

Insight

Western New York's Source for Fair Housing News



Housing Opportunities Made Equal

Eason Chosen to Lead HOME

By Kibrett A.B. Facey

In the summer of 2000, DeAnna Eason had no idea that she would one day be the Executive Director of Housing Opportunities Made Equal. In fact, she never imagined that one day she would be applying to a job there. A simple visit to her parents' home turned into a race against the clock to meet the deadline indicated on a job listing posted



for a Mobility Counselor at HOME. Her background in counseling and proclivity to help others were the characteristics that attracted her to the position.

"The deadline for submission was the next day, so I frantically updated my resume and typed up a cover letter. The rest was history," she said.

And it indeed it was. Although she was initially attracted to the counseling aspect of the position, little did she know that she would soon also be responsible for finding safe, affordable housing for Section 8 voucher holders. This is where the flame of her passion for Fair Housing was ignited.

For Eason, her role as Mobility Counselor was just the beginning. After excelling in that position, she transitioned to others during her sixteen year tenure with HOME. She was able to counsel landlords and tenants on their rights and responsibilities, set up fair housing testing investigations, supervise fair housing staff, and train all new hires on fair housing

law. She would also act as Executive Director in Mr. Gehl's absence as well as supervise the programming of the Fair Housing Unit and the Mobility Unit.

It goes without saying that all of Eason's prior duties with HOME were primers for her upcoming role. She has seen HOME grow throughout the years and has borne witness to the changing dynamics over the last decade and a half. She surely has honed the skills necessary for carrying HOME forward and for making a difference in the Western New York community. This is especially significant since working in fair housing law requires patience, perseverance, and prioritization.

Working to enforce fair housing laws is not an easy task. Eason recalls one case in which a Congolese refugee was harassed while trying to build himself a better life in America. This gentleman worked endlessly to save enough money to purchase a home in the Old First Ward. A month after the client closed on his home, it was set ablaze in a horrific act of vandalism. This callous act of arson did not deter the client who immediately began to repair his property. Unfortunately, three months later, the home was set afire again. This time nothing but the frame of the house was left behind. Michael Fijal, a resident of the Old First Ward, would plead guilty to three counts of arson.

Eason noted that this case was a particularly sad one. While it may be easy to consider the outcomes of housing discrimination victims as lugubrious, there is certainly some optimism to be found. Working in the not-for-profit world (specifically those which seek liberty and civil rights) can prove to be exhaustive and sometimes lacking instant gratification. Despite this, Eason has a plan to ensure that she remains refreshed while fighting the good fight. She stated that the client stories rejuvenate her and that her faith teaches

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A New Day In Tonawanda

By Daniel Corbitt

HOME recently celebrated a significant win in the fight against segregation and concentrated poverty in Western New York. As a result of HOME's advocacy, the Tonawanda Housing Authority (THA) has eliminated its longstanding residency preference as a selection criterion for applicants. Previously, the THA's admissions process gave priority to applicants who lived in the City of Tonawanda for at least two years.

Courts have found that similar residency preferences used by public housing authorities in white-majority communities violated fair housing laws by disproportionately advantaging whites over nonwhites and creating barriers that prevent minority families from moving to areas with greater opportunities, thus ensuring that overwhelmingly-white communities remain overwhelmingly-white.

By giving a priority to residents of the predominately white city, the THA's residency preference has the effect of perpetuating segregation in one of the most racially and economically segregated regions in the country.

Here in the Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan area, people of color are disproportionately poor and clustered in the urban centers. In 2014, the poverty rate for white people in Erie County was 8.7 percent, while 36.1 percent of African Americans and 38.6 percent Hispanics were living in poverty. Buffalo is the sixth most racially segregated metro area in the nation. Eighty-six percent of the region's African-Americans are concentrated in the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. In contrast, 96 percent of residents of the City of

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From the Director:

TO A BETTER FUTURE

by Scott W. Gehl

Insight's new editor, Kibrett Facey, has given me the daunting assignment of reflecting on 35 years of HOME in about 700 words. Even for one not given to tangents or excruciating detail, that's a tall order.

