

NEW YORK STATE
DIVISION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INTERAGENCY TASKFORCE
DRAFT ACTION AGENDA

I. Draft General Recommendations and Agency Actions

Recommendation 1: Provide for Increased Community Representation and Access to Decision Making Processes

Action Agenda

- Through its enforcement of the New York State Human Rights Law, the State Division of Human Rights (DHR) reaches disenfranchised communities around the State, communities seriously impacted by the social injustice of discrimination in employment, housing, education and public accommodation, and by environmental injustices. As part of our outreach strategy, we communicate regularly with community activists and organizations in many historically disenfranchised communities. We maintain eleven regional offices around the state (specific contact information on the regional offices can be obtained at the DHR website www.dhr.state.ny.us). These regional offices have direct contact with local community groups. DHR has Memorandums of Understanding with local City and County Human Rights Commissions. As such, we are better able to reach communities of color and with low incomes, which represent the historically disenfranchised. On a regular, if not weekly basis, we participate in evening and weekend meetings in communities throughout the State on issues ranging from housing to hate crimes in our streets and racial tensions in our schools. Our brochures and other materials are available in numerous languages to maximize utility to constituents around the state. Most recently we initiated a public information program for our Housing Discrimination Office, which involved billboards throughout the state and advertisements on public transportation.

Recommendation 2: Continue Collaboration with the Environmental Justice Community

Action Agenda

- DHR is currently participating in numerous Interagency Task Forces- for example, Environmental Justice and the Hate Crimes Taskforce. The Division looks forward to collaborating with our sister agencies to engage in substantive outreach to disenfranchised communities. Given the difficult economic times, we are seeking to maximize our outreach budget by employing technology to reach as many interested New Yorkers as possible. For example, on November 17, 2008, the Division held our first statewide webcast, produced by SUNY at a minimal expense, to the public. Through technology and collaboration with sister agencies, we can reach as many constituents as possible and thereby increase citizen participation. The response to the web cast was positive. A second web cast will take place in June 2009. We are exploring other avenues to reach more of the public, including an initiative involving “training the trainer” and a school-based program to educate our communities on our laws and our mission. The Division will continue to provide advice and assistance to local communities seeking assistance in education about, and prevention of, unlawful discrimination in every area, including leading the state in enforcing the Human Rights Law.

Recommendation 7: Prioritize Enforcement Actions and Pollution Reduction Programs and Resources in Environmental Justice Communities

Action Agenda

- Our greatest impact in communities identified as environmental justice communities can be in the area of enforcing the anti-discrimination in housing laws. The Division enforces the Human Rights Law in the context of housing. The Division does this in conjunction with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. If in fact landlords or property owners are engaging in discriminatory conduct in regard to tenants or occupants based upon their membership in a protected class, the Division has enforcement jurisdiction. The Division adjudicates a substantial number of housing complaints in communities of color which are historically disenfranchised. A recent HUD partnered billboard program targeted discrimination in housing throughout the state and were developed in multiple languages.

Recommendation 9: Provide Environmental Justice Training for Agency Staff

Action Agenda

- The Division will work with other agencies to develop training in regard to educating and sensitizing its own staff and other agency's staff to environmental justice principles and the Human Rights Law. Specifically, the agency will:
 - Continue to participate in joint agency collaborations on topics such as environmental justice, hate crime prevention and education.
 - Continue to develop new programs to increase awareness and prevention of discrimination.

For more information about DHR and its offices and programs, visit our website at www.dhr.state.ny.us.