



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 7, 2017

Testimony regarding SB-742 (An Act Concerning Certain Housing Developments and Discrimination on the Basis of Age), HB-6874 (An Act Concerning the Disclosure of Housing Discrimination and Fair Housing Laws), HB-5740 (An Act Concerning An Incentive Program to Encourage Young Professionals to Live in Urban Areas) and HB-6878 (An Act Addressing Housing Segregation)

Good afternoon Representative Butler, Senator Slossberg, Senator Wang 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 to offer testimony concerning several bills on your agenda today.

The CHRO investigates and prosecutes claims of housing discrimination in violation 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 pursuant to federal housing discrimination law. We also have a contract with HUD to investigate and conciliate cases filed solely with HUD in order to increase response time to these complaints. We receive money from HUD through this contract to process these cases. In 2016 we received and closed over two hundred housing discrimination cases. The HUD contract requires the state fair housing statute remain substantially equivalent with the federal fair housing statute in order to receive funding through the grant. That funding goes directly into the general fund of the State of Connecticut. At present, the state statute is substantially equivalent to the federal statute. It is imperative that this not change so that the state does not jeopardize our much needed federal funding.

The CHRO's mission is to eliminate discrimination, and race, segregation and age are currently covered by the anti-discrimination statutes which we enforce. The CHRO seeks more information regarding the intent of the changes and how it would affect our fair housing statute. We are always concerned about amending our state statutes because any change could render state law not substantially equivalent to federal law. If that occurs, we risk losing our HUD contract which brings federal money into the state. In 2016 the CHRO received approximately \$282,300 from HUD which went into the general fund. The CHRO would like to work with the Committee to further develop these two bills without creating a fiscal note for the state and municipalities.

The CHRO supports HB- 6874. Last year PA 16-16 was enacted which required the CHRO to post a one-page information sheet about housing discrimination laws on our website. A copy of the information sheet was to be provided by sellers to buyers of residential property with two or more units and signed by the buyer. There has been some confusion as to when in the sales process the document should be presented to the buyer for signature. The CHRO supports any clarification the legislature would like to make to this process and would like to work with the Committee to reach an agreeable resolution.



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The CHRO has reservations about HB-5740. While the CHRO supports diversity in our communities, any incentive which is provided to one class of people over another is concerning. If an older person wants to live in an urban area why wouldn't this diversity be incentivized to the same extent as that of a younger person.