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INSIGHT

ITHACA MAYOR SVANTE MYRICK TO SPEAK AT HOME DINNER *by Steven Haagsma*

On the evening of May 17 Housing Opportunities Made Equal will host its Annual Dinner at the newly renovated Shea's Seneca in South Buffalo, with the keynote address given by Ithaca, NY Mayor Svante Myrick. The event will be hosted by Madison Carter of WKBW Channel 7 Eyewitness News. The dinner, celebrating HOME's 56th anniversary, will also mark the first anniversary of Erie County's landmark fair housing law. The event will be an evening of cocktails, dinner, basket raffles, auctions and awards—all to benefit fair housing in WNY. Tickets can be purchased at homeny.org/dinner.

First elected in 2012, Myrick was, at 24, the youngest mayor in Ithaca's history, as well as its first mayor of color. Myrick was first elected to public office while still an undergraduate at Cornell, winning a seat on Ithaca's Common Council at age 20. He is known for closing the City of Ithaca's budget deficit without major tax increases, for his advocacy within Ithaca as well as in Albany and Washington, DC, for his prominent social media presence, and for changing his dedicated parking spot into a public park. On March 6, 2019, Mayor Myrick announced that he will run for a third term as Mayor. Myrick also has personal experience with housing that few public figures have endured: he experienced periods of homelessness as a child. This perspective makes him uniquely suited to address fair housing, as someone who has experienced both powerlessness and power.

The evening will also include the presentation of the Sarah G. Metzger Human Rights Award as well as live and silent auctions. For sponsorship information, please contact Development Officer Reina Ysaguirre-Boersma at ryboersma@homeny.org or at 716-854-1400 ext. 22.

Whether you attend every year or this is your first Annual Dinner, we look forward to seeing you there!

SAVE THE DATE

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES MADE EQUAL'S

56th | ANNUAL
CELEBRATION

FRIDAY - MAY 17, 2019

SOCIAL HOUR 5:00 PM
SHEA'S SENECA
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HOST MADISON CARTER | WKBW CHANNEL 7 EYEWITNESS NEWS

DINNER | AUCTIONS | MUSIC | AWARDS | RAFFLES

\$85 Tickets | RSVP 716-854-1400 or homeny.org



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Svante L. Myrick
Mayor of Ithaca, NY

Svante L. Myrick was sworn into office in January 2012 at the age of 24, becoming the City of Ithaca's youngest and first Mayor of color. His first budget included a radical overhaul of City government that merged departments, streamlined processes and successfully closed a \$3 million deficit—all while delivering the lowest tax increase in the City of Ithaca since the year 2000. He has been featured in *Times Magazine* and listed in *Forbes' 30 Under 30*.

He is a recipient of the John F. Kennedy New-Frontier Award and was voted Most Innovative and a mayor to "Keep Our Eye On" in a *Politico Magazine* poll.

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TRENDS IN FAIR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT

by Dan Corbitt, Esq.

Fair Housing Month is fast approaching, and it is a fitting time to recognize the considerable barriers to housing choice that persist in Western New York and throughout the nation. Barriers that, fifty years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, continue to harm our entire nation by denying the most disadvantaged in our society access to opportunity and prosperity.

Each year, the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) releases a Fair Housing Trends Report based on housing discrimination complaint data collected from government agencies and private, nonprofit fair housing organizations such as HOME. NFHA has collected this information on an annual basis since 1996, and over that period, disturbing and persistent patterns have emerged.

Nationwide, the study found that the number of housing discrimination complaints continue to increase. In fact, the number of complaints has steadily risen for the past four years. Despite this disturbing trend, the federal government is failing to take action to address the growing crisis. For the past few years, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has processed fewer complaints and the Department of Justice (DOJ) has filed fewer cases in court. For example, HUD processed just 1,311 complaints in 2017, the most recent year for which data is available. This comprises less than 5 percent of reported complaints

for that year. Worse still, DOJ only brought 41 cases to trial.

To compensate for the lack of enforcement by the federal government, private fair housing organizations like HOME have stepped up their enforcement efforts, and each year handle more than twice as many housing discrimination complaints as all government agencies combined. Despite this fact, federal support for fair housing has come under attack in recent years. In recent years, Congress has attempted to limit or completely remove funding for private fair housing organizations and prevent those organizations from conducting enforcement efforts in their local markets.

Another signal of the federal government's failure to robustly enforce fair housing law came in 2018 when HUD suspended implementation of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule (AFFH). When passed in 1968, the explicit purpose of the Fair Housing Act was to eliminate housing discrimination and promote residential integration. However, these goals have been largely frustrated by deep-rooted policies and practices that perpetuate discrimination and segregation in municipalities across the country, including exclusionary zoning rules and school attendance boundaries.

