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# INSIGHT

*Celebrating 55 Years of Fair Housing!*

## ERIE COUNTY SCORES HUGE FAIR HOUSING VICTORY!

by Daniel Corbitt, Esq.

On Tuesday, May 22nd, 2018, County Executive Mark Poloncarz signed the Erie County Fair Housing Law into effect, providing needed protections against housing discrimination for Erie County residents. The new law incorporates the same protections as the federal and state fair housing laws while also prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity, immigration and citizenship status, and source of income. Additionally, the legislation creates a five-member Fair Housing Board to hold hearings and refer verified cases of housing discrimination to the Erie County Attorney's Office for prosecution.

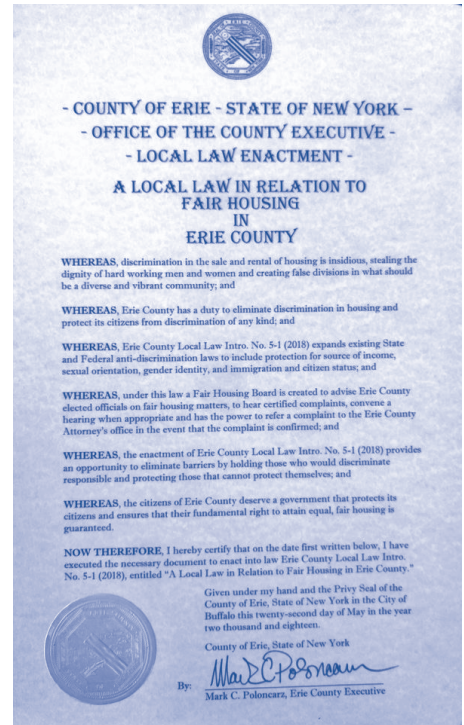
Erie County's law comes as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act. While we honor the anniversary of this progressive piece of legislation and celebrate the passage of Erie County's added protections, we are still confronted with the difficult truth that the Fair Housing Act has been an abject failure in its goal of reducing segregation. The "dissimilarity index," which scholars use to measure segregation, remains stubbornly high in areas with relatively large black populations, such as New York City, Detroit, Newark, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Chicago, and Buffalo. These metropolitan regions and others throughout the country remain deeply divided according to race, ethnicity, and income.

How can this be if the Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination against a home seeker's race, color, sex, national origin, familial status, religion, and disability status? Moreover, the New York State Human Rights Law also makes it illegal to discriminate based on age, sexual orientation, marital status, or military status.

Part of the answer rests in the fact that housing providers routinely discriminate on the basis of a person's lawful source of income, whether that income is from housing vouchers, disability benefits, pensions, or other non-wage income. This type of discrimination has a disproportionate and adverse effect on veterans, persons with disabilities, minorities, the elderly, single-parent families, persons experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, and survivors of domestic violence.

Source of income discrimination denies access to opportunities in employment, education, and other services and amenities. For decades, unequal access to opportunity has driven inequities throughout our community, creating geographical areas of concentrated, generational poverty. Make no mistake, we all lose when a person does not have the opportunity to be successful and make positive contributions to our community.

Homeseekers should not face discrimination and further hardship merely because they have rental assistance or non-wage income to help cover their housing



costs. But too often they are told, "You have to work," "We don't accept government assistance," or "We don't want Section 8 people."

As a result, many are forced to accept substandard housing in the region's poorest neighborhoods where the housing stock is often extremely dilapidated. Some unscrupulous landlords in these areas are all too willing to accept rental assistance, knowing that it provides a stable source of revenue, all the while refusing to take steps to ensure that the property is a safe and decent place for their tenants to live. Consequently, HOME and other organizations receive daily reports from tenants who are living in housing that is unsafe and unsanitary with such awful conditions as collapsing walls and ceilings, backed up sewage, no running water, or no heat in the winter.

Now, fifty years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, Erie County has taken a significant step to acknowledge the shortcomings of the federal and state laws and remedy this injustice by safeguarding true housing choice and equal opportunity for all county residents.

