



State of Connecticut
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 450 Columbus Blvd., Suite 2, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Housing Committee
February 28, 2017

Testimony regarding SB-752
An Act Concerning Housing Segregation

Good afternoon Representative Butler, Senator Slossberg, Senator Hwang and members of the Housing Committee. My name is Cheryl Sharp and I am the Deputy Director of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities ("CHRO"). The CHRO investigates and prosecutes claims of discrimination including housing discrimination claims. I am here today to offer testimony concerning SB-752 An Act Concerning Housing Segregation which is on your agenda today.

The CHRO investigates and prosecutes housing discrimination complaints alleging violations of Conn. Gen. Stat. §46a-64c et seq. Additionally, we work with our federal counterparts at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to conduct joint investigations under federal housing discrimination law. We are also under contract with HUD to investigate and conciliate cases filed solely with HUD. We receive federal funding for each HUD case we process. In 2016 we received and closed over two hundred housing discrimination cases. Through civil rights law enforcement, the CHRO combats segregation by investigating and prosecuting complaints where an individual believes that they have been denied housing due to their race, national origin, source of income and many other protected classes. The CHRO also has jurisdiction over complaints of steering and redlining – where people are forced to live in certain neighborhoods and/or excluded from certain neighborhoods based on race, color, national origin and other protected classes.

We certainly support the general concept of SB-752 which promotes fair housing and seeks to eliminate segregation. After all, Connecticut has one of the highest concentrated pockets of wealth and poverty compared to large metropolitan areas in other states¹. These neighborhoods (both poor and wealthy) tend to be racially segregated. Any legislative agenda that aims to diversify our neighborhoods is important.

Lastly, the CHRO certainly supports a cause of action against any state agency funding or administering housing that fails to affirmatively promote fair housing choice and racial and economic integration in its programming, the addition of that cause of action into the statutes that the Commission has jurisdiction over would create a need for additional legal resources – including attorney positions for the agency due to the time and complexity involved with litigating this type of case. The Commission would need to be funded for that work in its upcoming budget. Unfortunately, the CHRO cannot absorb these duties with our current staff level which is in decline.

¹See, Datahaven's 2015 report on Concentrated Wealth and Poverty in Connecticut's Neighborhoods at <http://www.ctdatahaven.org/reports/concentrated-wealth-and-poverty-connecticuts-neighborhoods>