Only the most devoted of readers will recall that for my first decade as executive director, I — in my spare time — edited HOME's newsletter. Long before we knew the name Bill Gates, each word of those first 41 issues flowed through my fingers two or three times—typed on a donated Underwood electric with an annoyingly loud hum and without a working backspace key. I must have consumed even more coffee in those days.

Challenging circumstances

The organization I went to work for in the Spring of 1982 was in difficult straits. Founded by an amazing group of visionary volunteers committed to the dream of Fair Housing, HOME's first two directors had met with limited success.

Housed in a windowless suite of offices on an inaccessible second floor at 1490 Jefferson, HOME struggled to pay even a very modest rent. With a \$7,000 debt and a budget of only \$60,000, we had no margin for error. When informed that HOME had hired the former University District Councilman, City Hall imposed a retroactive hiring freeze and reduced our only government contract by 27 percent. Newly elected Chair George Hezel spent days waiting in the office of the City's Commissioner of Community Development before the freeze was lifted.

Thankfully, my first Board of Directors was heavily weighted with people of courage and quality — like Jim Civial & Sally Metzger, Denis Woods & Dan Acker, Ron Coan & Jim Myers, Art Butler & Jim Crawford & Charlotte Wolpin. Treasurer Bette Blosat set about the task of training the new executive in the rudiments of financial management. And—as new staff was hired and trained — somehow the Board didn't let me go.

We began to put systems in place, improve client services, and significantly increase the number of people HOME helped. Within weeks of joining HOME, I sat at the negotiating table with the NYS Division of Housing to resolve a racial steering complaint filed in the wake of the Love Canal emergency. A few months later, we were sitting down with *Buffalo News* Publisher Henry Urban, Publisher-designate Stan Lipsey, and Editor Murray Light to discuss

ending discrimination in advertising. Those discussions would lead to the Publishers' Voluntary Agreement, which included 27 newspapers in Western New York.

Recurring themes

Looking through a dozen years of *Insight* from the perspective of 35 as HOME's director, I can discern several reoccurring themes.

Despite modest resources, *HOME* has attacked big problems — such as discrimination by Buffalo's largest landlord, when BMHA was the favored patronage haven of Buffalo's longest serving mayor. Lacking sufficient horsepower to proceed alone, HOME reached out to a young investigative reporter named Jim Heaney who fashioned a five-part series — later nominated for a Pulitzer Prize — which exposed discrimination and other wrongdoing.

As a direct result, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan came to Buffalo for a series of public hearings (HOME would become a consultant for the Senator) and HUD Secretary Jack Kemp ordered a Title VI compliance review. When HUD concluded that BMHA had indeed discriminated against minority tenants and applicants, HOME was named to an advisory panel to fashion a remedy (which the *News* called a "masterplan to desegregate the troubled authority"). HUD's refusal to help fund the desegregation plan led to the class-action suit *Comer v. Kemp* undertaken in partnership with our colleagues at Neighborhood Legal Services and the WNY Law Center

HOME has broken new ground: eliminating discriminatory advertising (until the internet), filing early cases under the Supreme Court's *Havens* doctrine (which gave standing to fair housing organizations), applying the *Havens* doctrine to the NYS Human Rights Law, and, in *HOME v. Pataki*, challenging the State's practice of closing discrimination cases for reason of "administrative convenience".

HOME has been resilient and resourceful — shifting tactics from case advocacy, to collective action, to using media to focus the light of public attention on injustice, to filing lawsuits, to advocating for the passage of laws — whatever path will best remedy injustice.

In cases too numerous to cite, *HOME* has repeatedly spoken truth to power —

sometimes challenging even our own sources of financial support. In a keynote address to HOME's membership, Canisius College President John J. Hurley paraphrased the late Dr. Martin Luther King saying that, time and again, HOME had been "dangerously unselfish in the cause of fair housing".

More than a decade before, John had chaired HOME's Board as we led a determined battle to enact a fair housing law in Buffalo. Assembling a phalanx of supporting organizations and turning out HOME's membership despite a snow storm severe enough to close schools, the measure (co-sponsored by Gene Fahey and Jim Pitts) passed the Common Council but faced a certain veto. Ever the showman, the then mayor held a public hearing to "help decide" whether he would veto the civil rights law. Attending was a mob of frightened and angry residents bussed to City Hall from predominantly white neighborhoods; testifying in favor of the civil rights law were Dan Kohane, John Hurley and myself. Had he covered that hearing for the *Buffalo News*, Tennyson might have written: "And into the Valley of Death rode the Six Hundred."

