



**FAIR HOUSING OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT  
CITY OF ALBANY**

Submitted by: Amanda Ahrens, Fair Housing Officer

October 2023 – December 2024

The Fair Housing Officer conducts preliminary investigations of housing discrimination complaints, and assists individuals with rental housing concerns including landlord-tenant disputes. Investigations may consist of the Fair Housing Officer conducting research, interviewing and collecting evidence from both parties, surveying housing units, monitoring advertising, speaking with witnesses, and identifying discriminatory housing practices based on someone's race, sex, creed, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or expression, age, disability, and marital or domestic partner status. The Fair Housing Office works in collaboration with the City of Albany's Law Department and New York State Department of Human Rights to enforce laws as necessary.

### **WORK PERFORMED:**

Starting October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the City of Albany gained its first Fair Housing Officer to operate the Fair Housing Office that is regulated under § 187 in the City of Albany Code. The Fair Housing Officer started off by organizing virtual meetings with all the head department leaders of the major fair housing agencies in New York State (NYS). By January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, the Fair Housing Officer had conducted virtual meetings establishing important relationships with the following agencies:

- Housing for Urban Development's (HUD) Fair Housing and Equity Office
- HUD's Fair Housing Initiative Program (FHIP)
- The Fair and Equitable Housing Office at NYS's Division of Homes and Community Renewal (HCR)
- Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency's Fair Housing Office
- New York State Division of Human Rights
- Central New York Fair Housing

The City of Albany's Fair Housing Office now provides counseling, investigates allegations of housing discrimination, and performs outreach to tenants, landlords, community groups, tenant advocacy groups, and the general public. Additionally, the Office regularly gives presentations to educate housing providers such as landlords, property management companies, and other housing agencies on the nature and ramifications of the City's fair housing laws.

In the course of the last fourteen months (October 2023 – December 2024), the Fair Housing Officer has accomplished the following tasks and duties as listed below.

### **CALLS AND WALK INS:**

From November 2023 through December 2024, the Fair Housing Office has received a total of 73 housing complaints involving fair housing concerns and landlord—tenant disputes.

<b>Received Case Referrals From</b>								
<i>Website</i>	<i>Housing Services Advocate</i>	<i>Neighborhood Services Dept.</i>	<i>Buildings &amp; Regulatory Compliance</i>	<i>Police Dept.</i>	<i>Mayor's Office</i>	<i>Non-profit Agencies</i>	<i>NYS HUD Office</i>	<i>Total Referrals</i>
<b>25</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>73</b>

## **COURTROOM ASSISTANCE:**

The Fair Housing Officer attends housing court to observe proceedings and to hand out fair housing materials to people in the City of Albany Housing Courtroom. During these courtroom observations, the Fair Housing Officer has helped four people with various landlord and tenant concerns.

## **DOCUMENTS CREATED:**

The City of Albany appointed its first Fair Housing Officer to receive housing discrimination complaints, complete investigations following the complaints, and follow procedure according to the City of Albany Code § 48-3 Omnibus Human Rights Law and § 187 Fair Housing Office. The Officer created documents and forms to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the Fair Housing Office per these ordinances. Furthermore, the Officer created content to educate the general public and other entities about Federal, State, and local fair housing laws.

### *Forms, Procedures, and Legislative Amendments*

- City of Albany Housing Discrimination Complaint Form
- Fair Housing Office Policy and Procedure Handbook
- Fair Housing Complaint Flow Chart
- Complaint Information for Complainants
- Content for the Fair Housing Office webpage on the City website
- Inclusionary Letters and Forms for developers and tenants to fill out
- Drafted proposed legislation amendments to the City of Albany Code § 187 Fair Housing Office and § 48-3 Omnibus Human Rights Laws.
- Form letters for case work
  - General Release Form
  - Notifying Complainant of Accepting the Case
  - Notifying Complainant Case Is Not In Jurisdiction
  - Notifying Respondent of Complaint and Response
  - Notifying Housing Providers of Accommodation Requirements
  - Determining Damages Worksheet for Conciliation

