



**Commission on
Human Rights**

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**NYC COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS ANNOUNCES SETTLEMENT WITH
SUNNYSIDE QUEENS CONDO BOARD FOLLOWING INVESTIGATION INTO
TENANT HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION**

Settlement requires resignation of board member Neal Milano and two others, removal of offensive displays and symbols in lobby, and changes to house rules to comply with the NYC Human Rights Law, among other changes

Commission launched investigation in August 2017 after receiving reports of harassment and discrimination from elected officials, tenants, and condo owners

NEW YORK — The NYC Commission on Human Rights announces a settlement with the Condominium Board of Managers at 47-55 39th Place in Sunnyside, Queens following an investigation into reports of tenant harassment, discrimination, and a hostile environment, including displays of Nazi and Confederate imagery, swastikas, and hate symbols in the lobby. The Commission launched the investigation on behalf of the City in August 2017 immediately after it learned of possible violations of the NYC Human Rights Law in the building from Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, tenants, and condo owners.

The settlement requires the resignation of board member Neal Milano and two others from the Board, removal of all offensive posters, symbols, and materials from the lobby, and changes to the Condominium’s “House Rules” to comply with the NYC Human Rights Law, including the removal of a provision requiring tenants to prove their immigration status and amending its “no pets” policy to include language about accommodating tenants with disabilities. The settlement also requires the new Board of Managers to create and distribute new written policies detailing its housing obligations under the NYC Human Rights Law to all unit owners and tenants, post “Fair Housing” and “Notice of Rights” posters prominently in the lobby, and train newly elected board members on the Law. The settlement also allows the Commission to be present at Board of Manager’s annual meetings and elections to ensure compliance with the settlement and the NYC Human Rights Law and requires the new board to notify the Commission of annual meetings for the next two years.

The settlement is the result a Commission-initiated investigation and only the Commission’s claims were settled. Aggrieved tenants and condo owners may still file their own complaints at the Commission.

“We hope this settlement sends a strong message to housing providers citywide that New York City does not tolerate discrimination or harassment and that we will not hesitate to take immediate action when we learn of violations,” said **Assistant Commissioner for the Law**

Enforcement Bureau at the NYC Commission on Human Rights, Sapna V. Raj. “Housing providers, including condo boards, supers, landlords, and brokers, have a legal obligation to follow the NYC Human Rights Law, which prohibits discrimination and harassment based on national origin, immigration status, race, or any other protected category. We encourage anyone who is experiencing discrimination or harassment to report it to the Commission by calling 718-722-3131.”

“We are encouraged by the actions taken tonight by the NYC Commission on Human Rights with whom we have been working closely on this investigation,” said **New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman**. “Our investigation into potential state civil rights violations and financial misconduct at the condominium continues.”

“At a time when immigrants are being threatened and harassed by Washington, we won’t stand for it happening here at home,” said **Bitta Mostofi, Acting Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs**. “This settlement in Sunnyside builds on the City’s proud track record of defending the rights of all New Yorkers, including immigrants. Together with our colleagues at the City’s Commission on Human Rights, the Mayor’s Community Affairs Unit, and the Public Engagement Unit, we will continue our outreach efforts and take action against harassment and discrimination.”

The Commission launched an investigation into discrimination at 47-55 39th Place in Sunnyside, Queens after several tenants and unit owners reported that board member Neal Milano was harassing tenants based on their immigration status, national origin, and race and creating a hostile environment, including the posting of notices, photos, and slogans in the common area of the building to demean, intimidate, and harass tenants. The Commission immediately sent a Cease and Desist Letter to the Board in September 2017, which warned that their policies and practices were potentially in violation of the NYC Human Rights Law and ordered Mr. Milano to stop, and began investigating the allegations by interviewing tenants and unit owners and reviewing the Board’s rules and policies.

One tenant alleged that Mr. Milano stopped her as she was walking to her apartment with her boyfriend, who is of Puerto-Rican descent, demanding to see his passport and exclaiming that he “could be anyone illegal.” Another unit owner said that Mr. Milano left her a voicemail claiming to be Adolf Hitler and stating that “the grandmaster of the KKK is coming to the lobby.” The same unit owner said that Mr. Milano also responded to her attempt to rent her unit to a Latina woman by declaring, “She’s Spanish. They are low lives and don’t pay the rent.” In addition, the Commission found violations of the NYC Human Rights Law in the Condominium’s “House Rules,” including a provision requiring unit owners to provide to the Board the U.S. Passport or Residency Card of any tenant renting or residing in the unit as well as a blanket “no pets” policy that does not mention accommodations for tenants with disabilities.

It is illegal under the NYC Human Rights Law for housing providers to discriminate against or harass tenants based on their immigration status, national origin, race, disability or any other protected class. It is also illegal for housing providers to discriminate against tenants by creating a hostile environment or refuse to make repairs or provide equal services to tenants because of their protected class.

The NYC Commission on Human Rights continues to crack down on housing providers who discriminate and harass tenants, including sending Cease and Desist letters and initiating investigations on behalf of tenants and the City itself when it learns of violations. The Commission nearly doubled the number of new investigations into housing discrimination over the last two years, investigating 928 housing discrimination claims in 2017/2016 up from 510 claims in 2015/2014. The Commission is currently investigating 600 claims of housing discrimination, more than 61 claims of which directly involve tenant harassment.

If you or someone you know believes they are the victim of discrimination or harassment, call the Commission's Infoline at 718-722-3131. Reports may also be filed anonymously and the Commission will never ask about a person's immigration status. People may also report discrimination on the Commission's [website](#).

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“This kind of behavior is disgusting and unacceptable. People were terrified,” said **Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer**. “As soon as we saw what was happening, we alerted the Commission who acted swiftly. No person in New York City should feel threatened or be harassed and discriminated against based on where they were born, how they pray, or who they love – especially in their own homes. I am happy to see this resolved and to know that the residents will no longer have to live in fear and can feel safe in our community.”

“New York is a place where people come to dream, free from discrimination, hate, harassment, and judgment,” said **Sateesh Nori, Attorney-in-Charge, Queens Neighborhood Office of the Legal Aid Society**. “Anyone who threatens our dreams threatens the essence of what it means to be a New Yorker. Today's settlement shows the strength and spirit of our City and its people in fighting against vile and hateful conduct.”

“We are heartened and proud of the commitment to justice, inclusion, and equality by our city government, as evidenced by the NYC Commission on Human Rights,” said **Judith Zangwill, Executive Director of Sunnyside Community Services**. “We are so pleased that our neighbors are now able to live in a building free of hate speech and intimidation. This demonstrates the power a community can have when we come together to raise our collective voice. Thank you to Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer for leading the fight.”

“There is no room for discrimination in New York City,” said **Maritza Munoz, Housing Program Director, Woodside on the Move**. “It is an unacceptable act against the rights of families for a landlord to threaten them based on their immigration status and we will not stand for it. Everyone, regardless of immigration status, has the right to safe housing, free of harassment. It is not only outrageous to exploit fear among immigrant communities and discriminate based on status, it's illegal. We will continue to work and fight for our community against tactics like this.”