



The Chairman's Corner

by

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FAIR HOUSING – PART 2

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Affordability and habitability/repairs top the list of issues that the Columbia County Fair Housing office tends to see most frequently, county Fair Housing Officer William Fisher said recently.

“The landlord has the obligation to provide safe, sanitary, and livable conditions to a tenant,” he said. “That’s even if the tenant is behind on the rent. We went through the pandemic and the moratorium on rents, which was supposed to apply to those affected by the loss of income or additional expenses due to COVID-19, but unfortunately a lot of people just stopped paying their rent. I look at the landlord’s situation, too. Fortunately, there were some emergency rental assistance programs.”

In 2019, the New York State Legislature enacted the state Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act, which “really has helped tenants quite a bit. There’s a lot more protection for tenant with things such as notices on rent increases, notices on evictions or terminations of tenancy. One of the keys is the length of term of residency, which dictates the time a tenant has to leave.” said Mr. Fisher.

While non-payment of rent is a separate issue, when, for instance, a case arises where the landlord wants to do some renovations and do away with the tenants, the notice that the landlord has to give depends on the length of time that the tenant has been in residency, he explained.

“A lot of people don’t know that. If you’ve lived in a property less than one year, then the landlord only has to give a 30-day notice. If they’ve lived there one-two years, it’s 60 days. And if it’s more than two years, it’s 90 days. That applies to rent increases as well,” Mr. Fisher said.

Every year, HUD determines the fair market rent for an area “for the purpose of the housing choice voucher, which we know as Section 8,” said Mr. Fisher. “Affordability is tough, HUD currently says fair market for Columbia County is \$1,100 per month for a two-bedroom house. Well, if you have someone looking for two bedrooms in Hudson they’d better be prepared to pay \$1,900-2,000. So, if you have someone with a Section 8 voucher, to find something within Section 8’s guidelines is difficult.”

On a day-to-day basis, the “panic of someone receiving a 14-day notice or a termination of tenancy” keeps the county Fair Housing office busy, said Mr. Fisher. “There’s always more time than people think. I try to return my calls quickly because I put myself in their shoes – at that point people start losing sleep and getting sick about it. People get concerned because they’re afraid of retaliation. They can be afraid to come forward with a legitimate complaint. Anything that becomes a legal matter, if they can afford an attorney, I recommend they get one. Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York can help. And the county Office for the Aging has an attorney that advocates for seniors.”

The Fair Housing Office website can be found at <https://sites.google.com/columbiacountyny.com/ccfairhousing/home>

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This is part two of a two-part series.