



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*

**March 22, 2017  
Planning and Development Committee**

**Testimony regarding HB-7297**

***AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION IN THE DUTY TO PROMOTE FAIR HOUSING AND REQUIRING A STUDY OF CONNECTICUT'S HOUSING INVENTORY AND CURRENT AND FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS.***

Good afternoon Representative Lemar, Senator Cassano and Senator Logan and members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Tanya A. Hughes and I am the Executive 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 HB-7297 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION IN THE DUTY TO PROMOTE FAIR HOUSING AND REQUIRING A STUDY OF CONNECTICUT'S HOUSING INVENTORY AND CURRENT AND FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS 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.

The CHRO provided testimony on a similar bill SB-72 which was before the Housing Committee several weeks ago. As stated in our previous testimony, the Commission supports the general concept of HB-7297 which promotes a private right of action for an affirmatively furthering complaint. 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.



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The CHRO is supportive of any initiative that creates housing opportunities for people who live in Connecticut. However, we believe the placement of an entirely new section (section 2) to Conn. Gen. Stat. §46a-98a is misdirected. All of the statutes in Title 46a concern discrimination causes of action the CHRO handles as part of its enforcement of the civil rights statutes in Connecticut. The new section in this bill involves a study conducted by the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority ("CHFA") and Department of Housing, the CHRO is not even mentioned in either paragraph of this new addition to our statute. It is unlikely that a member of the public would be easily able to access this change because it is not located in Title 8 of the statutes which covers Zoning, Planning, Housing and Economic and Community Development. In fact, the statutes which affect both the Department of Housing and CHFA are located in Title 8 of the statutes – not the CHRO' statutes. There is no specific mention of the Department of Housing or CHFA in Title 46a – the CHRO's statutes. In an effort to make statutes easily accessible to our citizens it would make better sense to put this new section 2 statute where it belongs and where people might easily find it – Title 8 the statutes that the Department of Housing and/or CHFA have jurisdiction over.