

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

County of Suffolk

Lou D'Amaro

Legislator 17th District



130 West Jericho Turnpike
Huntington Station, NY 11746

Tel: (631) 854-4433

Fax (631) 854-4415

lou.damaro@suffolkcountyny.gov

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PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Ron Cohen 631-854-4433

Fighting Housing Discrimination in Suffolk County

Legislator Lou D'Amaro Supports Landmark Anti-Housing Discrimination Bill

The Suffolk County Legislature yesterday overwhelmingly passed a landmark comprehensive anti-housing discrimination bill. The bill, the first of its kind in Suffolk, will prohibit discrimination based on race, citizenship, disabilities, sex, gender, family make up, and religious affiliation in connection with private sales and rentals of residential and commercial property. Predatory lending practices by banks and other lenders are also prohibited under the measure.

Violators of the law would be subjected to severe civil penalties and fines, including penalties of up to \$50,000 for repeat offenders.

For the last decade, only the State and Federal government could investigate and prosecute complaints based upon housing discrimination. This new law will give Suffolk County, through its Human Rights Commission, the authority to conduct its own investigations and to hold hearings at the County level.

Many supporters of the bill, who spoke at numerous public hearings, believe that this bill was needed in response to the failure of the State of New York to expeditiously investigate and process complaints. According to statistics from the New York State Division of Human Rights (NYSDHR), between the years 1999 and 2005 there were 165 total race complaints filed with the NYSDHR. Of the 165 complaints, African Americans, who historically have experienced the majority of housing discrimination cases, filed 117.

“This is a major step for the County in fighting housing discrimination,” said Legislator Lou D’Amaro (D-North Babylon). “Having local control over the investigative and adjudicative process will ensure the proper enforcement of civil rights for our residents.”

“Passage of this bill is a cause for celebration, because at long last, victims of housing discrimination will have access to a County enforcement system,” said Elaine Gross, President of ERASE Racism, and a longtime advocate for an anti-housing discrimination bill in Suffolk.

The bill has teeth, asserts D’Amaro. “In addition to stiff fines and penalties, the County Attorney’s office has subpoena power and the mandate to not only assist the Commission with hearings, but also prosecute against severe offenders who engage in a recognizable pattern of discrimination.

“This bill has been a long time in coming,” added D’Amaro. “It took two years to consider all sides and craft the final version. What’s important is that advocacy groups, such as ERASE Racism and the County’s own African American Advisory Board, were included in the process, contributed to the bill’s content, and ultimately were pleased with the final version.”

The County Executive is expected to sign the bill into the law within the next few weeks.

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Suffolk County Legislator Lou D’Amaro (D-North Babylon) represents the 17th Legislative District, which includes North Babylon, Deer Park, Dix Hills, Melville, West Hills, South Huntington and Huntington Station. He is the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Vice-Chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee and the Environment, Planning and Agriculture Committee; as well as a member of the Public Works and Transportation Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature.