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RACISM

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New Study Dispels Myths about Why African Americans Live in Segregated Communities and Brings Attention to Several Challenges Facing the Region

-ERASE Racism conducts telephone survey of black Long Islanders about housing related issues

ERASE Racism's new poll of African Americans on Long Island brings several regional concerns into the spotlight. The telephone survey posed questions about housing related issues and found that a majority of black Long Islanders are not living in neighborhoods that possess the qualities that they consider to be the most important. The study also reported on experiences with housing discrimination and demographic changes in their neighborhoods. The findings call attention to regional issues that Long Island must address in order to improve the economy and the quality of life for all of its residents.

Westchester case: In 2009, Westchester County was ordered to remove structural impediments to furthering fair housing, such as exclusionary zoning, and create hundreds of housing units for moderate-income people in overwhelmingly white communities and to aggressively market them to nonwhites in Westchester and New York City. This came out of the settlement of a case in which the county was charged with fraudulently receiving tens of millions of federal housing dollars by falsely claiming that it was "affirmatively furthering fair housing."

Many in Westchester, including its County Executive, Robert Astorino, have made inaccurate statements to resist the creation of affordable housing in majority white communities. They have asserted that the county is diverse since there has been growth in the black and Latino populations. Similar claims have been made on Long Island in response to ERASE Racism's previous reports that show high levels of segregation. People have reasoned that blacks actually 'don't want to live in racially integrated communities'; that they 'prefer to live with their own kind'; and that they value living 'close to family and friends' who provide much-needed assistance. ERASE Racism's new housing survey proves that these claims are false.

The survey, which polled black Long Islanders, found that **99% of respondents would ideally like to live in racially mixed neighborhoods, with a majority, 69%, choosing an even racial mix of 50% black and 50% white. Only 1% of respondents said that they would like to live in a neighborhood that is all black.**

The study found that blacks on Long Island considered a low crime rate, landlords/homeowners who take care of their property, high quality public schools and good local services as the most important neighborhood characteristics. Conversely, when asked about their ideal neighborhood, **very few black respondents, 28%, considered "living close to family and friends" as one of the most important neighborhood qualities and a majority, 64% or almost two-thirds, said that they received a little or no assistance from their neighbors in**

finding jobs, babysitting, and carpooling. These findings discredit the common myth that African Americans choose to live in the same community because they value social ties and being able to rely on one another more highly than other factors.

As in Westchester, the levels of segregation on Long Island have remained high throughout the past thirty years, despite increases in the minority population. Using the Dissimilarity Index as a measure of the level of segregation, with 100 being total segregation, Long Island continues to be one of the most racially segregated regions in the nation. In 1980, the Dissimilarity Index for blacks in relation to whites was 76.9, which is considered a very high level of segregation. Thirty years later, in 2010, the black-white level of segregation was 69.2, still very high and representing just a slight decrease (dropping barely 1 percentage point every five years).

While Long Island also tends to be segregated by income, the report shows that income disparities cannot explain the high level of segregation experienced by blacks in the region. Given ERASE Racism's finding that blacks clearly prefer integrated communities, this pattern of racial segregation, regardless of income, suggests that other factors, such as housing discrimination rather than black self-segregation, are contributing to the high levels of racial segregation.

Lack of affordable housing: The Long Island Association's recent study of housing costs, the Long Island Index's 2012 profile report that highlights regional challenges, and the Strategic Plan from the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council (Elaine Gross, president of ERASE Racism is a member of the Council) that calls for more affordable rental housing all warn that the lack of affordable housing on Long Island is hurting the region's economy and is having a detrimental effect on the quality of life for many residents.

ERASE Racism's new study not only confirms the need for affordable housing on Long Island but, in addition, it calls attention to racial barriers – such as housing discrimination, that have severely limited the housing choices for African Americans in the region. The struggle against racism and segregation is an essential element of the provision of affordable housing on Long Island. Housing that is not available to individuals and their families because of their race or ethnicity is not affordable at any price.

According to the survey, African Americans perceive housing discrimination as pervasive on Long Island: **33% of respondents reported having experienced housing discrimination first-hand or within their immediate family; 22% of respondents said that the discrimination involved a real estate agent who would not show, sell, or rent them homes in mostly white areas, when they could, in fact, have afforded those homes.**

The survey also suggests that Latinos may be experiencing increased housing discrimination. **Forty-five percent of blacks on Long Island said that the number of African Americans had decreased in their neighborhood in the last 10 years; of these respondents, 80% said that Latinos had largely replaced blacks in their area.** The Latino population is the fastest growing demographic on Long Island; however, according to 2010 Census data, they are now experiencing higher levels of segregation than ever before. In relation to non-Hispanic whites on Long Island, the level of segregation for Latinos in 1980 was 37.1; by 2010, the level had risen to 48.5. The increase in segregation for Latinos indicates the possibility of housing discrimination that is limiting their housing choices to majority minority neighborhoods.

