



Executive Director's Report for February 2025

Introduction

February was a month of transition as Keoki Kim left the agency at the end of January. The mayor appointed Paul Ervasti as acting executive director on February 5, 2025. The main priority of the agency is keeping up with investigations and current cases while a new executive director is approved and hired. Our investigators completed a weeklong training course and are now certified EEOC Investigators.

Case Status

Inquiries and New Complaints

The agency received 24 inquiries and perfected 3 new complaints in February 2024.

<i>Inquiries and New Complaints</i>								
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Inquiries	498	516	408	385	363	333	324	63
New Complaints	119	130	82	72	73	55	48	7

Pending Cases

As of February 2025, the agency has 24 open cases.

Case Closures

This month 1 case was closed by settlement between the parties.

<i>Case Closures</i>								
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total Closures	126	108	83	97	71	85	79	3

Backlog Cases

AMC 5.50.010 requires the AERC to “promptly and impartially” investigate complaints and conduct fact finding procedures. The AERC shall, unless good cause is shown, issue its determination of whether the allegations are supported by substantial evidence within 240 days

after the filing of the complaint. The agency currently has **four** cases that exceed 240 days for good cause.

- One case is pending settlement. The complainant requested extra time to consider a settlement agreement. The investigator recently met with the complainant and the parties are in the process of editing and finalizing a settlement.
- In one case, both sides are represented by counsel. The attorneys requested numerous continuances while they attempted to negotiate a settlement.
- In one case the investigator was unable to reach the complainant for several months but has recently re-established communication.
- One case was reassigned to a new investigator after a previous investigator left. The case is pending a draft settlement agreement.

The agency remains focused on eliminating this backlog entirely and on briefing the commissioners on every case that exceeds 240 days.

Budget Status

2025 Budget vs Actuals

	Current Budget	Encumbrance	Actuals	Difference	Utilization
Labor	\$ 720,580.00	\$	\$ 33,631.39	\$ 686,948.61	4.67%
Non-labor	\$ 13,175.00	\$	\$ 246.57	\$ 12,928.43	1.87%
Travel	\$ 8,500.00	\$	\$ 0.00	\$ 8,500.00	0.00%
IG Charges	\$ 225,172.00	\$	- \$ 108.38	\$ 225,063.62	0.05%
Revenue	\$ (49,800.00)	\$	\$ (0.00)	\$ (49,800.00)	0.00%
Total	\$ 917,627.00	\$	\$ 33,986.34	\$ 883,640.66	3.70%

Budget Principles and Policies

Public service is a public trust. As public servants entrusted with taxpayer dollars, we must exercise good stewardship of those resources. Our purchases should reflect a frugal mindset and be for items that are mission essential. With those principles in mind, I would like to outline my approach to managing the AERC's budget for the next few months while I am interim director.

- All purchases will be reviewed and approved by the executive director before purchase. Any purchases beyond routine and minor operating expenses, or that reflect a policy choice in managing the agency's budget, will be brought to the commissioners for approval before the purchase is made, unless it is an unforeseen emergency purchase that needs to be made before the next commissioner meeting. In that case, the chair and vice-chair will be briefed.
- Office equipment and AERC "swag gear": Pens, paper, computer thumb drives,

and other small items have the AERC logo and phone number on them. We'll use up remaining supplies but not purchase any more.

- Training and travel: Maximize our training budget by using remote learning or on-line training only. No travel or training that requires mileage and per diem. Any commissioner training will be in-house and no cost. The new permanent executive director might need to complete some EEOC training courses, and we want to save money now to make sure money is available for that later, if needed.
- Outreach items (t-shirts, sweatshirts, etc.): No outreach items have been purchased since last summer/fall. The agency will only give out one-page informational pamphlets or similar type items – not items that have any monetary value. As interim director only serving in this role part time, my focus is on keeping the agency afloat. Long term outreach strategies will have to be addressed by the new executive director at the direction of the commission. Funding for outreach items should be listed in budget proposals and appropriated for that purpose.

During this transition period, the investigators and support staff have been amazing at working together and keeping the office running without a full-time executive director. A big thank you to Harley, Cade, James, and Maya for the hard work they have put in these last few weeks! Unfortunately, picking up some of the slack has required some staff overtime. This should be temporary. With the executive director position unfilled for several months, even with occasional overtime for staff, the total labor costs for the agency will remain under budget.

Administration

During the Month of February our investigators, Lanette Harley, Tumaini Cade, and James Griffin completed the weeklong online EEOC New Investigator training course from February 21-February 25, 2025, and are now certified EEOC Investigators! This is an amazing accomplishment, which required them to start their workdays at 3:30 a.m. every morning.

Internal Audit is currently auditing the AERC and finalizing a report, which will be a public record. All AERC staff have made themselves available to provide requested information to the auditor as needed. Auditors signed confidentiality agreements in which they agreed to protect the identity of complainants, respondents, and witnesses before they were granted access to review AERC files. A public report is expected to be released soon and will be provided to all the commissioners once it is available.

The process to hire a new executive director has involved updates to the job classification to make sure the posted job description is accurate. We are hoping to get this finalized and start recruitment soon. Hiring a new executive director is subject to both appointment by the commission and approval by the mayor. Once we have a pool of applicants, the hiring process will likely involve a hiring panel that will interview applicants and make a recommendation to the commission. We will likely need two commissioners to serve on the hiring panel. If other commissioners have specific questions that they would like applicants to be asked or considerations for the hiring panel, please bring them up during commissioner comments at one

of the meetings.

Case Management System: The agency uses Time Matters as its case management system. Several years ago, the agency decided to not renew active licenses for this system while deciding on the best solution for a case management system. Licenses would cost around \$25,000 per year. Each year the agency continues to use this program without paying for an active license, the number of bugs and technical challenges increases. Currently, investigators spend a lot of time with IT, and this sometimes does not resolve their issues. Time Matters has its own service desk and IT support that could easily fix the issues, but these services are only available for subscribers with an active license. Therefore, a long-term decision will need to be made about the future case management system. As interim director, I do not feel it is appropriate to recommend any long-term solutions to the commission or pursue solutions that would commit the agency to significant future expenditures of funds. This will have to wait until a new executive director can learn the nuisances of the case management system, the needs of the agency, and can make an informed recommendation to the commission. For now, we'll maintain the status quo and work with IT as best we can to keep the system operational.

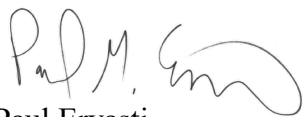
Outreach

Harley provided a presentation to the Alaska Air Carriers Association on February 27, 2025, about our agency. She brought in the Alaska State Human Rights Commission to co-present. Harley will be presenting at a 'We are the People' community gathering on March 8th. Harley and Cade will be resuming further outreach in April to spread awareness for AERC.

Conclusion

The investigators and executive assistant have been truly exceptional during this period of transition. Harley has been great at training up the new team members, and the rest of the team has been stepping up big time. I believe that we have a solid foundation in place that will set the agency up for future success. I appreciate the feedback and advice from all the commissioners as we navigate this transitional period together.

Very Respectfully,



Paul Ervasti
Acting Executive Director
Anchorage Equal Rights Commission