throughout the state.

**The following individuals have been appointed as Commissioners to the State of Connecticut Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission:**

Dr. Stacey Brown

Mr. Seth Freeman

Dr. Steven Hoffler

Elder Ashley "A.J. Johnson

Mr. Bobby Ramos

Ms. Kristen Shorter

Ms. Mandy Wenis

**January 20, 2020**

The State of Connecticut Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission held its 34<sup>th</sup> Annual National Liberty Bell Ringing and Awards Celebration on Monday, January 20, 2020, at the State Capitol, Hartford. This is a public event with attendance of individuals from across the state, as well as Governor Ned Lamont, Constitutional officers and other state officials. This celebration is held annually in

remembrance of Dr. King's efforts towards the advancement of civil rights. This year's awards were presented to the following individuals:

**Leadership Award — Theophilus "Ted" Meekins, Bridgeport**

**Humanitarian Award — Phil Gordon, Hartford**

**Community Service Award — Jaylee Caries, Manchester**

**Distinguished Service Award — CT Youth Forum**

Commissioners Bobby Ramos, Kristen Shorter, and Ms. Rose Blackwell were presented with awards of recognition for their untiring service and dedication to the Dr. MLK Holiday Commission during its transition period. The entire Commission is grateful to these three individuals for their leadership and commitment in keeping Dr. King's dream alive.

### **The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission Celebrates February Black History Month**

During February's commemoration of Black History Month, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission continues to have a presence and a voice at various community celebrations, commemorations, and events, which emphasize the importance of human rights.

**Presenter at Souls to the Polls Black History Celebration at the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, Hartford. Black History Celebration, Central CT State University, New Britain.**

### **Program Cancellations**

Due to safety guidelines during this pandemic year, the Commission cancelled three events in the community: A February library workshop on the life of Dr. King in Willimantic; A Spoken Word event planned for April in New Haven; and a back to school event in August. Despite some unforeseen challenges, the Commission is proud to highlight some of the accomplishments for this report.