The AFFH requires all municipalities that receive federal funding to submit an Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH)

to HUD. The AFH is a planning process through which communities use local data to analyze barriers to fair housing choice and establish robust measures to reduce those barriers. By extending the deadline up to seven years for municipalities to submit AFH plans, HUD has effectively abandoned its duty in the interim to ensure that municipalities take substantive steps to address housing discrimination and reduce segregation. The current administration has also launched assaults on fair lending laws, including stripping the Office of Fair Lending of its enforcement powers and working to repeal fair lending provisions contained in the Dodd-Frank Act.

Our nation will never truly thrive if it continues to be hobbled by discrimination, segregation, and rising inequality. Today, the federal government is failing to remedy those injustices and remove the barriers to fair housing. While this puts a greater strain on HOME's limited resources, we will not rest until our community becomes a place of opportunity for all residents and true housing choice exists for all. It's more imperative than ever for you to join with HOME in promoting the value of diversity and ensuring all people an equal opportunity to live in the housing and communities of their choice. Support this vital mission and become a member of HOME today! ■

This is what

We are here for



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"This apartment has a lot of steps for someone with a cane, I think you would be better off somewhere else."



In 2018, HOME received 36 recorded reports of discrimination on the basis of a person's disability. To learn more about discrimination, contact HOME.

LEAVING HOME: MIATA WRIGHT

March 8th marked Miata Wright's last day as HOME's Business Manager. Moving on to explore other opportunities, Miata will be sorely missed by her HOME colleagues, our clients, and staff from government and local agencies that she daily worked with. Blessings Miata!



How did you first hear about HOME?

I learned of HOME through the previous Executive Director Scott Gehl. We were active in our street's block club.

When were you hired at HOME?

I was hired in November 2013.

Where and when did you graduate college? With what degree?

I graduated from the University at Buffalo in 2013 with my Bachelor's degree in Aerospace and Mechanical engineering.

That degree does not appear to be a fit with a not for profit civil rights agency.

Unfortunately so many people in my generation graduate from college and end up in a completely different field from what they studied. Although I haven't been working in the engineering field, my technical and analytical skills certainly came in handy during my time at HOME. I'm glad I could contribute to agency that makes such a huge impact in the community.

You worked closely with longtime HOME staffer Margaret Brown (who has since passed away). How was your relationship with her? What type of supervisor was she?

I quickly understood why Margaret was called the "Sherriff of HOME"! She was a very organized and knowledgeable office manager. I had no idea what to expect as I had never worked in an office before but her demeanor reassured me that I would be able to pick up where she left off and keep HOME running efficiently. She even called well after her retirement to check in with me to make sure everything was running smoothly. She also got me involved in Juneteenth Festival which means a great deal to me. I am grateful I had the chance to work with her.

What did you learn from Margaret that you can take with you and use in future endeavors?

One of the first things Margaret told me is to always be honest. She said that if you make a mistake, own up to it and work to fix it instead of hiding it. Her dedication was evident through her work and I always wanted to make sure I was putting forth that same dedication.

What kind of work will you be doing once you leave HOME?

I'll be working in the network operations center of an energy company. I'll be responsible for managing energy curtailment events to avoid blackouts and brownouts and restoring power if they do occur.

What have you learned over the years while working at a civil rights agency?

I have seen first-hand how the lack of access to opportunities and the most basic human right, housing, can have on individuals and their families. Civil rights has come a long way over the last few decades but there is still so much work that needs to be done to ensure people have the access to the housing that they want and so desperately need.

What are you going to miss most about HOME?

I'll miss being in an environment where my colleagues go above and beyond to help those that need it the most.

Any parting words for the HOME clients, members and friends that you have come into contact with over the past 5 years?

Despite the opposition from some, you should still keep fighting. The work you do now can change the lives of future generations for the better. ■

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY: MS. WASHINGTON

by Steve Dalton

Ms. Washington came to HOME looking for assistance in getting her security deposit back from a previous landlord. Ms. Washington had a low income and therefore needed to get her security deposit back to be able to afford another rental unit. Her previous landlord took her to small claims court to recoup money for minor damages that occurred to the property over the years as a result of normal wear and tear (which is not the responsibility of the tenant to pay). After an unfavorable judgement was handed down, Ms. Washington came to HOME. After examining her paperwork, HOME determined that she should not have had to pay for the all of damages on her property. HOME was able to help her file a FOIL request with the health department and get the results of previous inspections that had taken place on the property. In addition to this HOME was able to help file a Trial De Novo Request for Ms. Washington where the judge ended up ruling in her favor after reviewing all the evidence. In conclusion, HOME was able to help save Ms. Washington \$800 and she was able to recoup that money to move into a new property. ■