ERASE Racism's previous housing reports, reports by others, and various law suits have documented the ongoing problem of fair housing violations, including racial steering by real estate agents, predatory lending by banks, and discriminatory municipal policies. **The most effective way to increase access to affordable housing is to build and enforce a framework of laws, policies, structures and patterns of behavior that make it possible for all existing and new affordable housing, no matter the community, to be fair housing, accessible to all who need it – including African American and Latino families.**

Improving the quality of education for students in high-need districts- Recently, members of the Alliance for Quality Education and the Long Island Progressive Coalition joined together to demand that New York State legislators equally allocate more than \$200 million to more than two dozen high-need school districts, instead of forcing them to compete for aid as Governor Cuomo's competitive grant program requires.

The findings from ERASE Racism's new survey report indicate that alternatives are needed in addition to increasing funds in order to address low student performance in high-need districts. The survey asked black Long Islanders, a majority of whom live in high-need districts, about the quality of their local public school and found that a majority of respondents are not satisfied with the public school education offered in their district. **Only 16% rated their local schools as excellent, while just under half, 40%, rated them as fair or poor. Not surprisingly, this dissatisfaction was most pronounced among respondents who live in high-need school districts; fifty-five percent of those in high-need districts rated their local schools as fair or poor.**

There is significant evidence that concurs with the perception of the survey respondents that blacks on Long Island do not have access to a high quality public education. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, in 2008-2009 only 9% of black students on Long Island had access to a high performing public school, compared to 14% of Hispanics and 30% of whites.

Even when federal and state money is factored in, schools in areas of concentrated poverty have higher levels of unmet needs. Consequently, there are vast disparities in resources for students and in student performance in majority black and black/Latino schools that tend to be in high-need districts, as compared to majority white schools, most of which are in average-need and low-need districts. **According to 2010 data from the New York State Department of Education, only 19% of majority minority school districts on Long Island had a graduation rate greater than 85%, compared to 91% of majority white districts.**

ERASE Racism's survey report recommends creating new affordable housing in majority white communities with high performing schools, as one way to give black and Latino students access to high quality education. There is no reason why Long Island should have any high-need districts. Affordable housing that is strategically placed in areas with little poverty provides a way to ensure that all schools have sufficient funding to meet the needs of their students.

KEY FINDINGS

Neighborhood Racial Demographics and Housing Discrimination

- When asked about the percentage mix that best represents the kind of neighborhood in which they would most like to live, nearly all respondents (all of whom were black) chose a racially mixed neighborhood, with a large majority, 69%, who chose an even mix of 50% white and 50% black. Only 1% chose all-black.
- Among blacks who said their neighborhoods had become less African American in the last 10 years, 80% said that Latinos had largely replaced blacks in their area.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents said they believe that African Americans miss out on housing because real estate agents will not show blacks homes in white areas. Just under half, 44%, believe that African Americans miss out on housing because white homeowners and landlords will not rent or sell to blacks. Altogether, over 80% of respondents said these forms of housing discrimination are somewhat or very likely to affect blacks.
- Roughly one out of three respondents said that they have, or a family member has, been a victim of housing discrimination. A majority of those respondents explained that the discrimination involved a real estate agent who would not show, sell, or rent them homes in mostly white areas, when they could, in fact, have afforded those homes.

Neighborhood Quality Preferences and Satisfaction with Current Neighborhood

- A majority of African Americans reported that they consider a low crime rate (89%), landlords/homeowners who take care of their property (81%), high quality public schools (80%) and good local services (78%) as the most important neighborhood characteristics.
- Only 28% of blacks considered “living close to family and friends” as one of the most important neighborhood qualities and a majority, 64% or almost two-thirds, said that they received a little or no assistance from their neighbors in finding jobs, babysitting, and carpooling.
- Only 16% rated their local schools as excellent, while nearly half, 40%, rated them as fair or poor. Fifty-five percent of those in high-need districts rated their local schools as fair or poor, compared to 11% in low-need and average-need districts. In addition, only 37% believe that local public schools are a good value compared to the taxes that they pay.
- Thirty-seven percent of black residents rated their local government services as fair or poor and 43% said that they are not a good value compared to the taxes they pay.
- Roughly half, 52%, of all blacks said they are somewhat or very likely to leave Long Island in the next five years. Another 27% said that they were somewhat or very likely to move from their current residence to somewhere else on Long Island. When asked why they were thinking of moving to another area on the Island, the most common response, by roughly 40%, was unhappiness with their current neighborhood.