

State civil rights agency doing more with less

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

With 38 fewer staffers, the state Civil Rights Department resolved more discrimination cases than it received in 1991.

And with three fewer offices, it cut processing time from 14.6 months to 12.1. How?

"Case management. A strategic plan," replied Laura Reyes Kopack, the Livonia lawyer who co-chairs the three-member panel.

Kopack, vice president of a Detroit Edison subsidiary, joined the CRC a year ago when Gov. John Engler named six new members. The panel named her co-chair with Arthur Lombard, Gross Pointe Farms resident and professor at the Detroit College of Law. Another area resident on the CRC is Harry G. Hutchison IV, Lathrup Village resident who teaches law and economics in the University of Detroit Law School.

Engler was able to clean house because his predecessor, Democrat James Blanchard, had held up all appointments in 1990 so they wouldn't become election year issues.

A Spanish-speaking politico, Kopack since 1973 has risen through the ranks of nationalities groups to reach not only her leadership role in civil rights but to become first vice-chair of the Michigan Republican Party and a national convention delegate.

9.2 percent cut

Like most operating departments of the state, Civil Rights took a 9.2 percent budget cut last year that forced it to eliminate 38 of its 226 jobs and close three of its 11 offices — Pontiac, Jackson and the Upper Peninsula.

Yet director John Roy Castillo was "upbeat" about the result. "In fiscal 1991, the Enforcement

Bureau resolved a total of 6,900 complaints. The total caseload has been reduced to 5,482 or 374 fewer complaints than reported in fiscal 1990."

Some 1,169 claimants got cash or annualized awards of \$4.3 million, an average of \$3,700.

Biggest case: The CRC ordered Pinckney Community Schools to pay gym teacher Douglas Rutherford \$28,000 for his sex discrimination complaint. Because he was laid off before a female with less seniority, Rutherford collected more than \$20,000 in lost pay and \$8,000 for mental distress.

'More with less'

Kopack said she and Lombard

made "doing more with less" their top priority. Items:

■ The intake process of complaints has been computerized. Each of the two main offices (Lansing and Detroit) is on-line with eight regional offices. "A case that was filed in Lansing could be located in Detroit. It can be brought up on a computer in Detroit. It saves travel time and expense in assigning staff," Kopack said.

■ If an employer is "stonewalling" a case — failing to provide information to the CRC staff, the department now enters default judgments. "It's similar to a default judgment in court," said Kopack. "In the past, cases just

stayed on the docket and were referred from conciliation to legal and back again."

■ The commission put new emphasis on conciliation hearings. "In prior years, there had not been heavy emphasis on them to bring them to resolution. We asked, 'Why? I mean, if the employer and employee can come to terms, there's no reason to go to the (full) commission and stay in the system,'" Kopack said.

■ The new CRC is asking that one or two cases that can't be resolved through conciliation be brought to it at each monthly meeting. "Only one was brought in the prior year," said Kopack. The full CRC reviews transcripts

and the referee's findings. Then it either upholds, modifies or reverses the referee's judgment.

■ The department is developing a strategic plan for the first time in several years — how to inform people and businesses of changes in the law, how to save time on communications, etc.

For example, that bureau conducted 250 conferences attended by 7,500 people last year — an average attendance of 30. The Kopack-Lombard regime is asking it to explore videotaping seminars and then dealing with local cable TV companies — "instead" of going to 10 different spots and holding 10 different seminars."

Here's where to give blood in your town

The following is a list of Red Cross Bloodmobiles in our area for the month of January:

■ Monday, Jan. 4 - West Bloomfield: Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, 4800 Orchard Lake Road, 2-6 p.m., Kris Goetze, 633-2845.

■ Tuesday, Jan. 5 - West Bloomfield: Jewish Community Center, 6800 W. Maple, 1-7 p.m., Connie McOsker, 334-5776.

■ Wednesday, Jan. 6 - Troy: Troy Community Center, 500 W. Big Beaver Road, 3-9 p.m., Beverly Wiles, 639-1933.

■ Wednesday, Jan. 13 - South-

field: DMR Financial Services, Inc., 24445 Northwestern Highway, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Connie McOsker, 334-5776.

■ Monday, Jan. 25 - Troy Northminster Presbyterian Church, 3633 W. Big Beaver Road, 2-8 p.m., Anne Marr, 628-8192.

■ Monday, Jan. 25 - Birmingham: First Presbyterian Church, 1639 W. Maple, 2-8 p.m., Mary Skolik, 640-7023.

■ Friday, Jan. 29 - Troy: Children's Hospital Troy Finance, 755 W. Big Beaver Road, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Dorothy Gemill, 966-2010.

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Team members:
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