



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Ben Ewen-Campen, Chair, Housing and Community Development Committee
FROM: Bryant Gaspard, Program Specialist-Fair Housing/Operations, OSPCD-Housing Division
CC: Stephanie Hirsch, Vice Chair; Committee member Jesse Clingan
George Proakis, Executive Director, OSPCD
Michael Feloney, Housing Director, OSPCD-Housing Division
DATE: February 5, 2019
RE: November 26, 2018 Agenda Item #206773 - That the Administration establish a widely-advertised Fair Housing enforcement program that proactively tests for illegal housing discrimination.

This memo follows up on a request for information made at the Housing and Community Development Committee meeting held on November 26, 2018 on the above-referenced agenda item. At that meeting, Committee members and OSPCD Housing Division staff discussed agenda item # 206773, “That the Administration establish a widely-advertised Fair Housing enforcement program that proactively tests for illegal housing discrimination.” This agenda item was referred by the Board of Aldermen (BOA) as a Resolution (ID# 19559) on October 11, 2018 following its passage.

As noted, the resolution called for establishing a widely-advertised Fair Housing enforcement program. In the initial response to the resolution, OSPCD Housing Division staff outlined current practices of the City’s Fair Housing Commission in this regard. Housing Division staff described an existing fair housing testing program at Suffolk University that serves Somerville and the Greater Boston area. Staff explained that the Suffolk University Housing Discrimination Testing Program (HDTP) is based out of Suffolk Law School, and works to address housing discrimination in the Boston metro area through testing, enforcement, education, and research.

The HDTP receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to conduct its work. Housing Division staff informed Committee Chair Ewen-Campen that there have been several rounds of communications with staff and administrators at HDTP regarding the program’s focus of prioritizing testing at properties or locations where there is a complaint of discrimination. Additionally, the HDTP provides its services at no cost to the cities and towns it conducts testing in and also compensates the testers it engages.



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Chairman Ewen-Campen closed out the discussion by keeping agenda item #206773 open and requesting that staff follow up in writing with publicly available data from HDTP. Housing Division staff subsequently contacted HDTP staff. Director of Investigations and Outreach Nadiyah J. Humber at HDTP provided the data summarized below.

In sharing this information, Ms. Humber emphasized that the data are not entirely representative of the amount of discrimination that actually occurs in the Greater Boston area (or other communities, for that matter). Ms. Humber noted that housing discrimination often goes unreported and still fewer cases of discrimination have testing evidence available to support a victim's claim.

HDTP conducted a total of 140 tests in 2016 and 2017: 80 in 2016 and 60 tests in 2017. A total of 56 tests in 2016 and 2017 resulted in Evidence of Discrimination found. Of the 56 tests where Evidence of Discrimination was found:

- 23 tests involved source of income/public assistance discrimination
- 16 tests were familial status discrimination
- 8 tests were disability discrimination
- 5 tests were race discrimination
- 4 tests were national origin discrimination

The majority of tests are conducted in the Greater Boston area.

If you and/or the committee members have any need for further information or have questions about HDTP, please feel free to contact me at 617-625-6600 ext.2578 or via email at bgaspard@somervillema.gov.

Thank you.

