



Message from the Director

Welcome to the website of the Westchester County Human Rights Commission. Established in 1999 with an effective date of March 15, 2000, the Commission operates to insure that the residents of the County of Westchester are protected from discriminatory conduct of any kind. The Commission also works to insure, through its education and outreach initiatives that the residents of this multiracial, multinational, multiethnic County are able to understand and appreciate the importance of diversity in employment, housing and public accommodation.



The Westchester County Human Rights Law prohibits discrimination based on actual or perceived differences, including those based on race, color, religion, ethnicity, creed, age, national origin, alienage or citizenship status, familial status, gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. Such discriminatory acts are prohibited in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodation and credit. On October 6, 2005, County Executive Andrew Spano signed an amendment to our law extending protection against discrimination in employment and housing to victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and stalking. We are particularly proud of this accomplishment because Westchester County is the first and only municipality in the State of New York to provide this dual protection. We are also pleased that this amendment received the unanimous consent of the Westchester County Board of Legislators.

Under the County's Human Rights Law, the Commission is subject to jurisdictional limitations. The Commission has the authority to handle cases in Westchester County except those that occur in those areas of the County that have a local commission, such as, Yonkers, White Plains, New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Peekskill, Mamaroneck/Larchmont and Rye City.

In 2005, our Commission received 371 cases and has received over 1,500 cases since the year 2001. With its broad investigative powers, the Commission thoroughly reviews and investigates the cases received in our office to determine both jurisdiction and the merits of the claim. Once jurisdiction is established, the case is handled from inception to closing solely by the Westchester County Human Rights Commission. The Commission offers conciliation and mediation as a first effort towards an expeditious and beneficial resolution of the complaint; however, if conciliation or mediation are not successful, the case may be submitted for a full evidentiary administrative hearing. The Commission has subpoena power as well as the legal authority to award monetary damages, punitive damages in housing cases, and equitable relief. The Commission has a panel of independent, neutral certified mediators and a panel of administrative law judges all trained to hear and resolve human rights issues.

As part of this Commission's education and outreach initiatives, we often speak at community organizations, churches, religious institutions, schools and colleges and participate in various programs and panel discussions on human rights, civil rights and diversity issues.

If you have a claim or case that you believe should be brought to the attention of the Commission, please contact us. Also contact us directly if you would like for us to be involved in educational or outreach initiatives including training and panel discussions. The Westchester County Human Rights Commission continues in its efforts to insure that the residents of Westchester County receive the best efforts and best practices in the elimination of discrimination.