



Minnesota Department of Human Rights

Project Description

June 2019

BACKGROUND

Established in 1967, the mission of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR) is to eliminate discrimination in Minnesota. To achieve its mission, MDHR is responsible for

- (1) investigating charges of illegal discrimination,
- (2) ensuring that businesses seeking state contracts conform to equal opportunity requirements, and
- (3) informing Minnesotans of their rights and responsibilities through education and dialogue.

MDHR enforces the Minnesota Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination in education, employment, housing, public accommodations, and public services. Minnesotans who believe they have experienced discrimination may bring a complaint to MDHR. If the complaint falls within the department's jurisdiction, MDHR's role is to act as a neutral fact-finder to determine whether there are reasonable grounds to conclude that a violation of the human rights act occurred. If the department concludes that discrimination likely occurred, MDHR attempts to work with the parties to resolve the matter. MDHR reported opening 606 new cases involving potential discrimination in 2018.

State law outlines several requirements for MDHR's investigatory activities. For example, one such requirement is that the department make a determination on a case of alleged discrimination within one year. Historically, MDHR has faced criticism regarding a backlog of discrimination cases and its inability to meet statutory deadlines. MDHR reported the average time to close a case was about 370 days in 2017.

More recently, there have been questions about MDHR's approach to initiating discrimination complaints based on its own analyses. Finally, some stakeholders have questioned the department's approaches to investigating complaints and resolving cases of alleged discrimination.

In Fiscal Year 2018, MDHR spent about \$4.9 million. The department is funded primarily through the General Fund, although federal reimbursements and fees provide additional revenue.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent has MDHR established transparent and reasonable policies and procedures for investigating and resolving discrimination complaints?
2. To what degree has MDHR addressed discrimination complaints in a timely and consistent manner?

DISCUSSION

This evaluation will focus primarily on MDHR's investigations into alleged discrimination. For this evaluation, OLA will review key state and federal laws and MDHR policies and procedures. We will also review information from a selection of national and local organizations performing similar investigations into allegations of discrimination to better understand how MDHR processes compare to those used in other offices.

We will review a sample of complaint files to assess MDHR's approaches to case investigations and resolution. We will not decide whether recommendations made by MDHR in specific cases were appropriate; instead, we will determine whether MDHR staff followed established procedures for conducting investigations and documenting their work.

Finally, we will analyze data from MDHR's case management system, focusing on the volume of complaints and the timeliness of the department's activities.

We plan to complete the evaluation and issue a report in early 2020. For additional information, contact project manager Caitlin Badger at 651-297-1917, or caitlin.badger@state.mn.us.