



Hour photo/ERIK TRAUTMANN

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Fair housing panel told about bias renters face

By **ROBERT KOCH**
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — When the Connecticut Fair Housing Center received a complaint alleging that a Norwalk landlord had rejected a potential renter based upon the person's reliance on Section 8 housing vouchers, the center spoke with the landlord and then had investigators — posing as renters — contact the landlord. "(The landlord) testified at

the hearing that she always took Section 8," said Center Executive Director Erin Kemple, guest speaker at the Norwalk Fair Housing Advisory Commission's annual luncheon at City Hall Wednesday afternoon. "We had six people contact the landlord. Every single time, for all six people, she kept saying, 'I don't take Section 8. I don't take Section 8. I don't take Section 8.'"

Rejecting a tenant based
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win raves from lawmakers for action plan

Council, Healthy Collaborative and Smart, that was after aid and monitoring from birth to eight by taking a holistic school prepara-

1 plan focuses on - early education, family — with an racking results to ting funds and rt, a strategy that

struck a chord with legislators. "We are all trying to work through a results-based accountability system," said state Sen. Bob Duff, D-Norwalk, a member of the Appropriations Committee and the host of the meeting. "Frankly, this is too important not to measure and see progress."

'Speaking to accountability, the group offered a 2006 community "report card" that describes achievements since

2003, when the report was last issued. Mary Peniston, executive assistant to the superintendent of schools and a co-chair of Kids Start Smart, said the report served both as a benchmark and as a tool for raising the bar in coming years.

It cites strides in expanding the capacity of licensed preschool centers, for example, but notes that only 24 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds have access to

subsidized early care and education, the plan's linchpin.

"We want to see this (plan) in the biennial budget at the state level," Peniston said. "We need to make sure there is adequate support for communities that are ready, like Norwalk, for school readiness."

The action plan calls for the creation of 200 additional school readiness slots by 2010, 100 of which can be supported

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Rell meets with area students

Gov. M. Jodi Rell leans forward as she meets with a group of students from New Canaan Country School in her office at the state Capitol in Hartford Wednesday. The children met with her to talk about environmental issues.

AP photo

Fair housing panel hears about forms of discrimination

From A3

upon his or her reliance on Section 8 vouchers is, with few exceptions, a form of housing discrimination and, as such, is illegal. As a result of the investigation into the case, the victim was awarded \$7,000 in damages for emotional distress. The center recovered \$17,000 in attorneys fees, Kemple said.

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center investigates complaints of housing discrimination, advises and counsels about fair housing laws, and provides free legal representation to the victims of housing discrimination.

Rejection based upon Section 8 reliance was one of many forms of housing discrimination addressed by Kemple at the luncheon presentation titled "Housing Discrimination: What's Happening in Connecticut?"

"Connecticut has severe fair housing problems," Kemple said. "Between 1999 and 2005, the center received more than 3,400 complaints of discrimination."

The top five issues the center has seen: Discrimination based upon source of income, as evidenced by rejection of Section 8 tenants; discrimination based upon a person's race and national origin; discrimination by insurance companies; and discrimination based upon a disability. For example, a landlord cannot demand a tenant's medical records nor forbid a disabled tenant from installing a ramp to his or her housing unit.

And, predatory lending, whereby lenders offer loans with excessive rates and fees with the intent of acquiring the borrower's property, plague poor and minority neighborhoods in Connecticut cities, according to the center.

The luncheon comes as the Fair Housing Advisory Commission continues with its anti-

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Erin Kemple

Executive Director, Connecticut Fair Housing Center

predatory lending campaign begun several years ago under the title "Don't Let a Thief Steal Your Home."

"With all of the aspects of fair housing ... the thing that really disturbs me is the predatory lending and reverse mortgages and what goes on, especially with senior citizens," said Mayor Richard Moccia, while noting the city's anti-predatory lending campaign and educational efforts, such as making residents aware of the earned income tax credit. "Fair housing goes beyond discrimination. It goes to make sure people are educated."

The luncheon drew about three-dozen people to the Community Room of City Hall, including Moccia; Fair Housing Advisory Commission Chairman the Rev. Jeffrey A. Ingraham; Norwalk Fair Housing Officer Margaret K. Suib; Norwalk Housing Authority Executive Director Curtis O. Law; and members of the city's Fair Housing Advisory, Fair Rent and Human Relations commissions.

"The issue I've seen increasingly frequently is the failure of landlords to grant reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities," Suib said. "For example, failure to assign a handicapped parking space and refusal to allow a tenant to install a wheelchair ramp."



Planning on a tan

Christine Bitondo and Denise M celebrating Maisonett's birthday

Zoning panel

From A3

ment project manager at the agency, again made to Zoning commissioners the case for eliminating the requirement, which he characterized as odd and unique, and not in keeping with redevelopment visions for Norwalk's core. Between 1990 and 2004, three new housing units rose in the Central Business Design District, and then only through variances, he said.

"Correlation is not causation, but this area of our city has the second smallest population in the city after Silvermine," Johnson said. "This is our downtown and it has somewhere between 100 and 200 units in a city of 80,000 people."

In 1987, when the requirement was adopted, the city, using census data, saw a reduction in persons per household, according to Michael B. Greene, director of planning and zoning for the city.