



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
April 12, 2024

Media Contact:
Alejandra Lopez, The Legal Aid Society, ailopez@legal-aid.org

ADVOCATES LAUD CITY COUNCIL DECISION TO RESTORE CRITICAL FUNDING TO THE NYC COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

*City Council has sent the Mayor an important message: it is time to act to save
the City Commission on Human Rights*

*Advocates Call on Mayor to adopt their recommendation in the Executive
Budget*

NEW YORK: The New York Human Rights Law Working Group lauds the New York City Council for including essential funding for the NYC Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) in its response to the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget. Advocates called on Mayor Eric Adams to join the Council in recognizing the crisis at CCHR and adopt the Council recommendation.

"The Council is committed to protecting the rights of all New Yorkers, especially those in vulnerable communities. That's why we are pushing to restore critical funding to the NYC Commission on Human Rights in response to the Mayor's proposed cuts. The CCHR must be able to address discrimination and hate in employment, housing, and public accommodations. As a Co-Chair of the new Task Force to Combat Hate, this is a critical priority for me as we move towards the new fiscal year," said **Council Member Shahana Hanif**.

CCHR is the sole agency tasked with protecting low-income New Yorkers from discrimination. CCHR plays a vital role in addressing discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. When adequately funded, its early intervention unit has successfully resolved issues that could have led to significant hardships, and even homelessness. However, without sufficient funding, its ability to carry out this critical mission is severely compromised. All New Yorkers are and will continue to experience the cost of its absence.

"We are proud that the City Council has included restored CCHR funding in our official budget response. This funding is necessary to building and maintaining the fair and just city we deserve,

where the dignity of every New Yorker is prioritized and protected,” said **Council Member Chi Ossé**.

"Restoring essential funding for the NYC Commission on Human Rights is critical. This commission stands as a guardian for the most vulnerable New Yorkers, tirelessly working to protect them from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. The work they do is not just a service but a cornerstone of justice and equality in our city. I look forward to working with Speaker Adams, Council Member Williams and my colleagues to ensure the FY25 budget reflects our shared commitment to upholding fundamental rights for everyone. Let's invest in fairness and dignity for all," **said Council Member Erik Bottcher**

We support the Council and its call to increase the Commission’s budget with an additional \$4.4 million. Council’s proposal to fund CCHR at \$18 million in Fiscal 2025 would restore the budget for the Commission’s Law Enforcement Bureau to its pre-pandemic level and provide necessary funds to enforce the Fair Chance for Housing Act, starting on January 1, 2025, when it takes effect. **We call on the Mayor to join Council in reinvesting in the Commission.**

"The Council is ready to reinvest in the NYC Commission on Human Rights to protect low-income New Yorkers. As we expand access to FHEPS vouchers and implement the Fair Chance for Housing Act, the Commission must have the staff capacity to prevent discrimination against formerly incarcerated New Yorkers and New Yorkers depending on a voucher to access housing," **said Council Member Lincoln Restler**.

The Commission’s headcount has plummeted over time while its responsibilities have grown. We agree with the Council: now is the time to act to rebuild. We know all too well how understaffing can contribute to homelessness, unemployment, and other harmful effects.

"As more New Yorkers are experiencing homelessness, displacement, and discrimination it is more critical than ever that we ensure the NYC Commission on Human Rights has the resources it needs to protect our communities," said **Council Member Sandy Nurse**.

Underfunding at the Commission hurts New Yorkers like **Nycole-Lanyse Jaqcques, a member of Unlock NYC Leadership Collective, who said** “In November 2022, I received my CityFHEPS voucher to assist me with future rent. From the winter of 2022 until the summer of 2023, I viewed and applied to dozens of apartments throughout New York City. Unfortunately, during my search, I experienced a lot of discrimination because I was a voucher recipient. After discovering Unlock NYC in December 2022, I was able to report the discrimination I faced through their platform to CCHR. On January 30, 2023, I was contacted by CCHR's Law Enforcement Bureau letting me know I would receive an appointment. Four months later, in April, I received an email about an in-person meeting scheduled for August of 2023. I was only able to submit a complaint in November 2023. After that, I didn't hear from the Commission for six months. They still have not resolved my complaint. ***It has been almost a year and a half since I first reported voucher discrimination to CCHR, and I still remain unhoused.***”

Unfortunately, for New Yorkers like Nycole-Lanyse Jacques, the Commission's staffing levels have resulted in extraordinary delays. These delays are costly for the City and its residents. We hope the Mayor will join Council in recognizing that the Commission must have more staff to ensure it is meeting the needs of the City's most vulnerable residents.

