

Winnie Wilkinson

P.O. Box 1017

St. Albans, VT 05478

Tel: (802) 309—0318

Email wilkinson.winniea@gmail.com

House Committee on General and Housing

Rep. Marc Mihaly, Chair

Rep. Ashley Bartley Vice Chair

March 5th 2026

Dear Chair Mihaly and Vice Chair Bartley,

Subject: Request for Legislative Review and Oversight of the Vermont Human Rights Commission.

I am writing to formally request legislative oversight and review of the Vermont Human Rights Commission (VHRC) and its effectiveness in serving marginalized communities throughout the State of Vermont.

The Vermont Human Rights Commission was established to protect Vermonters from discrimination and to ensure that civil rights protections are meaningful and accessible. However, there is growing concern among some community members, advocates and residents that the current processes and operations of the Commission may not be functioning in the manner that is full accessible, transparent or responsive to those it is intended to serve.

Individuals who contact the Commission are often doing so because they believe their civil rights have been violated. For many people—particularly individuals from historically marginalized communities such as people of colour, immigrants, individuals with disabilities and low—income residents. The Commission may represent one of the few state institutions available to address discrimination.

Yet, concerns have been raised regarding the practical realities of engaging with the Commission. These concerns include difficulties navigating the intake process, limited clarity regarding case status and procedures, extended timeline for cases resolution, and broader perception that the system can be difficult for ordinary residents to navigate without legal expertise or institutional familiarity.

When residents lose confidence in a state agency tasked with protecting civil rights, the consequences extend beyond individual cases. It risks weakening public trust in the system that are meant to ensure fairness, accountability and equal protection under the law.

For this reason, I respectfully urge the House Committee on General and Housing to exercise its oversight role and consider conducting a review of the Vermont Human Rights Commission.

Such a review could examine:

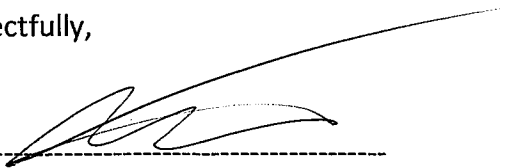
1. The accessibility and clarity of the intake process for complainants.
2. Communication practices and transparency regarding case progress and outcomes.
3. Average timelines for investigations and case resolution.
4. Outreach and engagement with marginalized communities across Vermont.
5. Whether the Commission currently has sufficient resources, staffing and accountability structures to effectively carry out its mission.

Legislative oversight is not only appropriate but necessary when questions arise about the effectiveness of agencies entrusted with protecting the rights of Vermonters. A thoughtful review by the Committee would provide an opportunity to strengthen the Commission and ensure that it operates in a manner consistent with Vermont's values of fairness, transparency and justice.

Vermont has long pride itself on being a state that respects civil rights and democratic accountability. Ensuring that the Vermont Human Rights Commission is fully accessible, responsive and effective for all Vermonters, especially those who rely on the most. Is essential to maintaining that commitment.

Thank you for your time, consideration and service to the people of Vermont. I respectfully hope the Committee will give this matter careful attention.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Winnie Wilkinson', is written over a horizontal dashed line.

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CC:

Senate Committee on Economic Development Housing and General Affairs

~~X~~ Sen. Alison Clarkson. Chair ~~X~~

Sen. Randy Brock. Vice Chair

House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

Rep. Matthew Birong. Chair

Rep. Lisa Hango. Vice Chair

Sen. Brian Collamore. Chair

Sen. Tanya Vyhovsky. Vice Chair

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Rep. Marc Mihaly, Chair