### *Outreach Materials*

- Know Your Rights Flyer
- Red Flags of Searching for a Home
- Voucher Holder Protections
- Military Status Protections
- Outreach letter to Common Council and City of Albany staff

### *Power Point Presentations*

- Fair Housing Basics
- Fair Housing for Housing Providers
- Mental Health and Disabilities
- Domestic Violence Protections

## **TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED:**

The Fair Housing Officer is expected to be an expert in the latest fair housing laws at the Federal, State, and local levels. In order to continue learning and to stay current on ever changing laws and policies, the Officer virtually attended 21 fair housing related trainings and attended two in-person events hosted by governmental fair housing agencies during the 2024 calendar year.

Additionally, the Officer traveled to the City of Buffalo, NY, this past April to meet with and learn from Harold Cardwell, the Fair Housing Officer for the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency. The Buffalo Fair Housing Officer, who has been in their role for eight years, provided insight and knowledge on how to establish, implement, and maintain a Fair Housing Office.

- NYS Attorney General's Office: Innovative Housing Initiatives
- HUD Buffalo Community Planning and Development: Fair Housing Highlights
- Housing Justice Center: Dismantling Segregation and Achieving Housing Justice
- HUD Washington D.C.: Affordable Housing Strategies and Implementation
- 2024 Human Rights and Fair Housing Conference in Springfield, MA
- 2024 NYS Department of Human Rights Fair Housing Conference in Bronx, NY
- Affordable Housing Partnership: Secrets of Successful Landlords
- National Fair Housing Technical Assistance Forum:
  - Engaging Communities to Achieve Fair Housing
  - Combating the Many Forms of Mortgage Lending Discrimination
  - Appraisal Bias Risk Management
  - Fair Housing Complexities- Preparing Organizations to Handle Systemic Cases
  - LGBTQIA+ Protections and Fair Housing
  - Assistance Animals in Housing
  - Fair Housing Rights for People with Disabilities
  - Empowering New Americans
- HUD Exchange:
  - Source of Income Discrimination
  - Planning How to Build Inclusive Communities
  - Public Housing and Serious Mental Illness – For Housing Providers
  - Equal Access Rule in Shelters
- Housing Counseling Annual Conference – Promoting Community, Driving Change
- NYS: Domestic Violence 101
- Identifying and Addressing Behavior Health Needs in Encampments
- Fair Housing Rights for Immigrant Households
- Center for Community Progress training on code enforcement

**EVENTS ATTENDED:**

To promote and highlight the Fair Housing Office's services, the Officer attended and introduced themselves at these events in the City of Albany throughout the 2024 calendar year.

- Housing for All meetings
- Planning Board Meetings
- Short Term Rental Forum
- South End Neighborhood Collaborative
- Common Council Meetings
- Codes Court with Senior Assistant Corporation Counsel Christopher Cech
- CARES monthly meetings
- SUNY Mini Resource Fair
- City of Albany Commission of Human Rights
- Michael McKee: Emergency Tenant Protection Act Teach In
- Adriel Colón-Casiano: Security Deposit Legal Clinic
- Women's Affordable Housing Network: Breaking Ground and Glass Ceilings
- City of Albany School District Community Roundtable
- Community Block Parties
- ACPAC Police Discussion
- Capital Region BOCES Resource Fair
- Housing Providers Meeting Hosted by Ashley Hilaire, Housing Services Advocate
- Veteran's Stand Down Event

**PROVIDED FAIR HOUSING EDUCATION TO THE PUBLIC:**

- Hosted Central New York Fair Housing's Landlord and Tenant Fair Housing Training
- Presented Fair Housing Basics to Neighborhood Specialists
- Presented Fair Housing Basics w/ Housing Services Advocate Ashley Hilaire
- Presented Mental Health and Disability Rights Within Housing
- Presented Domestic Violence Protections at In Our Own Voices for LASNNY
- Presented Fair Housing Office to South End Community Meeting

**DISCRIMINATION CASES:**

Under the City's Omnibus Human Rights Law, residents or local advocacy organizations may submit complaints to the Fair Housing Office about discrimination based on someone's race, sex, creed, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or expression, age, disability, and marital or domestic partner status. The Fair Housing Officer investigates complaints and makes a determination of probable cause. The Fair Housing Officer conciliated discriminatory cases between the parties, including preventing one illegal lockout. No housing discrimination cases were referred to the City of Albany's Law Department for prosecution in 2024.

