

**Testimony of Dana Sussman
Special Counsel to the Commissioner/Chair
New York City Commission on Human Rights
Before the Committee on Housing and Buildings
May 4, 2016**

Int. No. 477 – A Local Law to amend the administrative code of
the city of New York, in relation to evictions of elderly tenants

Int. No. 755 – A Local Law to amend the administrative code of
the city of New York, in relation to evictions of disabled tenants.

Good morning members of the Committee on Housing and Buildings, and thank you for convening today's hearing on Int. Nos. 477 and 755. I am Dana Sussman, Special Counsel to the Commissioner and Chair at the New York City Commission on Human Rights. The Commission does not regularly appear before this Committee, but is happy to testify here today with our partners at HPD, to discuss the work the Commission is doing to address discrimination in housing, and specifically with respect to housing discrimination on the basis of age and/or disability.

With the Council's and the Administration's support, the Commission has grown in both size and in scope as we work to strategically enforce the City's Human Rights Law, one of the broadest and most protective anti-discrimination laws in the country. To do so, we opened 31% more investigations in 2015 than in 2014, of which approximately 1/3 of those were housing discrimination cases. Complaints based on disability discrimination represented the largest proportion of complaints in housing; the vast majority of which involve requests for reasonable accommodations.

Tackling housing discrimination is a major priority of the Commission and we are addressing it in several targeted ways. We have rebuilt the Commission's testing program to address systemic and insidious forms of discrimination in housing by adding investigators experienced in testing and entering into an MOU with the Fair Housing Justice Center to specifically address housing discrimination. We have partnered with several Council Members to bring our attorneys to their districts' different tenant organizations to do on-site intake where systemic issues are uncovered in order for the Commission to conduct Commission-initiated investigations.

The Commission has also revamped our programming and community education and outreach. For example, just last week, MOPD and the Commission co-hosted a panel discussion on protections against housing discrimination for people with disabilities at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, where Commission attorneys were on hand to conduct legal intake for any individuals who had complaints of discrimination. The Commission will also be hosting a Fair Housing Symposium in June at CUNY School of Law in Long Island City with many Administration partners to educate more New Yorkers on their rights and responsibilities under the City's Human Rights Law. The Commission has worked with our Administration partners, including MOPD, MOIA, HRA, HPD, and NYCHA, to train staff, develop referral networks, and increase internal capacity to identify housing discrimination and refer cases to the Commission.

If any tenant believes they are being targeted for eviction because of their age or disability, or immigration status, use of Section 8 vouchers or other rental assistance, religion, race, or any other protected category, they should immediately call 311 and ask for the Commission on Human Rights. Commission staff will conduct a short phone intake and schedule a longer meeting with an agency attorney to determine if the Commission has jurisdiction over their claim. We look forward to working with HPD, the Council, and our Administration partners to continue to address discrimination in housing in its most insidious forms.