

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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From Left to right: Legislator Calarco, Legislator Browning, Legislator McCaffrey, Town of Huntington Councilwoman Tracey A. Edwards, Legislator Krupski, County Executive Steve Bellone, Colleen Merlo, Executive Director of the Suffolk County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Legislator Anker, Legislator Trotta, Legislator Martinez, Jennifer Blaske, Esq. Executive Director of Suffolk County Human Rights Commission

SPENCER AMENDS HUMAN RIGHTS LAW TO PROTECT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE FROM HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Hauppauge, NY – On Tuesday, December 2nd, Resolution 1996-2014, making housing discrimination against victims of domestic violence illegal, was unanimously supported by the Suffolk County Legislature. The resolution, spearheaded by Suffolk County Legislator William R. Spencer, M.D., (D-Centerport), prevents housing discrimination against those who have suffered from domestic abuse. With this amendment to the Suffolk County Human Rights Law, the County continues to reflect its commitment to ensuring that the principles of dignity and equality are afforded to all residents.

“I want to thank Legislator Spencer for taking the lead on establishing more protections and support services for victims of domestic violence,” said County Executive Steve Bellone. “This is a solid piece of legislation that will begin to eliminate the hardships of housing discrimination for the victims of domestic violence. I applauded the Legislature for their unanimous vote on this issue.”

“Without a doubt, passing this new provision of the Human Rights Law protects vulnerable victims of domestic violence and ensures they do not have to face additional obstacles during extremely difficult times. It is not unusual for victims to be cut off from their support network of family and friends and to be economically dependent on their abuser. They should not be subject to any additional hardship or discrimination when they seek housing for themselves or their families,” stated Legislator Spencer. “I am proud of our Human Rights Law as it exercises all of our power to protect residents from discrimination.”

“We have to do everything we can to help victims of domestic violence, and making sure that victims are not discriminated against when seeking housing is a key part of that effort,” said Suffolk County Legislature Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory. “Finding safe and appropriate housing is a great challenge for victims of domestic abuse and we have to remove any and all barriers victims may face in seeking housing.”

“Domestic violence touches the lives of all regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, economic or social background. Victims can find it difficult to protect themselves and their children and require safe shelter and housing which is why as elected officials, it is our fiduciary responsibility to respond to domestic violence and provide the necessary assistance and support that meets the needs of the victims.” stated Legislator Monica Martinez.

Housing authorities and landlords will often cite previous violence in a household, repeated police visits, and property damage caused by abusers as reason to deny victims access to housing, or even as cause for eviction. Victims and survivors often face more subtle causes of discrimination due to lack of credit or poor credit, as well as lack of employment and rental history as a result of their abuse. Having these provisions in place will help those individuals seeking to escape their situations by leveling the playing field, and providing an avenue where individuals can seek help if they are experiencing discrimination.

“Securing safe housing is critical for the protection of victims of domestic violence,” said Susan Lagville, Executive Director of Housing Help, Inc. “Being denied housing is tantamount to a sentence of continued abuse. An abused spouse, often with children in tow, faces a mountain of hurdles to overcome. Safe housing should not be one of them.”

Colleen Merlo, Executive Director of the Suffolk County Coalition Against Domestic Violence (SCCADV) spoke about a survivor of domestic abuse who experienced housing discrimination first-hand. After securing an order of protection against her abuser and deciding to break away from the violent relationship, she found a lovely home for herself and her children. When she disclosed this information to the landlord, he withdrew his offer to rent the home to the victim. This amendment would have protected this family.

With statistics showing that women are overwhelmingly the victims of domestic violence, this amendment also strengthens the county’s support for women’s equality:

- About 1.3 million women are victims of assault by their partner each year and 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.
- 85% of domestic violence abuse victims are women.
- Nationally, 11% of evictions involve victims of domestic violence who are evicted due to abuse.

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