Erie County has sent a clear message – that it is a strong, inclusive place that celebrates diversity and provides access to opportunities for all. While this law is a major step on the path to social justice, HOME will be working with our community and government partners to ensure this law is effectively administered and enforced. Join with HOME today in the ongoing battle for true housing choice and ensure that people no longer have to endure discrimination because of how they will pay their rent. ■

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## HE MADE A DIFFERENCE by Scott Gehl

There are a very few people who--through intellect, moral compass, strength of character, and chutzpah--have made a significant difference for our community. James L. Hecht, who lived here barely 18 years and left in 1970, was such a person. Dr. Hecht passed on April 27th (ironically during fair housing month) in Highland Ranch, Colorado. Amy Blatchford Hecht, his wife of 65 years, was at his side.

I met Jim & Amy on a sweltering summer Saturday in 1982 in the back yard of Sally & Ernie Metzger. Sally & Amy had been college friends and I, still a young executive director, was invited to meet the visiting Hechts, who had figured so prominently in HOME's early years. I had already read Jim's 1970 chronicle of the fair housing movement in America, *Because It Is Right*.

A chemist at DuPont, Jim had found his way to fair housing through the Social Concerns Committee of the Amherst Unitarian Church. After hosting a public meeting in his living room, then President Howard Fuller invited him onto the board. It was Jim who suggested that the Niagara Frontier Council for Freedom of Choice in Housing change its name to Housing Opportunities Made Equal, who recruited the Friends of HOME to build public support for this

controversial cause, who helped shepherd the first legal complaints against discriminating realtors, and who conceived of Project Good Neighbor: a list of thousands of area residents who publically pledged to welcome African-American neighbors.

At my suggestion, HOME invited Dr. Hecht to keynote our 25th Annual Meeting (in 1988) and our 40th (in 2003). On the former occasion, Jim asked me to arrange a meeting with *Buffalo News* Editor Murray Light, where he told Murray that this still struggling organization deserved an editorial. The News published that editorial and, one year later, endorsed HOME's very progressive Buffalo fair housing ordinance, which later succumbed to mayoral veto.

Although absent from Buffalo for 45 years, Jim and Amy remained members, participated in a documentary marking HOME's first 50 years, and contributed to the Home for HOME capital campaign. During my last year as executive, Jim asked me to review a draft of his book, *Making a Difference*, in which he called his work with HOME perhaps his "proudest accomplishment".

Jim Hecht was a colorful and often challenging advocate whose important work helped build the foundation of HOME. ■

## MEET HOME'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS: DESHAWN KING

*by Miata Wright*

**DESHAWN KING** is one of HOME's newest board members. A Buffalo native and graduate of Hutch-Tech High School, he appreciates the unique offerings that Buffalo has to offer year round—from quaint coffee shops and restaurants to large summer festivals and 5K runs. After earning his Bachelor's in Economics and Finance from Buffalo State College and his Master's in Organizational Leadership from Medaille College, he has spent much of his career in the financial sector leading him to his current position at FedEx as an International Finance Accountant. Financial literacy is something he is passionate about, and he uses his knowledge and experience with finance to educate others through workshops on budgeting, saving money, and reviewing credit reports.

### *How did you become involved with HOME?*

For more than three months, I researched several nonprofits in Buffalo that helped those in the community by addressing issues residents in the inner city face. Late last year, I stumbled upon HOME's website and its mission and learned of the impact the agency has had on the community for more than 50 years. At that point I applied, interviewed, and was asked to join the Fund Development and Annual Dinner committees where I help raise awareness and funds for HOME. After such a successful Annual Dinner, I was welcomed onto the board in April (of 2018).

### *What is your vision for HOME and fair housing in our region?*

I'd like to see HOME reach millennials and generation - z. These generations are important in continuing the effort to reduce and eventually eradicate housing

discrimination in the region. Educating the public on housing laws, rights of those being discriminated against, and equal opportunities will offer everyone the chance to make a significant impact in communities that need it most. HOME is trending in the area of fair housing and offers landlord trainings, help for those in need of affordable housing, and advocacy for individuals that have been discriminated against.

