



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

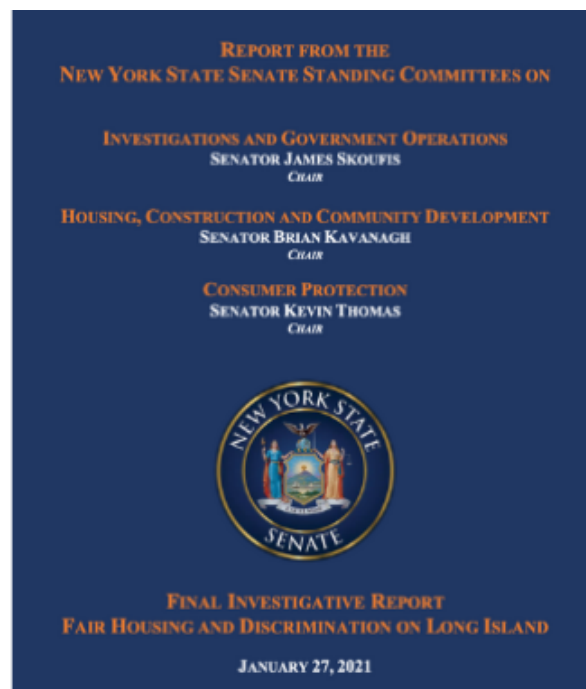
James Skoufis

Senate Committees Release Investigative Report on Housing Discrimination on Long Island

JAMES SKOUFIS January 27, 2021

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Senate Committees Release Investigative Report on Housing Discrimination on Long Island

Chairs Call for Comprehensive Legislation and Other Reforms

ALBANY, NY – Senator James Skoufis, Chair of the Investigations and Government Operations Committee; Senator Brian Kavanaugh, Chair of the Housing, Construction and Community Development Committee; and Senator Kevin Thomas, Chair of the Consumer Protection Committee, released a 97-page report on fair housing and discrimination on Long Island. The report includes investigative findings and legislative recommendations.

Following a 2019 Newsday exposé, *Long Island Divided*, revealing widespread discriminatory practices among real estate brokers and agents, the committees opened a joint investigation, including public hearings in December 2019 and September 2020, with dozens of witnesses from real estate firms cited by Newsday, as well as experts in fair housing policy, to determine how best to address this unacceptable situation. Individuals who refused to show up voluntarily were issued subpoenas, compelling them to testify.

The three Senate committees developed a comprehensive report based on the two hearings, testimony from stakeholders, document requests, Newsday's findings, policy meetings, and committee research. The Committees' recommendations are intended to address housing discrimination that manifests in many forms and occurs in all aspects of the industry including rentals as well as real estate sales.

The committees' top-line recommendations are:

Develop a New York State Fair Housing Strategy

More Proactive Enforcement of Fair Housing Laws

- Investigate and enforce fair housing laws through testing
- Increase funding to support fair housing efforts
- Mandate statewide collection of demographic data

Licensing and Renewal Training Requirements

- Enhance the training required for licensed real estate agents and brokers
- Ensure effective curriculum and quality of training instruction
- Ensure quality of course instructors
- Rescind rule requiring classes be recorded

Increased Penalties and Broader Accountability

- Increase penalties for violating fair housing laws
- Improve broker supervision of agents
- Require brokers to standardize their policies for all home seekers

Ensure that Government at All Levels is Part of the Solution

- Require state and local governments to affirmatively further fair housing

Brokerage Industry Reforms

- Open offices in communities of color
- Disseminate a model fair housing policy
- Create a more diverse real estate sales force

The Senate intends to advance a package of fair housing legislation in the coming weeks pursuant to the recommendations in the investigative report.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, "When the Newsday investigation uncovered widespread housing discrimination on Long Island, the Senate Majority

committed to address this unacceptable, predatory practice. We held hearings, issued subpoenas, and compelled testimony to get to the bottom of these allegations, because we know that racist and biased housing practices need to be confronted and eliminated on Long Island and throughout New York State. The report issued by Senator Skoufis, Senator Kavanagh, and Senator Thomas, is a comprehensive review of the actions taken by the Senate Majority and the information we gather because of these hearings. I commend the committee chairs for their diligent work and leadership on this issue of fundamental fairness, and I look forward to taking more action to ensure every New York resident has a fair shot at achieving the American Dream of home ownership."

Senator James Skoufis, Chair of the Investigations and Government Operations Committee said, "Newsday's exposé revealed egregious discrimination and it is our duty as elected officials to get to the bottom of what happened, how it happened, why it happened, and how we can prevent it from happening again. We all share a responsibility to ensure fair housing laws are robust, properly funded, and enforced so that all New Yorkers are treated with dignity and fairness. I thank our Senate Majority Leader and my fellow committee chairs who have collaborated over the past many months to develop real, tangible solutions to tackle these issues head-on."

Senator Brian Kavanagh, Chair of the Housing, Construction and Community Development Committee said, "Our report details the very troubling and apparently widespread discriminatory practices that occurred on Long Island, and undoubtedly in other parts of the state, along with our recommendations on what must be done to replace New York's patchwork, inadequate approach to this problem with a comprehensive statewide strategy. The State and all stakeholders in the housing industry must come together and commit ourselves to affirmatively further fair housing practices, for the benefit of all New Yorkers. The recommendations contained in this report will enable us to ensure effective implementation and compliance with New York State's fair housing laws and hopefully

usher in a new era of transparency and accountability in our housing industry for the benefit of prospective homebuyers and renters, and all of our communities.”

Senator Kevin Thomas, Chair of the Consumer Protection Committee said, “Fair housing is a right shared by all New Yorkers. In 2019, Newsday published the results of one of the most concentrated investigations into housing discrimination since the enactment of the landmark Fair Housing Act. What they uncovered was eye-opening, tangible evidence of unequal treatment, steering, and bias directed at minority homebuyers and minority communities on Long Island. In response, the New York State Senate launched an intensive investigation of our own. This report is the culmination of our efforts to shed light on pervasive issues within the real estate industry and develop meaningful solutions to ensure fair housing opportunities for all New York residents. I thank Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Senator Kavanagh, and Senator Skoufis for their leadership and continued commitment to addressing and ending housing discrimination in all forms. Now more than ever, we must remain steadfast in protecting fair housing rights.”

Please see the attached report.