



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeremy A. Cooney

Another Voice: First-time home buyers need help to build generational wealth

SENATOR JEREMY COONEY September 29, 2024

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At this year's Democratic National Convention, Michelle Obama emphasized that most of us "will never benefit from the affirmative action of generational wealth."

In those short but powerful words, the former first lady encapsulated the advantages and opportunities afforded to those born into families with means, opportunities that are not available to far too many Americans. This is especially true in upstate cities in towns, where we have struggled to break the generational cycle of poverty in both urban and more rural settings.

One of the best ways we can build generational wealth for New York families is through homeownership, a lasting investment that allows families to transfer a financial asset and continue to build equity for future success.

Over the past three decades, the average wealth gap between homeowners and renters "increased more than 250 percent," a stark reminder of the opportunities granted to homeowners, but also of the disadvantages faced by renters who lack the resources to enter the housing market.

Unfortunately, homeownership has become increasingly unattainable for prospective homebuyers in recent years. We don't need to look any further than here in Western New York to see the impact rising housing costs have had on the housing market.

According to the Greater Rochester Association of Realtors, sales of homes priced between \$150,000-\$250,000 steadily rose leading up to the pandemic, peaking in 2021 at 3,594 homes sold in Monroe County and 3,609 sold in Erie County. Since then, sales have rapidly decreased as available housing inventory has declined and homes previously priced in this range are now selling for far more than they did just a few short years ago. As a result, last year, only 2,367 homes were sold in this price range in Monroe County and 2,379 in Erie County. While homebuyers continue navigating these difficulties, the market shows no signs of slowing down. Earlier this year Realtor.com ranked Rochester as the hottest housing market in the nation and Zillow has predicted Buffalo will become the hottest housing market by the end of the year. Demand for our housing stock continues to rise, making homeownership unattainable and unrealistic for first-time buyers.

Under the leadership of Gov. Kathy Hochul, New York has taken tangible steps towards increasing housing supply and tackling rising costs, including the adoption of her "Pro-Housing Communities" designation and grant funding. It's vital that we continue this work and build off of these ongoing efforts.

That's why I recently introduced legislation to lower costs for first-time homebuyers with my Home Ownership Market Expansion (HOME) Act. Vice President Harris has revealed her own housing plan, which includes providing \$25,000 to eligible homebuyers for down payments. My bill would complement the vice president's plan by providing an additional \$10,000 for New Yorkers, a total of \$35,000 to assist with down payments for prospective first-time homebuyers.

It's our responsibility to take action on all levels of government to help our communities achieve the American dream and New York is in a unique position to lead the way nationwide. When we return to Albany next year I am making the HOME Act one of my top priorities to increase homeownership and help build generational wealth that will allow our communities to succeed and thrive.

Jeremy Cooney represents the 56th District in the New York State Senate.