

# SEIU 668

PENNSYLVANIA SOCIAL SERVICES UNION, SEIU LOCAL 668

2589 INTERSTATE DRIVE  
HARRISBURG, PA 17110-9602  
TOLL FREE: (800) 932-0368  
PHONE: (717) 657-7677  
FAX: (717) 657-7662

PRESIDENT TOM HERMAN • SECRETARY-TREASURER JOANNE P. SESSA



The Honorable Mike Folmer  
337 Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

June 8, 2016

Dear Senator Folmer,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify at the Senate State Government hearing on Tuesday, June 7. As I indicated in my testimony, the work of the PHRC is vitally important to our organizational vision. The diminished effectiveness of the agency is a concern both from the perspective of the Pennsylvanians our members are not able to serve, and the strenuous workloads our members carry. If an average caseworker carries 80 to 100 separate civil rights cases, you have to wonder how effective continued tweaks to process can be.

You asked for clarification on how much we are asking you to advocate for. The figure I provided - \$4.1 million - is a restoration of funding to 2008-2009 levels, when staffing levels were 178. Interim Chair Joel Bolstein shared that when he started in 1999, and the Commission's complement was 200+, the Commission was "thriving." My veteran members share with me the same sentiment: that they were able to truly fulfill the mandate of the Commission at that time, at that staffing level.

Respectfully, we do not believe that Ms. Edwards ask of \$2 million, which would add approximately 25 more investigators, is adequate to address the existing backlog, nor restore the full-range of functions the Commission needs to fulfill its mandate, especially community engagement. Hiring those investigators will improve the efficiency of the PHRC, but it will also invite new clients to file, likely expanding the average annual number of filers over time. Further, the number of bills introduced in the House and Senate that would expand the scope of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, and by extension the mandate of the Commission, would necessitate additional hiring, to ensure, if they were to become law, they could be properly enforced.

SB974 - a bill we fully support - is a prime example. We wish to avoid a repeat of Act 15 of 2015, a well-meaning law expanding the number of mandated reporters, but without proper funding to ensure effective implementation of the law. We represent those staff - the Caseworkers at DHS ChildLine who have, until recently, endured years of mandatory overtime; our concern was recently validated by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale's ongoing audit of that agency. The PHRC must be empowered to implement the PA Fairness Act upon its passage, and that requires additional staff.

I know that the Commonwealth is in severe fiscal straits. I also appreciate Mr. Bolstein's difficulty in relaying a purely quantitative benefit of the Commission's work to you. However, despite our Commonwealth's very real financial challenges, I believe that enough members of the General Assembly can be made to understand the invaluable role the Commission plays, and can play, in creating a better Pennsylvania. I would appreciate working with you on any efforts towards that end.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my insights on the PHRC, and I hope to work with you on its restoration. Feel free to call me, or our Legislative and Political Director, Christopher Hundley, at 717-635-6728 to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Herman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Herman,  
President