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Fair housing affects us all

Long Island still has a way to go to ensure an end to discrimination

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The history of Long Island on issues of housing fairness is sad and inglorious. One nasty example: After World War II, whites-only covenants kept people of color from moving into the original Levittown homes. Since then, we've made some progress, but a new report by ERASE Racism shows in painful detail the mountains still to be climbed.


The report is useful not just for discrimination victims, but for everyone in the region, because our economic viability depends heavily on our ability to provide housing that working families can afford. It's tough enough for people to find housing as it is, without having to bear the additional burden of overcoming irrational racial, religious or other prejudices.

Inexcusably, families who run into this wall are not getting the help they should. The new report criticizes the record of the New York State Division of Human Rights, which closes out the vast majority of race-based complaints by finding "no probable cause." The report also urges the Division of Licensing Services in New York's Department of State to crack down harder on those real estate professionals who discriminate.

One sign of hope is that Nassau and Suffolk counties, with a push from ERASE Racism, have adopted fair-housing laws that took effect in 2007. If the counties don't use the laws vigorously, we all need to pressure them.

Fairness in housing shouldn't just be the concern of one not-for-profit organization and a few government agencies. It has to be high on everyone's agenda: private citizens, public officials and especially the business community. If our businesses are to thrive, all of our workers need suitable housing - no matter what those workers look like.

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