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March 2, 2018

Honorable Mayor Ted Wheeler
Portland City Council Commissioners
City Hall, 1221 SW 4th Ave.
Portland, OR, 97204

Re: Proposed FY 2019 Budget Cuts for the Office of Equity and Human Rights

Dear Mayor Wheeler, Commissioner Eudaly, Commissioner Fish, Commissioner Fritz and Commissioner Saltzman:

On behalf of the Portland Human Rights Commission, we thank Mayor Wheeler for his leadership on human rights matters impacting our city, and his public support of the Office of Equity and Human Rights. Both are vital to address the historic and current disparities experienced by the most vulnerable communities in Portland. Specifically, our Commission acknowledges the Mayor's increasing involvement in this work and we look forward to strengthening our engagement with him and all City Council members as we work together to institute an inclusive and equitable ethos into all facets of our City's government.

Central to realizing this vision is ensuring that adequate resources are available to do the work. In January, OEHR submitted its annual budget proposal that included an overall 5% reduction at Mayor Wheeler's request. Doing so was part of an across-the-board exercise all Bureaus were expected to participate - presumably to ensure that no Bureau was treated differently, and that everyone shares in reckoning the financial challenges facing the City. While equal in measure, the exercise was not equitable. Most Bureaus have significantly larger budgets and access to diverse sources of revenue not available to OEHR; they exclusively rely on General Funds. Therefore, it is critical that current funding levels for the Office of Equity and Human Rights and for the Human Rights Commission be preserved or the Bureau will suffer disproportional disruption.

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OEHR's current and expanding regulatory and advisory purview is great. They are currently charged with:

1. Developing and implementing the City's racial equity and budget equity plans,
2. Monitoring the City's Title VI (CRA) and Title II (ADA) compliance to identity, address, and remove unjust attitudes and barriers,
3. Train city employees, advise Bureaus in their equity work, and coordinate the Language Access Program,
4. Manage the administration of the Black Male Achievement program, and:
5. Provide administrative support for the independent Portland Human Rights Commission and the Portland Commission on Disability.

Each of these deliverables alone requires significant staff time, and demands placed upon OEHR staff continue to grow as racial and religious hate crimes and other forms of bigotry spike - a trend that we have witnessed first-hand in Portland over the last several years. Given the current political, social, and economic atmosphere, OEHR and its programs are uniquely positioned to make meaningful human rights and equity impacts in our communities.

We ask for a continued commitment and greater investment in the work of OEHR. Specifically, the proposed \$5,000 decrease to the Commission's current budget will significantly compromise our ability to meet our responsibilities, responsibilities that include engaging with and connecting communities across Portland with City officials. As sworn government representatives, we are committed to honoring our responsibilities to all Portland community members and to City Council. As you understand, our work is complex and complicated, requiring a tremendous amount of intellectual and emotional time on the part of every Commissioner. It also requires a realistic and sustainable financial investment that demonstrates the City's commitment to equity and inclusion.

Our bottom line - without adequate financial support we simply cannot meet our obligations to the people of Portland. The issues that we address are vast and always evolving, and include systemic disparity within marginalized communities, community interactions with PPB (i.e., the DOJ Settlement Agreement), racial profiling, human trafficking, refugee and immigrant rights, houselessness (and the increasing criminalization of those who are housing insecure), food insecurity, Sanctuary status, religious intolerance, and protest violence, to name a few. As the federal government further attacks our City for its progressive values, we must be resolute in our investment to protect the human rights of Portland's community members, especially the rights of those who are the most vulnerable among us.

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All Human Rights Commissioners are volunteers - we do not receive a salary or stipend from City government - and we depend on the support, coordination, and expertise of several of OEHR's staff. Our Program Coordinator, for example, is tasked with many responsibilities outside of the work of the Human Rights Commission. This means that our ability to be efficient, to maintain our current level of engagement or to increase our engagement, and to accept more work (i.e., strategic policy review with a human rights focus) is contingent upon their schedule and workload. The Bureau's newly appointed Senior Administrator has already eased the Program Coordinator's burden in the short time since they were hired, and if the position is eliminated – as was offered up in their Budget - the consequences would be devastating for the entire office and for the Human Rights Commission.

We urge you to not only sustain OEHR's and the Human Rights Commission's current budgets but to also increase them. As you are aware, Portland has a lot of work to do to disentangle our policies and practices from a systemic and institutionalized discriminatory and bigoted history. That history along with a recent onslaught of emerging issues that threaten the safety and well-being of so many in our community, requires ongoing dialogue and vigilance, and enhanced and dedicated resources.

Sincerely,

The City of Portland Human Rights Commission

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