HOME's clients

While helping tens of thousands of clients and winning victories for hundreds of good people who have encountered the crime of discrimination, it is those relatively few losses which stay with me: Sherry (whose familial status case went to the U.S. Court of Appeals), Judy (whose race discrimination case, proven in federal court, received an insulting jury award to two dollars), Henry (whose death preceded justice long delayed), and families who lost homes in racial arsons in Lewiston and in Buffalo's Old First Ward.

Although not always proven right, HOME has always been *in the right*. What an honor it has been to play a role in seeking justice for so many.

And the people

Perhaps it is the nature of our cause, but people of extraordinary quality have always been attracted to HOME. In addition to those already mentioned, among the board chairs I have worked with were Art Butler, Anne Bertholf, Ellen Wells, Deborah Goldman, Sam Loliger, Sue Fayle, Janet Barnes, Chuck Thomas, Gilbert Hernandez

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During the Season of Giving, Local Organizations Open Their Doors to HOME

By Veronica Fabrizio

During the month of November, HOME ventured into the community to co-host a couple of events. The first was held at Alex and Ani Buffalo to share our mission of promoting the value of diversity and ensuring all people an equal opportunity to live in the housing and communities of their choice. For those who are not familiar with Alex and Ani, it is a company that creates meaningful, eco-conscious, and American-made jewelry and accessories to empower and connect humanity. Alex and Ani is dedicated to raising funds and awareness for non-profit organizations by way of hosting Alex and Ani



for helping the only organization that offers comprehensive services to victims of housing discrimination in WNY. Each organization truly went out of their way to provide the best customer service experience possible to our guests. HOME would also like to thank its members and volunteers for helping to execute the event. All of you truly helped to make this event possible! ♦

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A New Day In Tonawanda

Tonawanda are white.

As jobs and services have relocated to the suburbs over the past several decades, many minority residents of poor urban neighborhoods have been left with an increasing shortage of institutional resources, financial capital, and employment opportunities. For comparison, the 2014 Census data showed 31.3 percent of Buffalo residents lived in poverty, while the poverty rate of the City of Tonawanda was only 12.2 percent.

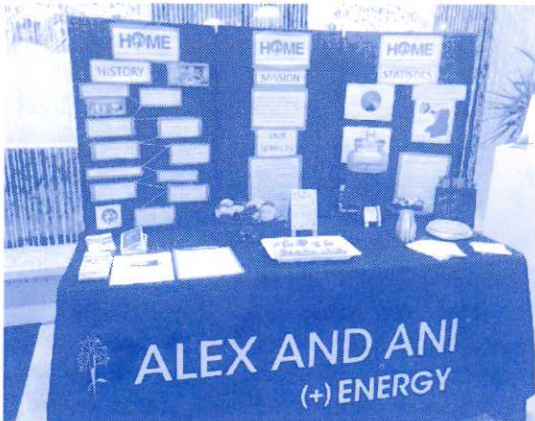
To compound the problem, almost 38 percent of poor people in our region live in neighborhoods where 40 percent or more of their neighbors are also poor. While only 1.2% of the metro area's white residents live in very high poverty neighborhoods, 25.9% of Hispanic residents and 21.1% of African-American residents live in very high poverty neighborhoods.

These areas of concentrated poverty isolate their residents from the resources and networks needed to be successful and make positive contributions to our community. Studies have shown that crime and delinquency, low educational achievement, psychological distress, health problems, and other



deleterious effects result from living in areas of concentrated poverty. These consequences not only harm the people living in these areas, but our entire region's economic and social potential is greatly weakened as a result.

