

HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE TOWN OF SEYMOUR

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To Whom it, May Concern:

As of late, the Seymour Housing Authority has received many inquiries and complaints about mixed populations in elderly housing. In response to this, I have included direct excerpts from a Legislative Program Review & Investigations Committee in a report titled: Mixing Populations in State Elderly Housing Projects.

In the late 1950's, Connecticut recognized the need for decent, safe and sanitary housing for low-income elderly individuals and established a program to create subsidized rental housing for the elderly in 1958. Under the program, which parallels federal public housing programs, state grants or loans are provided to a variety of entities – local housing authorities as well as municipal, nonprofit, and for-profit developers- to construct and operate units that can be rented to eligible tenants at below market rates. Construction of state housing developments for elderly persons began in 1959. At that time, the law defined an elderly person of low income as one aged 65 or older who lacked the income necessary to live in decent, safe and sanitary housing. (The age threshold changed and has been 62 since 1963.)

Three years later in 1961, the legislature revised the definition of elderly persons to include "persons who have been certified by the social security board as being totally disabled under the federal social security act." It is important to note that a review of the legislative record reveals no discussion about this change, including any controversy or opposition to the inclusion of the totally disabled to the definition of elderly persons. This means that no one presented public testimony at the time and the legislation passed with no oppositions or challenges. The statutory language was broadened in 1991 to include disability certification by "any other federal board or agency; presumably the Veterans Administration.

Fair housing legislation further limits all Housing Authorities to inquire or screen for types of disabilities. In administering public housing programs, housing agencies must comply with both federal and state prohibitions against discriminatory practices. Connecticut law related to eligibility for state-funded elderly housing projects has included both elderly and non-elderly disabled and has for quite some time. Thus, on its face, Connecticut law does not permit discrimination against persons in either group in

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housing. State Law: The state Discriminatory Practices Act prohibits discrimination in the sale or rental of housing similar to federal law. Discrimination in the sale or rental of housing is prohibited on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, marital status, handicap, age or lawful source of income. The law specifies a number of various discriminatory activities that are prohibited, including but not limited to: falsely representing that certain housing is not available; attempting to restrict the housing choices of a buyer or renter; imposing different terms and conditions for the sale or rental of housing; and refusing to allow reasonable modifications to accommodate a disability.

Federal antidiscrimination laws, discussed earlier, prohibit housing authorities from inquiring about the nature or extent of a person's disability, or about diagnosis or details of treatment. To verify that an applicant meets the statutory definition, a housing authority may confirm an individual's age and whether the applicant receives either Social Security disability or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Receipt of such income is all the verification needed that an individual qualifies as a person with a disability.

Antidiscrimination laws also prohibit housing authorities from applying different or stricter screening standards to applicants with disabilities than it applies to other applicants. Questions and information requested during admissions screening must be based upon an applicants' abilities to meet the demands of tenancy and satisfy eligibility requirements. Applicant evaluations must be made on individual behavior history and not on assumed behavior or unfounded perceptions. According to federal law, the application process cannot solicit information about the nature or severity of an applicant's disabilities. The law prohibits inquiries regarding an applicant's health or ability to live independently. Applicants cannot be asked to prove they are capable of independent living and cannot be required to provide confidential medical records to support claims they can live independently. To screen tenants, the Seymour Housing Authority asks for information such as the applicant's income, the number of people who need accommodation, references from past landlords, work history if applicable, a credit report to determine applicants history of meeting financial obligations, and a past criminal history to determine involvement in disruptive or criminal activity.

Some residents and family members contend that they live in fear of the young disabled. While incidents that occur from time to time as a result of nuisance behavior either linked to a disability or possible substance abuse, the Leases the Seymour Housing uses include provisions of State Eviction Laws including eviction for acts or behavior consisting of assaulting the landlord or other tenants, using the premises for gambling, prostitution, or to sell drugs. These are all considered grounds for eviction. A tenant cannot correct or cure an eviction based on illegal conduct or serious nuisance behavior. Unfortunately, residents have to accurately report such behavior to the Seymour Housing Authority and must consider being available to testify as to what they witnessed in the court eviction action.

Conflicts among non-elderly disabled and elderly people living in the same state public housing projects have been cited as a problem for years in Connecticut. What is not clear is the extent and pervasiveness of the problem as concerns are based largely on anecdotal accounts. A few highly publicized incidents have raised concern in at least a few housing authorities.

