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## Report: Housing discrimination on LI 'routine practice'

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In 2004, Kirk and Orlandina Carter, a young African-American couple soon to marry, started to look for a house to buy in a "good neighborhood."

"We probably had about three to five Realtors," said Orlandina Carter, 32. "They would always lead us to neighborhoods that were low-income, rundown."

A new study released today suggests the Carters' experiences were not unusual.

In "Racial Equity Report Card: Fair Housing on Long Island," the Syosset advocacy group Education Research Advocacy Support to Eliminate Racism criticizes real estate brokers and federal, state and local government agencies, which the group says do not act aggressively on discrimination complaints or enforce fair housing laws.

ERASE Racism's report on the issue in 2005 prompted new fair housing laws in Nassau and Suffolk that strengthened human rights commissions' power to investigate discrimination complaints and enforce the law.

The new report says a different approach is needed with real estate professionals - more license revocations as well as more continuing education for them - who the report said were defendants in 73 percent of housing race discrimination complaints on Long Island from 2000 to 2007.

The 70-page report is bolstered by a fall 2008 poll Stony Brook University conducted for ERASE Racism of African-Americans' and Latinos' experience with discrimination on the Island. Of 813 people surveyed, 40 percent of blacks and 21 percent of Latinos said either they or a member of their immediate family have experienced housing discrimination.

Survey participant Kirk Carter, 36, said brokers "would be cool with [them] until we would say what we did. That made me realize it was discriminatory. When we would say we were school teachers [he's a science teacher; she teaches math], they would be more receptive."

His wife added: "They would ask us questions like, 'Are you gainfully employed?'" She said she found the question absurd. "If I wasn't gainfully employed, why would be I be looking for a house?" Eventually, the couple bought a home in Amityville, and they are happy with it.

The report said, "Some Long Island real estate professionals commit illegal housing discrimination violations as a matter of routine practice."

In response, the 23,000-member Long Island Board of Realtors said it is "strongly committed to promoting the awareness of fair housing practice in all communities on Long Island and continues to educate its Realtor members and the public about the right to equal housing opportunities."

Still, Elaine Gross, president of ERASE Racism, said more needs to be done. "The issue hasn't been dealt with in a sustained way," she said, "and in a way where there is going to be oversight and accountability of those entities that are really responsible for enforcement."

The report also criticized the state human rights division for investigations that are "superficial and over-lengthy" and faulted the Department of Housing and Urban Development for lax oversight.

While conceding case backlogs in the past, Galen D. Kirkland, the state's human rights commissioner, said new policies have been implemented to speed the process. He said a half-million-dollar advertising campaign has led to a recent increase in cases filed.

HUD's New York office said it remained "committed to eradicating housing discrimination on Long Island, in any form." HUD said last year 71 percent of its Long Island investigations were cleared within 100 days.

Discrimination complaints: Who and why

The following chart shows the top categories, or "protected class," of housing discrimination case inquiries made in Nassau and Suffolk



counties. The inquiries were made to the New York State Division of Human Rights between 2000 and 2007.

#### NASSAU

Disability: 30 percent

Race/color: 20 percent

Sex: 12 percent

Creed: 8 percent

Familial status: 8 percent

National origin: 8 percent

#### SUFFOLK

Disability: 30 percent

Race/color: 24 percent

Sexual orientation: 12 percent

Familial status: 11 percent

Sex: 9 percent

Opposed discrimination retaliation: 5 percent

The vast majority of fair housing inquiries and complaints filed based on race on Long Island were made by African-Americans, both at 70 percent, according to ERASE Racism in a report today. That is based on inquiries made to the New York State Division of Human Rights from 1999 to 2007. Whites were 8 percent of the inquiries and 9 percent of complaints filed; Latinos comprised 7 percent of inquiries and 6 percent of complaints filed; Asians comprised 4 percent of inquiries and 4 percent of complaints filed; "other" comprised 11 percent of inquiries and 10 percent of complaints filed.

- SOURCE: ERASE Racism's "The Racial Equity Report Card: Fair Housing on Long Island."

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