

Testimony of Dana Sussman
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New York City Commission on Human Rights
Before the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and the Committee on Mental Health,
Disabilities, and Addiction
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Good morning Chair Eugene, Chair Ayala, and members of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction. I am Dana Sussman, Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental Affairs and Policy, at the New York City Commission on Human Rights. Thank you for convening today's hearing on the important topic of the negative mental health consequences of discrimination and bias incidents.

As you are aware, and as my previous testimony before the Committee on Civil and Human Rights highlighted, the Commission surveyed over 3,100 Muslim, Arab, South Asian, Jewish, and Sikh (MASAJS) New Yorkers about their experiences with discrimination and harassment. The survey results were published in a report earlier this year. The report found high levels of bias harassment, discrimination, and physical assaults experienced by MASAJS communities leading up to and following the 2016 presidential election. The report also revealed that victims of such acts are reporting them at low rates.

The survey included two screening questions about depression associated with the survey takers' experiences with discrimination and harassment. The findings of the survey show that half of those who had been fired because of race, ethnicity, or religion selected answers that indicated depression (51.3%) compared to just 16.2% of those who did not. Those who experienced employment discrimination of any kind were more likely to screen positive for probable depression (33.8% vs. 15.1% compared to those who had not). Experiences of verbal harassment were also associated with increased odds of depression, with over one quarter of those who had been verbally harassed screening positive for probable depression compared to less than one in six of those who had not been harassed (26.2% vs. 14.4%) and with physical assault (36.7% vs. 17.0% compared to those who had not experienced physical assault). Discrimination in public accommodations (37.9% vs. 15.9%) and experiences of bias harassment and discrimination such as experiencing vandalism or property damage targeted at your race, ethnicity, or religion (37.1% vs. 17.0%) were also associated with depression. Among those who wore religious clothing, having it forcibly removed was associated with depression (36.6% vs. 21.1%).

As a result of these findings, the Commission has been collaborating with our colleagues at Thrive NYC to share the information we gathered from the report and to cross train staff. Commission staff trained Thrive NYC's Mental Health First Aid outreach team this past September, and we are currently working with Thrive NYC to plan an event with MASA leaders to discuss intersections of discrimination and depression as highlighted in our report. And the Commission is working with Thrive NYC to arrange a Thrive training for Commission staff. The City Human Rights Law allows for complainants to receive compensatory damages, including for emotional distress, for harm that they've experienced. In Fiscal Year 2018, 125 cases at the

Commission involved an award of compensatory damages, totaling \$3,785,312 with an average compensatory award of \$30,282, higher than any prior year.

Thank you for convening this hearing today on this important issue. I look forward to your questions.