### *What is your vision for Buffalo?*

I see Buffalo continuing to work towards being an inclusive community. This can be demonstrated by respecting all of its residents and providing everyone full access to resources. Discrimination is prevalent in many areas of our daily lives, especially for minorities and formerly incarcerated individuals. As a community, we should work to promote equal treatment in areas such as housing, employment, and the justice system by educating everyone on their rights.

### *Do you have any hobbies outside of work?*

My favorite pastimes are adventurous activities such as skydiving, jet-skiing, white water rafting, rock-climbing, and parasailing, as well as traveling to new destinations. In the last five years, I have been blessed and fortunate to have visited China, Panama, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Bahamas, and more than 15 cities in the United States. I am very excited for my upcoming trip to the United Kingdom, France, and Iceland this December. My successes and experiences would not have been possible without the support of my family, friends, and my faith in God. Without God and those closest to me, I would not be the person I am today. ■



## MEET HOME'S NEWEST TEAM MEMBER: REINA YSAGUIRRE-BOERSMA

### *What brought you to HOME?*

I came to home because of its raw passion and just reputation for advocacy.

### *What were you doing before you joined the HOME staff?*

Before joining HOME, I participated in a variety of positions that range from small-business management to paralegal work. I have always been involved in the advocacy circuit and try my best to contribute to the betterment of others.

### *What does a normal day in the office look like for you?*

I try to push myself every day to accomplish something. I set daily and weekly goals to ensure I am always moving forward. I try to at least look busy. If I am not meeting and learning from friends of the organization I am trying to figure out how we can expand and develop as an agency.

### *What excites you most about HOME?*

The most exciting thing about HOME is its mission and

the continued value it brings to the neighborhoods that need it. I like HOME because it doesn't focus necessarily on a community, but on a problem and fights the issue from both sides. HOME takes a very stirring platform to solve issues of social justice and that's exciting.

### *Have you ever been discriminated against? If not, what sparked your interest in civil rights and fair housing?*

My first introduction to discrimination was when I was a child trying to understand why where I lived affected the way I was treated. Not just by teachers, but other kids in my school. Discrimination is an inherent behavior and I want to be a part of the change.

### *What legacy would you like to leave on HOME?*

I'm not looking for anything with my name on it. I want to contribute to HOME's legacy. I want to help strengthen HOME's community support. I hope I can help others see the sense of urgency and action HOME drives in the advocacy and services it provides. ■



## LIZ BARNE'S STORY *by Kibrett Facey*

Elizabeth "Liz" Barnes did everything that she was "supposed" to do. She pursued higher education by attaining her MSW, she received an employment opportunity shortly after graduating, and she even explored various roles throughout her career field until ultimately becoming a Caseworker in the Adoption Unit of the Erie County Department of Social Services. Everything was going great until June 2016 when her healthcare provider determined Liz was medically unable meet the requirements of her job. It was then that things took a turn for the worse.

In August of 2016, Liz was forced to pack up her 13-year old daughter and what possessions of theirs could fit into her car. They then drove to Southern New Jersey to stay with relatives and to seek more accessible, comprehensive medical care for Parkinson's disease. Only a few short months after relocating, Liz found that the stress stemming from her living arrangement were not conducive to her health. She and her daughter were forced to move into a homeless shelter in Atlantic City until they were able to return to Buffalo in February of 2017.

"After being here for a little over one year, I was fortunate enough to be selected to receive a Housing Choice Voucher through Belmont Shelter, Inc.," she said.

