



# Maine Human Rights Commission

# 51 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333-0051

*Physical location: 19 Union Street, Augusta, ME 04330*

Phone (207) 624-6290 ▪ Fax (207) 624-8729 ▪ TTY: Maine Relay 711

[www.maine.gov/mhrc](http://www.maine.gov/mhrc)

**Amy M. Sneirson**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Barbara Archer Hirsch**  
COMMISSION COUNSEL

March 24, 2020

To friends and colleagues of the Maine Human Rights Commission (“MHRC”):

For the past few weeks, the MHRC Commissioners and staff have been watching coronavirus sweep Maine, the US, and the world, just as you have. We, like you, try every day to grapple with changing standards of what is “safe” and what is not, and how to support each other as human beings in a time of crisis. The MHRC is tasked under the Maine Human Rights Act (“Act”) with investigating the rights of individuals in Maine to a life with dignity, and the reasons that may not occur; we are continuing to do that. Whether you are concerned about a case already pending with the MHRC, or a want to bring a new complaint to the MHRC, or are seeking information about novel coronavirus-related discrimination issues, ***the MHRC continues to operate and serve the public.***

Our operations have shifted from in person to remote. We have sent more and more staffers to work from home, and by the end of this week nearly all MHRC staff will be doing that. We are holding conferences, interviews, mediations, and all other meetings via phone or video remote platforms, with few to no visitors to the MHRC office. It is likely that the MHRC’s upcoming public meetings will also occur via phone or video participation, thanks to an amendment to the state Freedom of Access Act passed last week that allows government action to continue even when we can’t be near each other in meetings. *Please check our website for updates.*

We have been asked if we will “pause” our operations, or issue a blanket extension in all cases (as some courts have done); we are **not** going to do that at this time, both because the Act explicitly requires that we complete investigation/resolve every case within two years of when the complaint was filed with our agency *and* because the MHRC has worksharing agreements with federal agencies that rely on our investigations of complaints we have in common (and which support a significant percentage of our staffers’ jobs). We will pause on some cases that are far off from two-year deadlines, but many other cases – especially those dual-filed with federal anti-discrimination agencies – will continue. *Please contact our office with questions about new or pending cases.*

Even so, ***the MHRC is committed to providing as much flexibility as possible to people involved in cases pending with us; please just reach out to us and ask.*** Whether you need more time to answer a complaint, want to send in paperwork by email, can’t get to a notary for a new signed complaint, or can’t get to an office or client to obtain requested documents, **please just contact us (preferably by email) and we will help.** A worldwide pandemic is exactly the sort of emergency situation that justifies an exception to our usual “no extensions!” policy. This is an unprecedented and anxiety-provoking time for all of us, and we are here to assist as much as we are able to.

Thanks for your understanding and cooperation, and please take good care of yourselves and others.

Sincerely,

Amy Sneirson  
Executive Director