



PRESS RELEASE
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**U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report:
*Are Rights a Reality? Evaluating Federal Civil Rights Enforcement***

Today, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released *Are Rights a Reality? Evaluating Federal Civil Rights Enforcement*, a report that examines federal civil rights enforcement efforts in Fiscal Years 2016 through 2018. The Commission evaluated key elements for effective civil rights enforcement, whether agencies have sufficient resources to fulfill their enforcement responsibilities and whether the government satisfies its obligation to the American people to protect their civil rights across issue areas such as education, employment, healthcare, housing, immigration and access to justice. The report covers the civil rights enforcement record of thirteen federal agencies.

The Commission heard bipartisan testimony regarding ongoing widespread civil rights harms that underscore the need for strong federal agency enforcement of federal civil rights laws. The resulting report documents persisting civil rights violations across issue areas, many of which go unaddressed owing to policy decisions within the agencies and lack of funding and staff for enforcement efforts.

Chair Catherine E. Lhamon said, "As this report documents, this nation continues to fail to live up to its equity promise, leaving distressing civil rights harm as the painful result. The Commission findings and recommendations call for budgetary, staffing, management and Congressional oversight commitments sufficient to make rights real in the lives of all Americans."

Key findings from the Commission majority include:

- The extraordinary volume of civil rights complaints filed with federal agencies and findings and resolutions from these agencies underscore the reality that, today, the nation still has not reached a time when recognition of and protection for core civil rights promises is the norm.
- In evaluating data across 13 agencies, the Commission found they generally lack adequate resources to investigate and resolve discrimination allegations within their jurisdiction, leaving allegations of civil rights violations unredressed.

Key recommendations from the Commission majority include:

- Congress should continue to prioritize civil rights offices through budget appropriations, specifically increasing staff to fulfill the jurisdictional authorities Congress has given them.
- Congress should exercise oversight authority to evaluate baseline staffing necessary for federal agency civil rights offices to be able to fulfill their civil rights enforcement functions. Any determination of the requisite staffing necessary to fulfill an agency's external civil rights enforcement function should include evaluation of the funding distributed and the staffing necessary to conduct proactive compliance reviews of those funding recipients.

- Congress should give civil rights offices that now lack such authority the authority to compel resolution from noncompliant entities within an agency's jurisdiction, to allow for efficient investigation of allegations of civil rights harms.
- Cabinet agencies of which civil rights offices are part should ensure that the offices are incorporated into agency policy- and grant funding- decision making, in addition to civil rights enforcement or watchdog responsibilities. No agency should prioritize enforcement of one civil rights protection over another.

In November 2018, the Commission held a [public briefing](#), hearing from current and former federal government officials, academic and legal experts, advocates and the public. The morning and afternoon [sessions](#), the [public comment](#) session and the [transcript](#) are available for viewing, in addition to the [report](#).

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).