



August 2, 2021

The Hon. Tackey Chan, Chair  
Susan L. Moran, Chair  
Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Testimony in support of H.428/S.208, “An Act to end housing discrimination in the commonwealth”**

Dear Mr. Chairman, Madam Chair, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of One Family, Inc. in support of H.428/S.208, “An Act to end housing discrimination in the commonwealth”

**One Family, Inc. – organizational overview**

[One Family](#) is a Massachusetts nonprofit that prevents family homelessness by helping low-income parents achieve higher education and career success. Our approach to homelessness prevention combines direct-service programs, training and technical assistance, and public policy advocacy.

Through our longest-running direct-service initiative, the One Family Scholars program, each year we help up to 100 low-income single parents pursue college degrees, so they can build family-sustaining careers, and put a roof over their families’ heads. We do this through individualized coaching, scholarships, and flexible stipends.

And over the past four years, through the Credential to Career Coaching (C2C) program, we’ve also helped over 130 more low-income parents identify family-sustaining careers that match their skills and interests and will support housing stability, and then create individualized plans to enter those careers, including a roadmap to earning any necessary degrees, certificates or other credentials.

**The problem: rampant discrimination in the rental housing market**

Last year’s report by the Boston Foundation, Suffolk Law School and Analysis Group, “[Qualified Renters Need Not Apply](#),” documented rampant discrimination against Black renters and renters seeking to use a housing voucher in Greater Boston. Unfortunately, these findings came as no surprise to the many One Family Scholars and C2C participants who have been victims of discrimination.

Take, for example, Nakita, an African American graduate of the One Family Scholars program with a Section 8 voucher who has struggled to find a landlord or broker in the Greater Boston area who will take her on as a tenant. When one broker told her that her voice sounded “ethnic and scary,” she had no doubt that the broker was not inclined to rent to a Black woman. And as soon as Nakita mentions having a Section 8 voucher, she knows to expect a cold reception and no opportunity to see the apartment she’s interested in.

Or take Elisha, a graduate of C2C from Worcester who has encountered similar barriers when trying to use her Section 8 voucher to rent an apartment in the Worcester area, in spite of outstanding references from landlords, employers and trusted community members. On many occasions she has had promising interactions with brokers and landlords come to a screeching halt as soon as she mentions her voucher, and her calls suddenly go unanswered. One real estate broker even told her that they had had inquiries from prospective tenants without vouchers, and that she should call back in a week or two to see if the apartment is still available. (It wasn’t.)

## Fixing the problem

This rampant discrimination in Massachusetts must end. The Commonwealth needs to adopt a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination in the rental housing market on the basis of race, national origin, voucher status or any other category covered by existing antidiscrimination law.

To end discrimination, we need a comprehensive approach consisting of three elements:

- 1. Establish mandatory training on Fair Housing law for all real estate brokers in Massachusetts.**
- 2. Broaden the membership of the Board of Registration of Real Estate Brokers and Salespersons with a) a member with Fair Housing expertise, and b) a member with a housing voucher.**
- 3. Fix the broken enforcement system, by streamlining the process for suspending the broker's license of brokers who engage in illegal discrimination.**

H.428/S.208, "An Act to end housing discrimination in the commonwealth," sponsored by Representatives Madaro and Gonzalez and by Senator Gomez, embodies this comprehensive approach, and One Family strongly supports this legislation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express One Family's support for Representative Elugardo's bill H.358, "An Act promoting fairness in the rendering of dwelling accommodation services." This legislation would reduce barriers to accessing housing, by a) prohibiting rental brokers from charging a fee to the tenant, unless the tenant knowingly hired the broker, and b) requiring landlords who engage the services of a rental broker to pay the broker's fees, rather than shifting the cost to the tenant.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our strong support for "An Act to end housing discrimination in the commonwealth." We urge the Committee to favorably report H.428/S.208.

Sincerely,



Valerie Paric  
Executive Director

cc: State Senator Adam Gomez; State Representative Adrian C. Madaro