



City of Seattle

Mike McGinn, Mayor

Seattle Human Rights Commission • Seattle Women's Commission
Seattle LGBT Commission • Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities

October 13, 2010

Seattle City Council
600 4th Avenue
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Re: **Restoration of Funding for Seattle Office for Civil Rights**

Dear Seattle City Council,

We are writing to urge you to amend the Mayor's Proposed Budget and restore \$114,000 (1.0 FTE) in funding for the Seattle Office of Civil Rights (SOCR). SOCR fills the critical role of promoting racial and social justice for everyone in Seattle through education, policy work, and enforcement of civil rights laws. In working towards these goals, SOCR has a valuable resource in the expertise and thoughtfulness of the four Commissions it manages: Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities, Seattle Human Rights Commission, Seattle LGBT Commission, and Seattle Women's Commission.

The Mayor's proposed FY2011-2012 budget would eliminate one of the two staff positions at SOCR that support these four Commissions. Additionally, the Mayor's Proposed Budget would eliminate the City's only ADA Compliance Officer. We simply do not believe that these proposed staff cuts at SOCR serve the residents of this city or represent our values.

The Commissions provide valuable service to the City, including advice and policy recommendations to the City Council and the Mayor. Through the four Commissions, SOCR is able to tap into the expertise of over 60 committed volunteers with expertise in a broad range of civil rights and social justice issues. Several hundred hours of volunteer time are spent each month to improve the lives of Seattle residents.

Additionally, the Commissions are a key conduit between our various constituencies and the City. We are frequently the first contact for a member of the public seeking information about human or civil rights issues in Seattle. All four Commissions are also very active in our outreach to the communities we serve, frequently relaying information about City policies or actions that may affect them. We are able reach out to often underserved populations and magnify the communications efforts of the City.

Currently, two full time staff (Felicia Yearwood and Marta Idowu) work for SOCR to support these four City Commissions. One of the staff, whose position is being eliminated, carries out a critical task of working directly with the Human Rights Commission as it reviews and acts on human rights appeals which are conducted on a monthly basis. This is vital work that ensures the people of Seattle are treated fairly and have a voice.

Further, within the past year, the City Council voted to establish the Commission for People with Disabilities, including specifically calling for additional funding in the amount of \$35,000 (+0.5 FTE) to

staff the new position. We believe that the elimination of funding for one of the two staff persons for the four Commissions is contrary to the Council's wishes to provide the Commissions with the necessary resources to be effective.

In particular, cutting staff support for the Commission for People with Disabilities would be a significant challenge for this newly-formed Commission which has an increased need for support at this time. Each commissioner has almost daily contact with Felicia Yearwood-Murrell; this contact ranges from relaying bylaw advice from the city attorney's office to individual accommodations for commissioners to attend various meetings. It is a new commission, and it is a commission of citizens with disabilities.

Administrative staff allows the commission to participate actively in the city. SOCR administrative support is called upon regularly to remove/accommodate some of the barriers commissioners face. The budget cuts to administrative staff, as currently envisioned, would severely slow the commission's process and inhibit its ability to foster the energy and enthusiasm that has been generated by the creating of this new Commission.

All of the Commissions rely on SOCR staff to help them coordinate work with the City, liaise with City officials, and generally navigate City processes and procedures. With a reduction in staff support, each Commission's ability to function effectively would be significantly reduced. We rely on SOCR to provide us with guidance and insight in order to work efficiently with City so that we can focus on the issues where our expertise has the greatest potential for improving life in Seattle. If we are forced to devote our scarce volunteer time to tasks currently completed more efficiently by SOCR staff, our work on more substantive tasks will be significantly compromised.

For your information, some recent commission accomplishments include:


- In July, the Seattle LGBT Commission concluded a 6-week survey in which 1,600 people provided responses regarding access to housing, education, health, public safety and community involvement. The City Council endorsed this project with a resolution in June asking City departments to work with the Commission to provide a report to the Seattle City Council and the Mayor by June 2011.
- The Seattle Human Rights Commission prepared a report regarding the Aggressive Solicitation Ordinance that highlighted human rights concerns, and which assisted the Council and Mayor in their respective deliberations regarding the legislation.
- This month the Seattle Women's Commission will be facilitating a forum with homeless service providers to greater understand the barriers to women and families to getting housing, to further understand the root causes and to work to develop solutions to the barriers to providing service.
- The Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities is a newly established commission borne out of community activism as well as the need of the City of Seattle to direct its policies regarding our citizens with disabilities. As of our initial confirmations in May of 2010, we have already begun to serve our city by promoting access and downtown economic vitality by assisting SDOT with issues of parking and pedestrian right-of-ways. We have also begun connecting with many different disability communities and citizens.

- The Seattle Human Rights Commission actively worked with the Council, the Seattle Police Department, and the Mayor's office to assist the City in its response to the shooting death of John T. Williams.
- The Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities currently has 15 people from different disability backgrounds and knowledge that will be able to give constructive feedback and recommendations to the City Council, the Mayor, and the City of Seattle. There were well over 40 people who applied to the commission seeking service to our city, and we are seeking ways to continue engaging these interested individuals in the work of the Commission.
- The Seattle LGBT Commission has been actively building a relationship with the Seattle Police Department and serving as a liaison between the LGBT community and SPD, particularly on the issues of crime on Capitol Hill, treatment of transgender victims, and hate crime reporting and prevention.
- Worldwide, women and children are disproportionately represented in sweatshop labor conditions. The Seattle Women's Commission, in collaboration with Sweat Free Washington, advocated for a Sweat Free purchasing policy for all City uniform purchases. These efforts resulted in City Council passing an ordinance that mandates that all City of Seattle uniform purchases are made in Sweat Free labor conditions.


During times of economic downturn, it is the vulnerable among us who suffer the most. Creating a Seattle where everybody has equal opportunities, equal protections, and equal treatment in hard times as well as good is in best interest of City government and everyone who lives here.

We urge you to help us continue our work towards that goal by maintaining funding for the Seattle Office for Civil Rights in the 2011-2012 budget.

Sincerely,


Lillie Cridland & Christopher Peguero Seattle LGBT Commission


Laura Gramer & Erica Sekins Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities


Jamila Johnson & Abigail Echot Hawk Seattle Women's Commission


Roslyn Solomon & Chris Stearns Seattle Human Rights Commission

Cc: Mayor Mike McGinn