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January 24, 2026

Senator Liz Kreuger
Chair, Finance Committee
Assemblymember J. Gary Pretlow
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
Re: 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Environmental Conservation/Energy

Dear Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Pretlow:

CNYFair Housing is a private non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating housing discrimination, promoting open communities, and ensuring equal access to housing opportunities for all people in Central New York. We support the Governor's proposal to reform the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) in order to promote infill development that is key to expanding housing opportunities in communities like Syracuse.

The Syracuse region needs to build 12,000 new homes to alleviate our existing housing crisis and to accommodate growth from Micron. From a fair housing perspective, the best place to build much of that new housing is in existing communities—both in disinvested neighborhoods where decades of discriminatory housing policies have led to dilapidated housing and depopulation, and in well-resourced neighborhoods where exclusionary zoning has prohibited the construction of a diversity of housing options to meet the needs of our diverse community. Building new housing in existing neighborhoods creates housing diversity, it makes better use of existing municipal infrastructure, and it also makes those places more accessible by creating enough foot traffic to support both local businesses and high quality public transportation.

Unfortunately, that's not how most housing gets built in Syracuse today. It is much easier to build large detached single-unit houses on 1-acre lots past the exurban fringe, so that is what gets built. This has been the dominant development pattern in Syracuse for decades, and it is a disaster for fair housing. These new tract developments are only affordable to our community's wealthiest households, and they draw that wealth out of established neighborhoods. 100 years of this development pattern have turned Syracuse into one of the most racially and economically segregated communities in the nation. Sprawl is segregation.

SEQRA plays a little known role in perpetuating this development pattern. It subjects new multifamily housing to greater scrutiny than single-unit housing, and its enforcement mechanism—private right of action—is more likely to be triggered by infill projects in urbanized areas because those places have more people who might object to new construction. To give one example from Syracuse, an incumbent landlord threatened an environmental lawsuit in an attempt to block a new apartment building from being constructed next door. Even when meritless, these lawsuits can block construction by adding delay and cost. The mere threat of a SEQRA lawsuit reduces overall housing supply and pushes up prices for what does get built.

Reforming SEQRA to promote infill development will expand housing opportunities in Central New York. Luckily, these reforms will also advance SEQRA's environmental aims by encouraging more sustainable land use patterns that reduce sprawl, protect wildlife habitat, reduce car dependency, and make better use of existing infrastructure. CNY Fair Housing supports these reforms.

Sincerely,
Alex Lawson
Policy Director
CNY Fair Housing