Advocates for the disabled generally agree conflicts exist but don't view the problem as widespread and argue that mixed housing can work given adequate support services. Some point out that in some communities elderly and non-elderly disabled residents co-exist successfully and provide support for each other. In addition, it is important to note that neither group is immune to mental illness, physical limitation, or substance abuse. Comprehensive data on the nature and extent of the problems between elderly and non-elderly disabled people residing in state-funded elderly housing projects do not exist. Even if incident data were available, though the perceived concerns of elderly residents might not be adequately expressed by that information.

Although this information is relative to State Elderly complexes, the same Fair Housing regulations apply to Federal Elderly Low Income Public Housing.

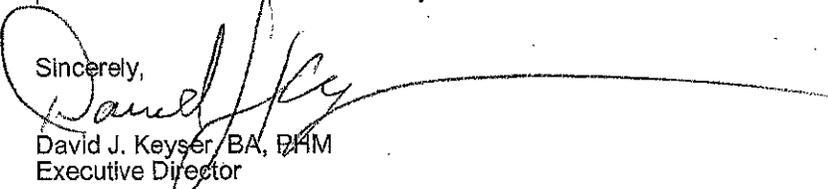
The Seymour Housing Authority maintains a zero tolerance for nuisance behavior and has taken many actions to address such problems in the past. We do, however, rely on documentation from the residents as well as their support when needed to testify as to the behavior they have witnessed. Police documentation helps also. We will, and do enforce the Lease and the Landlord Tenant Laws when necessary.

There is little money for the Resident Services Coordinator provided by the State. Each year this funding is cut. Case work cannot realistically be completed on with funding provided at 9 hours per week. These situations require near full time casework.

I have attached a recent resident petition to our Congresswoman that was sent by the residents of our elderly housing. The petition and the stories are telling of the dilemma from both sides of the issue.

I have also attached a news article that appeared on line from the Herald News that documents this is a problem across the board and not just in Connecticut.

Sincerely,



David J. Keyser, BA, DHM
Executive Director

Rosa DeLauro
Congresswoman, 3rd District
Main District Office
59 Elm St.
New Haven, CT 06510

RE: Mixed Populations in Elderly Housing

Dear Honorable Rosa DeLauro

On behalf of the Tenant's Associations and residents of the Callahan House and Norman Ray House within the Seymour Housing Authority, located in Seymour, Connecticut, we submit to you the following discussion. We hope that this letter will spur discussions that result in change that significantly improves the lives of the millions within this country who will live in public housing.

Seymour is an old industrial town that is growing, improving and making its mark as a community that is capable of positive transformation. We have an attractive and thriving base of commerce, made up of both corporate and small business. We have families that have lived here for generations and those who are young and new. We are also home to senior citizens and disabled people who have come to live here as the housing is affordable and well cared for.

Callahan House is a four story- 80 unit apartment building and home to 89 residents. Since its ribbon cutting in 1970, Callahan House has been known as one of the most desirable senior housing facilities within this region of Connecticut. Greater yet, it is subsidized by HUD and affordable for many older adults would otherwise not be able to meet the expenses of independent housing. Historically, Callahan House has been home to seniors ages 62 and up. We have enjoyed safe, clean housing as well as community living that includes a spacious community room, kitchen, computer and other recreational items. Overall, we have always been proud to say that everyone here cares for the other, offers a helping hand and reaches out when there is need.

Norman Ray House is a two story - 40 unit apartment building and home to 43 residents. It was originally developed as a State of Connecticut Elderly community, but was converted in 2010 to a Federal Elderly Low Income Public Housing complex just like the Callahan House. It serves similar purpose and mission to provide safe, decent and affordable housing for our community.

When people move here they are told that they are moving into senior housing. This is no longer true. We are no longer specifically a home to those who have raised their families, worked at their jobs, retired and are ready for the next phase of life where you "kick back". It is time to enjoy family and friends and the fruits of our labor. Yet, as a community or neighbors we find that we now live within a building that is party to troubles and problems that we are ill-equipped to manage.