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NEW YORK DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY PROMISES BIG CHANGES

by Steven Haagsma

Last November's elections ushered in a new era in New York State politics: full Democratic control. For only the third time in the past 50 years and the first in a decade, one party controls all three branches of the state government. With that control comes the power to pass much-needed legislation, and party leaders have already pledged to do just that. From expanded voting rights to criminal justice reform to campaign finance, the newly empowered state Democrats have a lot of policies lined up. Just a few months into the new term, some impressive victories have already been recorded, including new protections for child victims of sexual abuse.

On the housing front, one major victory has already been achieved in the passage of the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act, or GENDA. GENDA adds gender identity and expression as a protected class under all anti-discrimination statutes at the state level and also bans conversion therapy. While renters already enjoyed this protection in Erie County, now all New York State residents enjoy this protection and can no longer be denied housing because of their gender identity (which includes both actual and perceived gender, as well as non-conformity with traditional gender roles).

Another important protected class is lawful source of income (SOI or LSOI). Like gender identity, this class already exists under Erie County law, as well as in Buffalo, Hamburg, and West Seneca, but a push to expand the protection to the state level is vital. The Ban Income Bias NY coalition has been working to make SOI a state protected class since 2016. In a statement, the coalition said:

LSOI discrimination is pervasive in New York State and is often a proxy for illegal discrimination against protected classes already covered under existing fair housing laws, such as race and disability. Governor Cuomo included LSOI protections in his 2020 Executive Budget proposal and the

#BanIncomeBiasNY coalition is encouraging Members of the New York State Senate and Assembly to include the same LSOI protections in their one-house budget proposals. Coalition members continue to educate their state representatives and share how important LSOI protections are to some of our most vulnerable communities. We encourage all #BanIncomeBiasNY supporters to join us in our efforts by calling, emailing and meeting with their state Senate and Assembly Members! Supporters can also follow our progress on Facebook and Twitter, and can join the coalition by emailing banincomebiasny@gmail.com.

Adding SOI protection to state law would ensure that all New Yorkers are able to use income such as Section 8 vouchers, Social Security, disability, or veterans' benefits to pay their rent, expanding access to housing to those who are most vulnerable.



NY Assembly Majority Leader
Crystal Peoples-Stokes

We hope that the achievements so far in the new legislative term are just the beginning. Governor Cuomo has made some big statements as his politics have shifted left, including legalizing marijuana, embracing the Green New Deal, and banning single-use plastic bags. It remains to be seen how much progress is made, especially on housing justice and affordability. There are nevertheless some early victories worth celebrating, from the passage of GENDA to Buffalo's Crystal Peoples-Stokes becoming the first African-American woman to be the Assembly's Majority Leader. We at HOME will continue to push for positive change, especially by working with Ban Income Bias NY to ensure SOI protections for everyone in the state. ■



MEET HOME'S NEW OPERATIONS COORDINATOR, SHAUN WHITE

What did you do before you came to HOME?

Before coming to HOME I worked for a variety of not-for-profit agencies in and around the WNY area. I have over 10 years of experience in the accounting and finance industries along with numerous administrative responsibilities and functions.

Why are you interested in fair housing and social justice issues?

I am interested in fair housing and social justice issues as they affect us all no matter what background we come from. Having opportunities for fair housing promotes health and safety for all whom are affected. I believe social justice issues are so vital to examine as they promote and help to encourage a society that celebrates diversity and equality for all.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

Outside of work I enjoy raising my three children, listening to music and hanging out with friends. I also enjoy outdoor activities such as visiting state parks, finding new hiking trails and attending concerts and comedy shows.

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.

Mazzara, Alicia and Brian Knuden. "Where Families With Children Use Housing Vouchers: A Comparative Look at the 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas." *Poverty and Race Research Action Council*, 2019.

