

HOLDING CORPORATIONS ACCOUNTABLE FOR WORKER ABUSES

WORKPLACE JUSTICE FOR ALL: EMPOWERING
COMMUNITIES UNDER ATTACK BY ENFORCING THE
NATION'S STRONGEST WORKER PROTECTION LAWS

Diego Fernández-Pagés, Workplace Justice Attorney

Elizabeth Jordan, Co-Legal Director

Make the Road New York

NYC workers need the City to have their back when their workplace rights are under attack.

New York City has among the strongest human rights laws in the country, protecting more people against workplace and housing discrimination than any other municipality or state.¹ It also has extraordinary protections for low-wage workers, including in the fast food, retail, construction, and delivery sectors.² These laws help workers address the systemic discrimination and abusive working conditions that keep them poor and marginalized. But the promise of these protections remains unfulfilled. Worker protection agencies like the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection and the City Commission on Human Rights, charged with enforcing the law, rarely have the means to do so, and thousands of cases remain tied up in backlogs that last months or years.³ They are restricted both by their budgets to hire enforcement staff, monthslong delays and red tape in obtaining Office of Management and Budget approval to onboard new staff, and enforcement hurdles at the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings, the City's administrative tribunal, that favor lawbreaking employers and make it difficult to address the problems that plague low-income communities. And as the federal government abandons workplace protections for immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, and people of color, working New Yorkers have nowhere else to turn for support when abusive employers put their livelihoods at risk. Workers in New York City are caught in a trap: even if they know to seek recourse in their City's strong protections, they may never see their claims resolved and stability restored. Instead, workers are left to fight abusive employers on their own, all while trying to make ends meet for their families.

Ensure better jobs in New York City by empowering workers through executive interventions in the City's economic justice agencies.

Two city agencies lead the charge on empowering New York City's workers and enforcing its expansive protections: the Commission for Human Rights (CHR) and the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). Both have committed staff who often deliver exceptional outcomes for the New Yorkers who go to them for help. But both suffer from long backlogs, narrow workscopes, and limited resources to address an increasing volume of cases. Two proposals—both requiring executive mayoral support—together would significantly improve these agencies' ability to respond and act proactively in empowering the City's working class.

Mayoral intervention I: Dedicate staff to analyze newly accessible EEO-1 data to better address systemic discrimination.

City economic justice agencies like CHR and DCWP dedicate the majority of their staff to addressing complaints by individual employees or violations by individual worksites. Agencies spend limited time on tracking broader trends to inform proactive investigations.⁴ In 2025, however, the New York City Council passed two laws that require city agencies to track pay equity across employers with more than 200 employees.⁵ In part, these responded to the evisceration of large-scale pay equity tracking projects across several federal agencies by the Trump administration.⁶ They also responded to widespread inequities across New York City workplaces, and were designed to give “policymakers the tools to close wage gaps at their root.”⁷ The laws give the mayor authority to designate relevant agencies to publish a report based on data reported, across categories previously tracked by the federal government.⁸

The mayor should designate specific teams within DCWP and CCHR to target the root of the wage gap problem. After publishing these reports, both agencies can collaborate to intervene quickly with major pay equity violations, setting enforcement priorities that may raise standards across workplaces in New York City.⁹ Collaboration between the two agencies may also eliminate the need to hire data specialists at CHR, as DCWP already has a robust research team.

Mayoral intervention II: Promote protections for workers abandoned by the federal government.

Federal workplace protection agencies have abandoned immigrant workers, workers of color, and LGBTQ+ workers. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has issued interpretations of Title VII that neglect non-American, non-white, and non-male employees.¹⁰ The New York City Human Rights Law, however, explicitly covers even more categories than Title VII, and remains the most powerful refuge for members of communities that have been increasingly re-marginalized by the federal government.¹¹

Both DCWP and CCHR already have broad authority to lead public education campaigns.¹² Both agencies can use that authority to counter the federal narrative that LGBTQ+ workers, immigrant workers, and workers of color are not worthy to participate equally in the workplace. Citywide campaigns in multiple languages, targeting particular neighborhoods where data shows disparities are largest, that inform the public about who is covered under the Human Rights Law may lead to greater engagement from those communities and a strong sense of belonging in their city.

Conclusion

New York City's working class is being systematically excluded from long-standing federal worker protections. The City cannot capitulate to this new status-quo. Instead, it can take proactive action to improve outcomes for workers suffering from workplace retaliation, address systemic discrimination, and remind vulnerable communities that their City is on their side.

Endnotes

- 1 See New York City Human Rights Law, N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-101 *et seq.*
- 2 N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 20-927 *et seq.*; § 20-1201 *et seq.*; § 20-1501 *et seq.*
- 3 Press Release, *Housing Discrimination Complaints Languish at NYC Commission on Human Rights*, State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli (Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2025/12/dinapoli-housing-discrimination-complaints-languish-nyc-commission-human-rights>; Amir Khafagy, *Mamdani's Proposed Budget Threatens Cuts to Labor and Human Rights Agencies, Documented* (Mar. 12, 2026), <https://documentedny.com/2026/03/12/nyc-budget-guts-worker-protections/>.
- 4 CCHR has not published a report on systemic discrimination in the workplace since 2019; DCWP does publish reports on compliance trends at least annually, with focuses on specific industries.
- 5 N.Y.C. Local Law 173 (2025), N.Y.C. Local Law 174 (2025).
- 6 Joseph G. Schmitt, *Trump Administration Attacks Pay Equity Practices*, Nilan Johnson Lewis (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://nilanjohnson.com/trump-administration-attacks-pay-equity-practices/>.
- 7 Council Member Tiffany Caban, Stated Meeting, New York City Council Hearing Transcript at 28 (Oct. 9, 2025).
- 8 N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 12-208.2(a).
- 9 Specifically, the Commission on Human Rights can bring pay equity enforcement claims under § 8-107(1)(a)(3) of the New York City Administrative Code.
- 10 See, e.g., *Discrimination Against American Workers Is Against The Law* U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, <https://www.eeoc.gov/discrimination-against-american-workers-against-law>; Adam Rocco, Janay Stevens, Michael Griffaton, *EEOC Chair Encourages White Men to File Workplace Discrimination Charges*, Vorys (Feb. 2, 2026), <https://www.vorys.com/publication-eeoc-chair-encourages-white-men-to-file-workplace-discrimination-charges>.

11 See N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107.

12 For CCHR: see, e.g., N.Y.C. Charter § 905(a). For DCWP: see, e.g., N.Y.C. Charter § 2203(e)(v).