Additionally, and less intimidating is the social dilemma. Young people should not have to stop being their age. They should not have to feel that they have to change their volume, their jokes and their dress. They should feel welcome to invite their friends over. Seniors should not have to feel that they have to change their ways of living. They should not have to tolerate music that they do not enjoy, loud laughing and discussions that they do not consider worthwhile. They should not have to be party to by-products of social lives that they have already experienced. "We have no interest as seniors to be 40 years old again." As young disabled people, "we have no interest in sitting and listening to music from the 40's and playing BINGO". We are young and disabled. We don't like the feelings that accompany "Why don't you go back to where you came from. Can't your families take care of you?" "I am an adult and can live on my own. I do not need to live with my parents." Overall, we like each other, but we should be allowed to visit; not be mandated to live communally. We work very hard to live together. It is difficult to feel comfortable when people in your very own home are staring at you, talking about you as you walk away and unhappy with the overall idea that everyone feels forced to change their way of living and thinking.

Another True Story: (Threat to Civil Rights and Personal Security)

A transsexual young disabled man in his 30's is confined to a wheelchair. In his journey to transition he dresses as a female and prefers that people call him by his female name. Senior residents have made cutting comments, indignantly stating that they do not want their grand children to be exposed to such "perversion" when visiting and have an overall sense of difficulty with "this" being in their home. However, this is his home too. He is not a sexual deviant. He is not at peace with his assigned gender. As he continues to validate his gender identity the greater fight may be found in maintaining a sense of self in a closed environment that mandates the merger of two significantly different communities; one that is older and fixed within their perspectives and young adults who, according to popular developmental theories, who is in the time that people established their identities and are capable of following reciprocal relationships. Isolation may result if people cannot form such relationships.

This formula is a guarantee that isolation will occur. This is not the support that HUD prescribes within its mission:

HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. HUD is working to strengthen the housing market to bolster the economy and protect consumers; meet the need for quality affordable rental homes; utilize housing as a platform for improving quality of life; build inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination; and transform the way HUD does business.

Both populations agree that they must work together. This letter is a part of that process. This experience is not limited to our small community, but is shared by all senior housing residents – and now-young disabled tenants that must live within government subsidized housing. (Please see attached article from the Herald News.) We need to be advocated for, we have taken many steps to gain our collective voice. We ask that you move to redirect this mandate for senior/young disabled housing. Each time new people move into our building then story repeats itself. Older folks state that they don't want to change the way they think and live. We all agree that no one is trying to harm or offend the next, but this is an ongoing issue that will ultimately displace people,

Just like the seniors, young disabled people have also moved into Callahan House expecting that they can live their lives in peace and without conflict. They too, are happy to have found an affordable independent home that is safe and well-cared for. However, herein lays the conundrum:

In 1988, the government ruled to open the doors of subsidized senior buildings to also house the young disabled (ages 18-62). According to Federal Law the definition of a person with a disabled is:

"Any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment."

In general, a physical or mental impairment includes hearing, mobility and visual impairments, chronic alcoholism, chronic mental illness, AIDS, AIDS Related Complex, and mental retardation that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities include walking, talking, hearing, seeing, breathing, learning, performing manual tasks, and caring for oneself

No one here takes issue with this definition. The residents of Callahan House and Norman Ray House understand and agree with the precepts of the Fair Housing Act and agree that no one should be discriminated against due to their age, status or disability. Reading this description, it is easy to see the reasons behind merging these two groups under the same roof. However, this definition does not address actual developmental stages and needs of our two very different populations.

Both the young disabled and senior residents find themselves with the same expectations and problems.

- We have all looked forward to clean, healthy, safe, independent living.
- We live in a housing authority that upholds the Fair Housing Act and mandated policies for public housing making this a desirable place to live.
- We recognize that these two "groups" (senior and young disabled) are not interchangeable and are clearly at different levels of personal and social development.
- These differences increase the potential for significant disruptive and unhealthy issues.

True Story: (Threat to Physical and Emotional Safety at Home and Work)

An 85 year old widow is walking down the hallways towards her apartment. She is suddenly confronted by a young man (age 59) who is yelling about knowing who is after him. He looks directly at the woman and tells her that if she doesn't stop tormenting him he will cut her hands off. She is now terrified to live at home.

The same 59 year old young disabled man threatened to cut a 48 year old employee's head off as his paranoia dictates that people come through his ceiling and steal his coffee. He is infuriated. She needs to fix this or else.