

ERIE COUNTY FAIR HOUSING BOARD - 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Board of Directors

Karen Rybicki
Board Chair
Erie County First Deputy Commissioner
Department of Social Services

Terri Flaherty
Board Vice-chair
Belmont Housing Resources for Western New York

Jane Hughes - Vacant
Board Secretary
Western New York Law Center

Sharon L. Ciminelli
Buffalo Niagara Association of Realtors

Karen King
Erie County Commissioner of Public Advocacy

Board Staff

Daniel R. Castle
Ex-officio
Erie County Commissioner Department of Environment & Planning

Richard Stanton
Legal Counsel
Erie County Department of Law

As per Section 6 of the Erie County Fair Housing Law, fair housing board positions were chosen according to the requirements shown below:

- (a) One member upon recommendation from the Buffalo Niagara Association of Realtors;
- (b) One member upon recommendation from the Western New York Law Center or Neighborhood Legal Services;
- (c) One member upon recommendation from Belmont Housing Resources for Western New York or the Rental Assistance Corporation of Buffalo;
- (d) The Erie County Commissioner of Public Advocacy; and
- (e) The Erie County First Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Social Services – Family Independence.

Board members are listed above.

As per Section 10 of the law, entitled Education and Promotion of Fair Housing Goals, Erie County continued to take steps to affirmatively further and promote fair housing in 2023 by sharing educational materials and obligations within the law to 330 housing providers and real estate brokers within Erie County that have sold or rented 20 or more dwelling units within the calendar year.

Board of Director's met for their first meeting of 2023, on February 14th. The board meets quarterly with a HOLD meeting scheduled each month for housing discrimination cases that are brought to the board. Board meetings in 2023 continued to be held via conference call as they have been due to COVID-19 related precautions. There were 4 meetings held during 2023- meeting minutes are attached.

One discrimination case brought to the board in 2022 was conciliated in 2023 through a pre-filing settlement agreement between the parties that included relief in the public interest as well as monetary relief in the amount of \$2500 paid by the Respondent to the Complainant. Three previously filed discrimination cases were closed after the Complainants either withdrew their complaints or were unresponsive to multiple attempts to contact. One case referred to the County Attorney's Office was closed after the Respondent sold the subject property and ceased operations in Erie County.

As per Section 5 (A) of the law, Erie County has designated a not-for-profit fair housing organization, Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME), to assist with the implementation of the law. Services include, fielding fair housing discrimination complaints from residents of Erie County, referral services for residents with housing and human service needs and paralegal counseling to assist in resolving landlord/tenant disputes.

Results of HOME's work in 2023 are as follows:

Housing discrimination complaints- 41 cases of potential housing discrimination were investigated and resolved.

Landlord/Tenant dispute cases- 99 people were assisted with advice on resolving landlord/tenant dispute issues.

Referral services- 167 people were assisted with referral services regarding housing and human service issues.