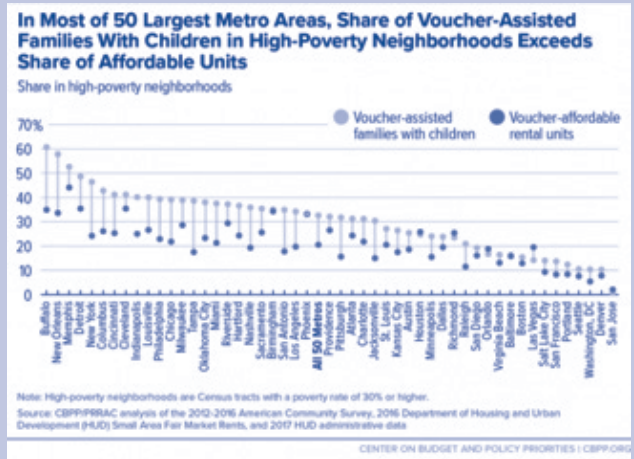
For this issue's article, we will be analyzing a report on the Housing Choice Voucher Program, often referred to as "Section 8," and looking at overall trends in where families with vouchers reside. This report, created by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' Poverty and Race Research Action Council is the first study to look at the broader picture of where voucher holders reside in the nation's fifty largest cities, including Buffalo, and seeks to detail the effectiveness of the program in alleviating poverty and creating opportunity. As you will see, the statistics for families with housing vouchers in Buffalo mirror larger national trends, but stands out in significant ways that are a product of Buffalo's particular history of racial segregation and urban development.

The key findings in this study concern the fact that many families with vouchers reside in communities and neighborhoods that are highly segregated and centers of concentrated poverty. Although the Housing Choice Voucher Program encourages individuals and families to move into voucher affordable units in lower poverty areas of cities, many families choose not to do so. This is due, in part, to the fact that some voucher holders want to stay in familiar neighborhoods, or around family. However, source of income discrimination—the denial of tenancy to

someone because they receive a Section 8 Voucher or other form of lawful income—is also a major reason why some in Buffalo have difficulty moving into areas of low poverty.

For example, in the City of Buffalo sixty-one percent of voucher assisted families with children live in high poverty neighborhoods, mostly in the city's east and west side. This is the highest concentration of voucher assisted families living in areas of concentrated poverty in the entire United States, which is at odds with the fact that most of the voucher eligible units in Buffalo are outside of these areas of concentrated poverty. While nearly all of the nation's fifty largest cities have more voucher assisted families living in areas of high poverty than actual voucher affordable units in these areas, Buffalo has the highest disparity. Sixty-one percent of voucher assisted families in Buffalo live in areas of high poverty, while these areas only contain around thirty-five percent of voucher affordable units.

Here at HOME we are working to reverse this trend through programs that help individuals and families move out of areas of high poverty into low poverty neighborhoods that provide life-enhancing



opportunities. Over the past twenty years, HOME's Community Housing Center (CHC) has assisted hundreds of families and individuals living in high poverty areas move into low poverty neighborhoods through down payment assistance and educational classes. As this report outlines, there are far more voucher eligible properties in low poverty neighborhoods than there are vouchers holder in the City of Buffalo. It is our goal at HOME, through the CHC program, to help reverse the national trend of voucher concentration in high poverty neighborhoods and ensure that families with housing vouchers have the opportunity to live in low poverty areas. In this way, HOME is working every day to ensure that Buffalo's past legacy of concentrated poverty and segregation won't look like its future. ■



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WHAT'S HAPPENING DURING FAIR HOUSING MONTH

National Fair Housing month raises awareness about fair housing rights in an effort to end housing discrimination.

TUE 2	Come see HOME at Community Access Services 9am-3pm 3297 Bailey Avenue Buffalo, NY 14215.	WED 3	Hamburg Office Hours , 3pm-5pm; Frontier SD Community Education Tenants' Rights workshop, 6pm-7pm.	THR 4	Fair Housing Month Proclamation, 11am 2919 Delaware Ave., Town of Tonawanda , 14217.	SAT 6	Amherst Center for Senior Services Housing Fair, 9am-11am; HOME at Saturday Academy - Frank Sedita School, 10am-1pm.	
MON 8	Erie County Training* at Orchard Park, 10am.	WED 10	Tenant Training at HOME, 5pm-6pm; <i>Green Book</i> movie showing at Hamburg Town Hall , 7pm.	THR 11	Erie County Training* at HOME, 9:30am; Health & Housing Community Forum	SAT 13	Come see HOME at Saturday Academy Frank Sedita School, 10am-1pm.	
TUE 16	Staff Fair Housing training for Howard Hanna Realty* .	WED 17	Landlord Training at HOME, 3pm-5pm; Buffalo Urban League Fair Housing Community Forum, 6pm-7:30pm.			SAT 20	Buffalo Urban League , First-Time Homebuyers course, 9am-4pm.	
THR 25	HOME's Annual Meeting, 5:30pm-7pm at HOME's office, 1542 Main Street Buffalo, NY 14209.	For more details on events during National Fair Housing Month, go to www.homeny.org or call us at 716-854-1400.						

*Asterisk events are not open to the public.