"The Council is committed to protecting the rights of New Yorkers, and prioritizing critical funding to the City's Commission on Human Rights through our budget response reflects our dedication to ensuring that all residents have access to the resources they need to safeguard their rights and seek justice and accountability. The City Council remains steadfast in our commitment to New Yorkers, rooting out discrimination in all its forms and creating an inclusive and equitable environment for everyone," **said Council Member Pierina Sanchez.**

"Only a properly staffed New York City Commission on Human Rights can enforce our Human Rights Law, educate the public against prejudice and protect New Yorkers. It is vital that the Administration restore the Commission's budget to pre-pandemic levels so that everyone is safeguarded by New York City's comprehensive anti-discrimination laws. I applaud Council Member Williams who will continue to advocate with her colleagues to enhance funding to this essential commission," **said Council Member Julie Menin.**

"The Commission on Human Rights protects all New Yorkers and their right to live free of discrimination, hate, harassment, and prejudice. I was incredibly proud to work closely with CCHR as our city passed landmark legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of height and weight in housing, employment, and accommodations last year, where I got a front row seat to the important duties they carry out every single day. We cannot let understaffing and funding shortfalls undo all the progress CCHR has made in enforcing and safeguarding our rights," **said Council Member Shaun Abreu.** "I applaud Chair Williams for her consistently powerful advocacy and join her in her calls for full investment in CCHR. Our communities deserve nothing less."

Reinvesting in the Commission makes fiscal and moral sense and we are proud to support Council's vision for a more just and equitable New York for all.

"The Commission is in crisis. The Council's response to the Mayor's budget proposal is farsighted, and a step in the right direction which promises to ensure the most vulnerable New Yorkers are able to access the protections of our human rights law," **said Rebekah Cook-Mack, Senior Staff Attorney in the Employment Law Unit at The Legal Aid Society.** "We thank Speaker Adams, Council Member Brennan, and all the Council for identifying CCHR funding in the Council Response. We call on the Mayor to adopt the Council's budget for CCHR and to ensure it can hire experienced attorneys to meet the City's needs."

"We applaud the NYC City Council for calling on the Mayor to invest in the NYC Commission on Human Rights in the FY2025 budget. Every day, we receive numerous reports from New Yorkers with housing vouchers experiencing discrimination in their housing search. The Commission is a critical partner to ensure the viability and effectiveness of housing voucher

programs. Without robust enforcement resources to combat discrimination, housing vouchers lead to dead ends. Investing \$4.4 million in new funding for the Commission - an insignificant rounding error in the City's vast \$106 billion budget - is a game changer for unhoused New Yorkers, and a necessary step towards creating a fair housing landscape in our city," said **Manon Vergerio, Head of Data & Advocacy with Unlock NYC.**

"I have a fully functioning Section 8 voucher, but I couldn't obtain housing for more than 3 years because of source of income discrimination. Without enough staff at CCHR's law enforcement bureau, there won't be enforcement, and the lack of monitoring and accountability will allow illegal discrimination across the city to continue unpunished. As someone who's experienced discrimination firsthand and been kept homeless because of it, I am glad to see the City Council investing in CCHR, and I call on Mayor Adams to do the same," said **Charisma White, a leader with Neighbors Together.**

"Laws are only as good as their enforcement," said **David R. Jones, President and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York.** "With this significant budget increase for the Commission, the Council shows its commitment to fighting discrimination in New York City. The Mayor can and should go further, however. The same constituency that fueled his election – working people – are often victims of discrimination, yet unable to access effective legal assistance. A robust Commission can protect their rights."

###

The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For over 140 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>