



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elijah Reichlin-Melnick

Senator Reichlin-Melnick And Senate Majority Passes Legislation To Combat Housing Discrimination

ELIJAH REICHLIN-MELNICK February 8, 2021

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New City, NY - Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick and the Senate Democratic Majority passed major legislation to continue addressing housing discrimination across New York State. This legislative package was created following two public hearings last year on housing discrimination that included 25 subpoenas, and in response to legislative suggestions outlined in the Senate Majority's 97-page investigative report on fair housing and

discrimination on Long Island released on January 27, 2021. The bills advanced will implement fair housing practices, annual covert fair housing testing, implicit bias training, compensatory relief to victims of housing discrimination, create an anti-discrimination housing fund, increase required training, and require brokers to track client demographic data.

Senator Reichlin-Melnick said: “Housing discrimination has a long and terrible history in this country, one that did not end when the Civil Rights Act was signed. The recent report from the Senate Committee on Investigations & Government Operations revealed that racial discrimination in housing was still actively harming Black, Hispanic, and Asian New Yorkers and perpetuating segregating neighborhoods. Passing this legislative package will continue to move New York along the path of progress towards our goal of a society where housing discrimination is a thing of the past.”

Senator Reichlin-Melnick spoke on the Senate floor this afternoon and delivered the following remarks:

“Housing discrimination has a long and terrible history in this country.

For more than half of the 20th Century, housing discrimination was legal. Restrictive covenants made whole neighborhoods off limits to Black, Hispanic, Jewish buyers and other groups. Red lining was official government policy and made it difficult or impossible for most Black people to get mortgages. Suburban developments like Levittown prevented Black Americans, including veterans, from buying homes. And when all this failed, efforts to desegregate were often met with violent racial attacks. The Civil Rights Act and Fair Housing Act ended much of this discrimination, but patterns of residential housing segregation have persisted.

Newsday's reporting in 2019 showed this wasn't accidental.

Over a three year period, Newsday conducted a detailed experiment to assess discrimination in the real estate industry on Long Island. Using so-called "paired testers" where two individuals with similar finances but of different races attempted to buy a house from a real estate agent. Newsday found discrimination against Asian buyers in 19% of cases, discrimination against Hispanic buyers in 39% of cases and against Black buyers in 49% of cases--meaning nearly HALF of Black buyers may face discrimination.

While White buyers were steered to communities that were overwhelmingly White, the minority buyers were shown houses in neighborhoods that already had higher concentrations of Black, Hispanic, or Asian residents. In other cases, agents required documents and imposed conditions on Black, Hispanic, and Asian buyers that they did not impose on White buyers. In the aggregate, these actions clearly end up perpetuating patterns of racial segregation.

Following Newsday's report, the Senate took action, with an investigation jointly conducted by three Senate committees and a report outlining findings and legislative recommendations. Today we're passing a number of bills that came out of this investigation and I'm proud to be supporting them but I specifically want to note how important this bill is [S. 112].

This proposal requires the attorney general to conduct annual covert fair housing testing to assess compliance with fair housing laws throughout New York State, essentially taking Newsday's groundbreaking investigation statewide and making it an ongoing feature of state law. These investigations will surely uncover additional discrimination, but perhaps most importantly, the knowledge that undercover investigations are being conducted may have a significant deterrent impact on real estate agents who might be tempted to

discriminate.

Passing this legislative package will continue to move New York along the path of progress towards our goal of a society where housing discrimination is a thing of the past.”