Liz does not use the term "fortunate" lightly. In the city of Buffalo, Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) are administered by the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, Belmont Housing Resources for WNY, Inc., and the Rental Assistance Corporation of Buffalo. Currently, all three agencies have closed waiting lists and there are some people on the list who have waited for their voucher for upwards of ten years. This dismal situation can be attributed to federal funding cuts. Prior to the passage of Erie County's Fair Housing Law, those who recently received their vouchers

are still not guaranteed housing due to the lack of legal protection for voucher holders and others receiving a variety of lawful sources of income.

"I was brand new to the HCV program and really had no idea what to expect as I began scouring Craigslist, the newspaper, and apartment finder websites," said Liz, "I learned real quick that landlords and realtors were not too interested in accepting HCV tenants."

Throughout her housing search, she was rejected at least ten times after revealing her status as a HCV recipient-- but this was not the reason Liz found HOME. Liz was referred to HOME by Kim Tolley of the Buffalo City Mission. She was informed of our Community Housing Center where we assist qualified first-time HCV holders with their security deposits. It was through her entry into this program that we were able to hear about Liz's plight. She expressed the stigma that was attached to her and her voucher.

Liz believes that there is a negative stigma associated with being a voucher holder.

"I had one potential landlord in Kenmore who actually told me about two tenants who had Section 8, who were horrible, unsanitary, and did not supervise their children which is why she would never consider renting to an HCV recipient," she said.

Fortunately, Liz was eventually able to find a landlord that would accept her voucher--but given her experience, she has joined us in as an advocate for fair housing rights. Just last April, Liz joined us in Albany to campaign with #BanIncomeBiasNY to end housing discrimination based on the



source of income of a person in New York State. She said that her experience lobbying was exciting and that it was refreshing to see a group of people coming from all over to unite and fight for the rights of people who may not have a voice.

While income bias is not yet banned in New York State, after years of resistance, the passage of the Erie County Fair Housing Law has finally come to fruition. For years, the battle within the legislative chamber persisted as those affected constituents, like Liz Clarke, hastened under deadline to find decent housing that would accept their lawful source of income. Denials bathed in discriminatory undertones ran rampantly throughout Erie County as we all awaited good news of the law's passage. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Justice too long delayed is justice denied," and until April, this was the case in Erie County. While this is a monumental accomplishment for the county, Liz has a message to those politicians sitting in the state's capitol while income bias persists.

"The basic need of all people is to have food, shelter, and clothing - how, in a country such as America can any one of those needs be stalled or voted on at a better time? The need is urgent and real!" ■

# Forever in Our Thoughts

HOME is grateful to have been a part of the full and respected lives of Susan Fayle, Rep. Louise Slaughter, and Dr. James Hecht. All three individuals supported fair housing and HOME. They were instrumental in HOME's move to 1542 Main Street in 2012 and have left an indelible mark on this agency and our mission. These three supporters will be sorely missed.



## REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER

*August 14, 1929 – March 16, 2018*

- Presented keynote address at HOME's 43rd Annual Meeting



## SUSAN M. FAYLE

*October 10, 1944 – April 9, 2018*

- Former chair of HOME's Board of Directors and the Main-Ferry Housing Fund Development Co. Board of Directors,
- Treasurer of the HOME Board of Directors,
- Chair of several HOME committees,
- Member of Oishei Task Force.



## DR. JAMES L. HECHT

*December 21, 1926 – April 27, 2018*

- Signed articles of incorporation for HOME in 1963,
- HOME's first executive vice president (then president, and finally chairman),
- Author of, *Because It Is Right: Integration in Housing*, which documented the early work of HOME.



## ERIE COUNTY FAIR HOUSING LAW

In addition to federal and state fair housing classes this new law adds protections for:

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LAWFUL SOURCE OF INCOME**



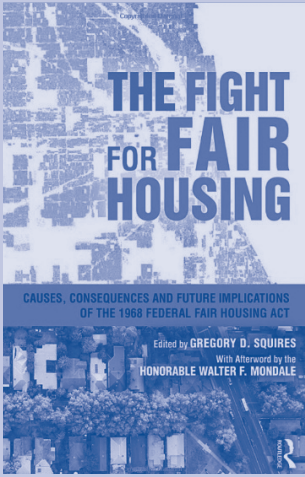
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## HOME'S READING CORNER *by Christopher Allaire*

HOME's Reading Corner is intended to give our supporters a summary of the significant books, articles, and academic studies on housing in Western New York and the city of Buffalo. This section will hopefully help contextualize the current struggle for fair housing in our region and illustrate the long history of community involvement in this critical civil rights issue.

Gregory Squires, Editor. *The Fight for Fair Housing: Causes, Consequences, and Future Implications of the 1968 Federal Fair Housing Act*. New York: Routledge Publishing, 2018.

In continued recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, this piece will be dedicated to reviewing another article from the recently published anthology: *The Fight for Fair Housing: Causes, Consequences, and Future Implications of the 1968 Federal Fair Housing Act*. As with last issue's article, this review will focus on a chapter in *The Fight for Fair Housing*: that helps the reader understand HOME's fair housing work and the federal government's efforts to uphold the 1968 Fair Housing Act. In particular, this review will look at the evolution of implementation of the HUD mandate to affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH) and outline the implications of recent changes to this mandate.

The chapter that we will be reviewing is titled "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing: The Mandate to End Segregation" and was written by Raphael Bostic and Arthur Acolin of the University of Southern California's Price

School of Public Policy. Bostic and Acolin's article focuses on what they see as the second half, and often under emphasized, mandate of the 1968 Fair Housing Act that requires HUD to affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH). Unlike HUD's mission to end housing discrimination through enforcement of federal fair housing laws, the AFFH mandate is an altogether different approach to ending housing segregation and the disparities that come from housing discrimination in this country. According to Bostic and Acolin, the enforcement mandate is only one half of HUD's overall mission and that:

"by contrast, the affirmatively furthering mandate places emphasis on the notion that pursuit of fair housing can potentially reduce disparities in access to opportunity—disparities that have kept individuals potentially locked up and thereby constrained the ability of communities and regions to prosper and grow. Through this lens, fair housing is a tool that can promote economic development function and thus align with the objectives of policymakers."

Unlike HUD's enforcement mandate that compels individuals and companies to comply with fair housing laws through investigations and enforcement, AFFH attempts to redress housing discrimination through increasing access to opportunity for individuals living in segregated and impoverished communities. The two strategies that HUD employs to this end, according to Bostic and Acolin, are mobility and investing in existing communities. The former approach uses programs such as Housing Choice Vouchers

(Section 8) to help individuals and families move out of impoverished neighborhoods and into areas of greater opportunity. The latter strategy leverages HUD funding that municipalities receive in the form of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to improve existing communities and conduct studies detailing impediments to equity in a particular region. Bostic and Acolin see these studies, known as Analyses of Impediments, as essential to the AFFH mandate in that they help municipalities identify "barriers to effective access to housing (both public and private)... as well as strategies and actions to overcome these barriers."

Near the end of the article, Bostic and Acolin take a positive view of the future of AFFH because of new regulation enacted under the Obama administration in 2015. These regulations, in part, required municipalities to complete a revised Analysis of Impediments called an Assessment of Fair Housing every five years. However, in the interim since this article was published, HUD has suspended the deadline for submission of Assessments of Fair Housing until after 2020 and according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition "for a large majority of jurisdictions until 2025." This article importantly demonstrates that the fight for fair housing needs to be waged on multiple fronts, both through enforcement and through actions that affirmatively further fair housing. The recent suspension of deadlines for submission of Assessments of Fair Housing represents a potential weakening of HUD's AFFH mandate and a blow to this country's overall strategy to combat housing inequity. ■

## FAIR HOUSING ART DISPLAY & CEREMONY

The art club students of Notre Dame Academy donated fair housing art to Housing Opportunities Made Equal. On Thursday, April 26, 2018, there was a public display and ceremony held in their honor.



MEMBERSHIP IS OUR STRENGTH - JOIN TODAY!



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