To overcome the challenges of segregation and concentrated poverty, HOME continues to fight to ensure that every Western New Yorker has equal access to the resources and opportunities necessary to achieve his or her potential. People currently living in segregated areas of concentrated poverty must be able to obtain quality affordable housing in areas with greater opportunities. With that purpose in mind, the THA's decision to remove a barrier to affordable housing for those who need it most is a positive step towards a more fair and just society, where all people have the same opportunities to live a full and productive life. ♦



Charity by Design events. During a Charity by Design event, an Alex and Ani store will open its doors to a non-profit organization for an evening. A portion of any sales made within that time will go to that organization.

Much to HOME's delight, its Alex and Ani Charity by Design event was a great success. In addition, there was a great turnout of guests attending the event. Throughout the evening, holiday shoppers admired and purchased dozens of Alex and Ani pieces from their latest collections to their signature gold and silver bangles. However, what truly made the event a success was the fact that HOME was given the opportunity to spread awareness of its mission to the local Western New York community.

Similarly, HOME was able to further spread its mission through another event co-hosted with the New York Institute of Massage. During this event, students from the New York Institute of Massage volunteered their time to give massages to any shoppers passing by. The New York Institute of Massage routinely hosts Massage-a-Thons at the Walden Galleria Mall in order to raise money for local non-profit organizations. The Massage-a-Thon was a success for everyone involved. HOME would like to thank the students of the New York Institute of Massage and the staff of Alex and Ani Buffalo for giving us these wonderful fundraising opportunities.

Here at HOME, we cannot express enough gratitude to the good people of Alex and Ani Buffalo and the New York Institute of Massage

HOME UPDATES

Joanne Champion-Granger Scholarship Award

In the coming months, we will be accepting applications for the Joanne Champion Granger Scholarship, awarded each year to a college-bound high school senior in Erie or Niagara County who demonstrates high academic achievement along with a commitment to volunteerism and human rights. This year, through the auspices of Dr. Carl Granger, HOME will be awarding \$1,500 to a first place winner and \$500 to two honorable mentions. HOME will also give \$100 to the first place recipient's nominating organization in thanks for its participation.

Inclusionary Zoning: PART OF THE SOLUTION?

By Kibrett A.B. Facey

The city of Buffalo has undergone a number of transformations in hopes of making it the bustling city that it once was years ago. While these changes lend to a thriving city, there is a population of the Queen City that has been neglected. Local rent and housing prices are skyrocketing as poverty in the area continues to barrage Buffalonians attempting to make ends meet. New housing is built but typically these units boast a luxurious price that is much too high for Buffalonians of lower incomes to afford. Gentrification and displacement are running rampant as urban revitalization serves more privileged society members.

So, how do we combat this? The fight begins with inclusionary zoning—a plausible method to ensure that there is steady creation of affordable housing to accompany new developments. Under inclusionary zoning policies, a small percentage of units in any new, city-approved market-rate development must be affordable for low-to-moderate income families. These affordable units also must be comparable to the other units in type, quality, and access to amenities. Simply put, affordable units should not pale in comparison to their market-rate counterparts.

In Buffalo, a cohort of forward-thinking organizations has been pushing forth potential inclusionary zoning policies. This cohort, known as The Buffalo Inclusionary Housing Coalition, includes members of the Partnership for the Public Good, PUSH Buffalo, Heart of the City Neighborhoods, LISC Buffalo, HOME, and Open Buffalo. In a city that is experiencing many disparities

and increased socio-economic segregation, this coalition is pushing inclusionary zoning in hopes of propelling economic integration.

In the Inclusionary Zoning report recently prepared by The Buffalo Inclusionary Housing Coalition, there is a discussion about current national trends and the toll that they have taken in the Queen City. There has been a roaring preference for cities as opposed to suburbs by residents, thus onsetting flurries of new investments. Public spending done in areas such as the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, downtown Buffalo, and the waterfront has given way to spurts of new developments and attractions. But like all new, shiny toys, there is a cost that must be paid. The price that Buffalo has begun to pay comes in the form of shortages of affordable housing and accompanying gentrification and displacement.

Did you know that Buffalo has experienced the seventh largest increase in rental affordability burden? Families are now spending 28.4 percent of their incomes on rent. In a household with an income of \$50,000, that means that an additional \$1,400 will be tacked onto rent annually.

