

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS**



**Fiscal Year 2027  
Budget Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
**Elizabeth Fox-Solomon**  
Interim Director

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

John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

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1:00 PM



Good afternoon, Chairperson Nadeau, members of the Committee on Public Works and Operations, and Committee staff. I am Elizabeth Fox-Solomon, Interim Director of the DC Office of Human Rights (OHR). I am joined today by our Chief Administrative Officer, Ayanna Lee, and our Agency Fiscal Officer, Adreana Deane. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about Mayor Bowser's proposed FY27 budget.

OHR is the District's civil rights enforcement agency. Our mission is to eradicate discrimination, advance equal opportunity, and protect the human rights of everyone who lives in, works in, studies in, or visits the District. We enforce the DC Human Rights Act—one of the strongest civil rights laws in the nation—along with 14 other local civil rights laws covering housing, workplaces, schools, public accommodations, and government services. In recent years, new laws and amendments have strengthened protections for our residents, while also increasing the demand for the agency's services and the scope and complexity of our work.

As you know, the District is navigating a challenging fiscal environment. Mayor Bowser's proposed FY27 Budget, Grow DC, was formulated with three key considerations in mind: how to drive growth in our economy to fund the services and programs residents count on, how to keep families in DC and attract new residents, and how to create a business environment that draws new investment and creates new jobs. We are navigating a pivotal moment that demands a more deliberate approach to growth. The federal dollars that once expanded our programs in unprecedented ways have been exhausted, and federal workforce reductions have introduced new pressures on our economy and commercial corridors. That being said, it's important to be clear: DC is still growing. Revenues have slowed, but the city maintains a strong financial foundation on which we can build by making the kinds of strategic and targeted decisions that will allow DC to continue growing while delivering the high-quality services our residents depend on.

Within this environment, OHR continues to work tirelessly to advance civil rights and meet rising public demand. Strong and reliable civil rights enforcement supports the District's ability to attract and retain residents, students, workers, and visitors; strengthen neighborhoods; and foster the inclusive, resilient economy envisioned by Grow DC.

Mayor Bowser’s proposed FY27 budget for OHR is approximately \$9.1 million, a 5.4 percent decrease from FY26. As a people-centered agency, nearly 90 percent of our total budget—roughly \$8.1 million—supports our 60 employees, who carry out our core functions of outreach and education, compliance, mediation and enforcement, and adjudication. The remaining \$975,000 in nonpersonnel services funds all other agency operations, including technology, equipment, and contractor support to fill critical staffing gaps and ensure continuity of services.

OHR continues to deliver meaningful results for District residents and businesses. Last fiscal year, we received more than 1,300 discrimination complaints, docketed 430 charges, and conducted 319 mediations. We secured more than \$1.1 million in monetary relief through settlements, final orders, and voluntary compliance agreements. These are real dollars returned to District residents, along with significant public interest relief to prevent future discrimination.

Through our outreach efforts, we connected with more than 4,000 constituents across all eight wards, including 13 events East of the River. Our Language Access Program supported more than 280,000 limited or non-English proficient (LEP/NEP) residents and over 65 covered entities with only two dedicated staff members, helping reduce barriers to vital government services. And our Youth Bullying Prevention Program reached more than 71,000 students, teachers, and parents, helping to build safer, more inclusive learning environments.

OHR also supports the local economy. Last fiscal year, we invested approximately \$430,000 in small and local businesses. The agency’s compliance programs also play a direct role in supporting both workers and businesses. For example, the Care for Seniors Program trained more than 3,000 long-term care facility staff on inclusive practices for LGBTQ+ seniors and seniors living with HIV. The Tipped Wage Program supported 800 businesses and thousands of workers in preventing and addressing sexual harassment, helping improve workplace safety in the hospitality sector. Our Open Movie Captioning and EEO Compliance Programs promote accessibility and equal opportunity across the District.

And the need for OHR’s services continues to grow. As federal priorities shift, more residents are turning to OHR for help. Last fiscal year, our main phone line received 61,000 calls and our general

inbox received 47,000 emails from people seeking information or assistance from OHR. So far in FY26, we have already received nearly 900 new discrimination complaints and are on track to receive approximately 1,400 by year's end. We are currently managing more than 1,000 open cases—including over 650 pending intakes, 400 in the ADR Unit, and 500 in investigation—supported by six intake officers, two mediators, and 10 investigators.

To meet this growing demand, OHR is implementing a new case management system to modernize workflows and improve tracking and reporting capabilities. Our staff is partnering closely with the vendor to ensure the system will meet the needs of the agency and the public. In the meantime, we continue to explore ways to use technology to maximize efficiency within existing resources.

Even with this modernization effort, maintaining sufficient staffing levels remains one of our greatest operational challenges, while our workforce remains one of our strongest assets. We are committed to recruiting and retaining a highly talented and specialized team, and we have filled all currently approved positions apart from two positions in active recruitment. As a small agency, retaining experienced staff is essential to preserving the quality, consistency, and continuity of our services. OHR currently has one of the lowest turnover rates in the agency's history. We continue to support our employees through targeted retention strategies, including professional development, cross-training, and recognition efforts that reinforce staff engagement and commitment. These investments are critical as our employees manage increasingly complex caseloads and growing public demand.

We fully recognize the difficult choices required in this year's budget. At the same time, sustained increases in caseloads will inevitably lead to longer timelines for intake appointments, mediations, investigations, and hearings. These delays affect residents seeking relief and businesses seeking resolution, and they increase the risk of burnout for staff. Despite these challenges, OHR remains committed to using all available resources to deliver on our mission to advance human rights and equal opportunity in the District.

In closing, I want to thank OHR's dedicated staff for their commitment to public service. I also want to express my gratitude to Mayor Bowser, Deputy Mayor Appiah, Chairperson Nadeau, and

the members and staff of this Committee for your ongoing support of our work. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.