



**Budget Testimony of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission  
Before the House Judiciary Committee  
Fiscal Years 2026 – 2027  
Angela Phelps-White, Executive Director  
February 12, 2025, at 11:00AM**

Good morning, Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, ranking Member Issacsohn, and members of the Judiciary Committee, on behalf of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, thank you for the opportunity to present this information and highlights regarding the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. My name is Angela Phelps-White, and I am the Executive Director of the agency.

Over six decades ago, the General Assembly took a firm stance against discrimination by enacting the Ohio Civil Rights Act (R.C. Chapter 4112), which led to the creation of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. Since its inception, the Commission, which is a neutral state law enforcement agency, has been entrusted with investigating and resolving discrimination complaints fairly and impartially, while ensuring the law is upheld in all sectors of society.

The Ohio Civil Rights Commission remains dedicated to fostering positive human relations across Ohio's diverse communities by enforcing the statutory mandates established by the General Assembly. Through its work, the Commission ensures that every Ohioan has equal access to opportunities, free from unlawful discrimination. We are a fair, neutral agency commissioned to serve all Ohioans, because everyone has a right to be treated fairly, and it is our purpose to assess and enforce the law when they have been violated.

As Ohio's primary civil rights enforcement agency, the Commission investigates complaints alleging unlawful discriminatory practices in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, and disability in higher education. When necessary, the Commission pursues legal action to hold violators accountable and protect individuals from discriminatory treatment.

The Commission's investigative process provides an efficient and cost-effective alternative to litigation, offering a resource for individuals to seek justice without the burden and cost of a formal court case.

To further assist parties in resolving disputes, the Commission offers mediation services, which also provide an impartial, lower-cost alternative to litigation. Mediation is a highly effective tool, with approximately 80% of cases resulting in voluntary, mutually agreed settlements. On average, mediation cases are processed within 45 days, offering a quicker resolution for individuals alleging discrimination. However, cases can be mediated anytime throughout the investigatory process.

The Ohio Civil Rights Commission remains steadfast in its mission. In FY2022, the Commission secured more than \$4.8 Million in monetary relief for victims of discrimination, and in FY2023 and 2024, this amount increased to over \$10.3 Million.

In a continued effort to manage the caseload within the prescribed timeline in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code, the Commission instituted a case management system in June of 2023. With this new system, members of the public can conveniently file charges online and the Commission can maintain its case files electronically, which saves time in processing. The case management system also assists investigators in performing their tasks more efficiently. Most importantly, the Commission can gather data and prepare reports that are useful to advocacy groups, legislators, as well as to other state entities.

To provide a snapshot of FY2023, the Commission received 6,395 case filings, marking a record 54.50% increase from the prior year. This trend continued into FY2024, with case filings rising to 7,779.

To address this significant rise in case filings, the Commission adjusted its budget and requested permission to hire more full-time employees (FTEs). With the already established resources, the Commission expanded its workforce from 84, including Commissioners, to 92. As a result, we have been able to reduce the average caseload per investigator from approximately 240 cases to approximately 189 cases. Despite the increase in staffing, the rising number of cases continues to be a challenge. Staff caseloads remain high, reflecting the sustained demand for the Commission's service.

However, with the new case management system and the streamlining of investigations, the Commission will continue to work diligently to process the daunting number of cases and at the same time preserve the efficiency and integrity in the investigation process.

Despite the high caseloads, the Commission's staff put forth a great deal of time and effort into each case to ensure that when the Commissioners make a decision it is an informed decision. The investigators conduct thorough investigations, which include speaking with the parties and any pertinent witnesses, reviewing all documents submitted to corroborate each party's position and preparing reports to the Commissioners inclusive of a recommendation. In some instances, upon request, the cases are reconsidered which triggers a second investigation to address the issues raised upon reconsideration.

Beyond investigations and legal enforcement, the Commission is committed to education and outreach. The agency offers free training sessions to businesses, organizations, and individuals to promote awareness of the Ohio Revised Code 4112 and encourages voluntary compliance. These initiatives are crucial in fostering positive environments with an attempt to prevent discrimination before it occurs. Each year, the Commission sponsors two privately funded public events that celebrate Ohio's compilation in civil rights history: The Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame, now in its 17th year, honors individuals who have made groundbreaking contributions to civil rights in Ohio; the Martin Luther King, Jr., Art, Essay, and Multimedia Contest, with a ceremony, to inspire and encourage young Ohioans to express their understanding of civil rights through creative works; and the Ohio Civil Rights Academy, which launched in 2023, and has grown into a key educational resource for attorneys, human resource professionals, teachers. The Academy offers an opportunity to understand the mission and processes of the Commission.

## **EXECUTIVE GRF RECOMMENDATION**

To expound on the Commission's budget, the executive recommendation for the general revenue fund (GRF) for the Commission in FY2026 is \$7,464,880 which is a 4.08% increase and in FY2027 a 4% increase totaling \$7,763,235. The recommended budget allows the Commission to maintain its current staffing levels. The proposed budget highlights the Commission's largest expenditure category, which is staffing, making up 78% of the total expenses. This consistent growth indicates that personnel costs remain a priority for the Commission. With the demands of the high caseloads, the Commission will continue to make the necessary adjustments to absorb all charges filed and to ensure that the integrity of the handling of these cases is maintained.

## **FEDERAL FUNDING**

Our Federal partnerships reflect stable funding. Federal funding remains a key component for the Commission's budget. Overall, there is a reliance on the federal contributions in order to sustain our budget predictions.

Without these federal reserves or an increase in the GRF funds, the Commission would not be able to complete thorough and effective investigations while maintaining the statutory requirement to complete all investigations within a year. In addition, it would hamper the commission's ability to satisfy the contractual requirements with our federal partners.

The Civil Rights Commission will continue a balanced approach to budgeting, ensuring stable funding operationally.

## **SUMMARY**

In closing, the Commission continues to move forward with advancements that will provide the best customer service, as it carries out its statutory duties and responsibilities imposed by the Ohio Civil Rights Act making the Commission a valuable resource for the state as a whole.

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, ranking Member Issacson, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I am happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have regarding the Ohio Civil Rights Commission.

Thank you,

Angela Phelps-White