Given the especially high poverty rates in the city, Buffalonians experience unique challenges. The median household income in Buffalo is \$21,815. If we define affordability as the ability to use 30% of one's income to pay rent, then we are looking at \$545 in rent per month. In our city, this is unrealistic; more than half of Buffalo's rental housing is priced at \$600 or more. The Buffalo Inclusionary Housing Coalition reported that 61 percent of renters have an income

of less than \$35,000 with approximately 78 percent of them spending more than 30% of their income on rent. It seems that in Buffalo, the only method of survival is living beyond your means.

This is a detriment that is far from being mitigated by the construction of new apartments. Two developments that are representative of the non-inclusionary pricing of newer apartments are units at Hydraulic Lofts on 500 Seneca and 301 Ohio Street Apartments. Two bedroom units at Hydraulic Lofts will cost you anywhere in between a whopping \$1,075 to \$2,000. Similarly, a two bedroom apartment at 301 Ohio Street Apartments will do damage upwards of \$2,495. While there are cheaper units that exist, they are often of lower quality and put renters at risk of things such as caved in roofs and mold. Quality has become something that renters must push aside to make their monthly payments. These unaffordable, new developments also ensure that renters are concentrated in racially segregated, high poverty neighborhoods.

To remedy these issues of unaffordability and segregation, The Buffalo Inclusionary Housing Coalition is advocating for a policy that requires developers of ten or more units to reserve 30 percent of units for people with an income falling below 60 percent of the City's median income. This policy could also allow great incentives for developers such as permits that would allow developers to build at a higher density as well as quicker processes in acquiring

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To A Better Future

and Diana Cooke. I learned from them all; they and colleagues too numerous to name, helped me become a better executive.

Our associate directors have also been instrumental to HOME's success — among them Jody Heublum Bailey, Joyce Jowdy, Andrea Mujahid-Moore, Shannon Koehn and DeAnna Eason. I take heart in the fact that the Board of Directors unanimously chose DeAnna to serve as HOME's fourth executive director; she is a woman of remarkable intelligence, courage and commitment.

At the time of HOME's 30th anniversary in 1993, I sat down to interview four members of HOME's founding generation. Among them was Jim Crawford, the self-effacing retired carpenter, whose eloquence so often surpassed that of colleagues with college degrees. Responding to a question about HOME's impact over three decades, Jim concluded: "I am reminded of Martin Luther King. He never could have accomplished what he did if he was just fighting for Black people. He fought for justice for all people — and HOME is doing the same thing." ♦

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Inclusionary Zoning:

necessary permits. Similar programs have had great success in major cities such as Chicago, Illinois and Boston, Massachusetts.

The resurgence of Buffalo will only truly be successful if it is inclusive. All citizens of Buffalo, despite income level, deserve the opportunity to live in sustainable neighborhoods for affordable prices. With the stipulations put forth in the Inclusionary Report, the future of the Queen City could be brighter than anyone could have ever envisaged. ♦

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Eason Chosen to Lead HOME

her to not be "weary in well-doing." Playing a part in changing the world is no easy task, but she surely rises to the challenge.

Assuming the role of HOME's Executive Director fills Eason with both excitement and anxiety. "I am honored to have been selected to this lead outstanding civil rights agency that has done such valuable work for 53 years," she said. While she is prepared to undertake this role, she has reiterated that she must rely on her faith and the team of individuals who have pledged to support HOME and her during this new chapter.

Eason pledges to continue her predecessor's legacy of speaking truth to power and ensuring that HOME is no longer Western New York's best kept secret. Through education, outreach, and enforcement, HOME will continue to empower the community by advising it of its rights and responsibilities under fair housing laws. With great power comes great responsibility, and DeAnna Eason is now the personification of that phrase. ♦

Meet HOME's New Staff

By Miata Wright

This fall, HOME welcomed two new staff members. We sat down with them as they reflected on their first couple of months at HOME.



KIBRETT FACEY is HOME's Education Specialist. Kibrett received her degree in Communication from Cornell University in 2016 and used her love for giving back to

communities in need by supporting Buffalo's grassroots development as a High Road Fellow. The young writer from Orlando, Florida aims to use her passion for civil rights and skills in community outreach to educate landlords and tenants on their housing rights.