As shown in Table X, the Fair Housing Office received 36 housing discrimination complaints. The Officer provided services for 27 of those complaints and referred nine complaints to an agency outside of the City of Albany jurisdiction.

Table X. Breakdown of Housing Discrimination Cases by Jurisdiction (2024)

Outcome of Discrimination Cases the Fair Housing Office Received			
<i>Albany Fair Housing Office</i>	<i>Referred to NYS Dept. of Human Rights</i>	<i>Referred to Other Agency</i>	<i>Total # of Discrimination Cases</i>
27	6	3	36

The services provided by the Fair Housing Officer depend on the nature of the housing discrimination case. Of the 36 cases received in by the Office in 2024, the Fair Housing Officer provided advocacy services for three complainants, and conciliation services for 15 complainants (N=18, see Table Y). Separately, the Officer provided educational services for two complainants. Of the remaining 14 cases, half of the cases were resolved for lack of discrimination found, and half of the cases were found to have no jurisdiction under the City of Albany’s Fair Housing Office. As of this report’s publication, there are seven active housing discrimination cases.

Table Y. Type of Service Provided to Housing Discrimination Complainants (2024)

Breakdown of Discrimination Cases the Fair Housing Office Received				
<i>Advocacy/ Conciliation</i>	<i>Only Provided Education</i>	<i>No Discrimination Founded</i>	<i>Outside Albany and Referred</i>	<i>Case Still Active</i>
18	2	7	9	7

Table Z, below, summarizes the type of discrimination cases received by the Fair Housing Office in 2024. The majority of cases were housing discrimination on the basis of disability (N=19). Of this case type, reasonable accommodations requests for people living with disabilities was the most common disability discrimination scenario. The Officer assisted six Albany residents protect their fair housing rights to reasonable accommodations. These six residents also comprise one-third of complainants who received advocacy or conciliation services from the Fair Housing Office (see Table Y). In addition, the Officer assisted nine residents in overcoming discrimination on the basis of domestic violence status, disability, immigration status, and race.

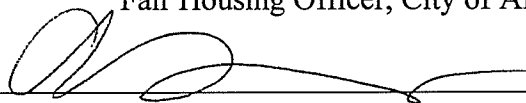
Table Z. Type of Discrimination Cases Received by the Fair Housing Office (2024)

Type of Discrimination Cases Received by the Fair Housing Office					
<i>Domestic Violence</i>	<i>Disability</i>	<i>Source of Income</i>	<i>Race or Color</i>	<i>Immigration Status</i>	<i>Military Status</i>
4	19	7	4	1	1

**CONCLUSION:**

The City of Albany Fair Housing Officer takes an incremental approach to encourage and enforce fair housing in the City of Albany. First, through community engagement with housing providers, tenants, and housing advocacy groups, the Officer provides educational information that enforces compliance without taking formal actions. The educational component encourages and empowers residents, housing providers, and housing advocacy groups to contact the Office with questions, concerns, and complaints. In the second stage, the Fair Housing Officer works with all parties to halt and deter acts of unfair housing practices; to assist housing providers in understanding their responsibilities; and to resolve compliance issues through proactive engagement such as conciliation without taking formal actions through litigation. This incremental approach provides the Fair Housing Office with the best opportunities to encourage fair housing compliance throughout the City of Albany.

Submitted by: Amanda Ahrens  
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Signature  Date 2-1-25