Tell us about your journey to HOME.

I've always had a passion for helping others. Since middle school, I've been dedicated to giving back to underrepresented communities any way I can. I've also had a desire to learn more about black history beyond what is told in school and I express that through my volunteer work with the youth. I volunteered with an organization in Orlando called Parramore Kidz Zone which provides supportive services to at-risk children and youth living in one of the most impoverished areas in Orlando. The youth is our future, and I believe that it is everyone's responsibility to support and inspire them.

What does a typical day at HOME look like for you?

Most of my days start with a cup of oatmeal. After that, I interact with housing providers and local organizations through phone or e-mail, letting them know of the housing services and education we provide. I also study and research fair housing laws, prepare presentations and monitor social media for groundbreaking fair housing news in addition to offering paralegal counseling.

Has anything made an impact on you since being at HOME so far?

Since joining the HOME team, I've realized that discrimination happens beyond race. Even though it may be subtle, it can have a detrimental impact on someone's emotional state when they are denied access to such a basic need as housing.

Being a Florida native, what differences have you noticed about the social climate and culture here?

I would say that although there is prejudice everywhere, it's harder to detect in Buffalo. Before I moved to New York, I was used to the discrimination and bigotry I experienced in Florida. Although I love my home state, when I visit Florida, I immediately get the feeling that I am not welcomed in certain settings. On the bright side, most of Buffalo has a strong sense of community and Buffalonians take great pride in their city, especially their sports teams. It's such a uniting factor in a city that has seen so many economic shifts over the last century.

What advice would you give to Landlords and Tenants?

I would advise landlords to know and understand the law before entering the housing and real estate industry. Ignorance of the law does not exempt you from the law so if there's something that you do not understand, reach out to us.

I'd advise tenants to not let the fear of being "the boy who cried wolf" prevent you from reporting discrimination. Your small step in alerting us to unfair housing

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HOME's Mission

Housing Opportunities Made Equal is a civil rights organization whose mission is to promote the value of diversity and to ensure all people an equal opportunity to live in the housing and communities of their choice – through education, advocacy, the enforcement of fair housing laws and the creation of housing opportunities.

Housing Opportunities Made Equal, Inc. would like to give special thanks to . . .

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Meet HOME's New Staff

practices could lead to justice for you and others in your community so I encourage you to voice your concerns with us.

VERONICA FABRIZIO is HOME's Development Officer. Veronica graduated from Canisius College with a degree in Sociology and Communications in 2013 and hopes to use her public relations experience to build strong relationships between HOME and other agencies and community members. She also aims to maintain the foundation HOME has as the sole fair housing agency in Western New York.

What did you do before joining HOME?

In college, I majored in Sociology and Communication and minored in Women's Studies. I was also the secretary of the Women's Studies club for 3 years. At the end of my senior year, I served as a Public Relations and Advertising Intern at the Buffalo Arts Studio where I used my background in advertising to assist in the planning and promotion of their biannual fundraiser.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I enjoy cooking and traveling. I studied abroad in Europe for six months and had the chance to experience the lovely countries of Ireland, Italy and Spain. I'd love to visit Europe again and even learn Spanish or Italian to make it an even more rewarding experience.

What are some projects you're working on?

Since I've started working here, I've been focused on planning events for the next several months. I'm currently preparing for

our Annual Dinner in April. I'm also coordinating smaller scale fundraising events in the area to remind the community that we are here to assist them with their housing needs.

Has your work at HOME changed your perspective of the housing needs and challenges faced by area residents?

I'm certainly more aware of how pervasive housing discrimination is. No one is immune to it and, unfortunately, it's very common across all demographics. I'm also more aware of how segregated the Buffalo area is, especially by income. In recent years, the resurgence of Buffalo has made it even more difficult for residents to find stable housing that they can afford. Just in passing, I've seen and heard many clients that face a number of barriers that prevent them from being able to sustain housing. No matter what that barrier may be, I believe it should be emphasized that everyone has a right to speak up about concerns regarding their housing. When someone lacks access to adequate housing, they lack access to so many other resources which can impact other areas of their life, including their health and well-being. ♦



*Happy Holidays
from
The Staff of
HOME*

