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Sarah Clark, Secretary

TO: House Committee on General & Housing
FROM: Angela Lasso-Jimenez, Policy & Research Analyst, Office of Racial Equity
DATE: Wednesday March 12, 2025
RE: Testimony of the Office of Racial Equity on H.169, An act relating to amending the prohibitions against discrimination in public accommodations and housing

Chair Mihaly and Members of the Committee:

The Office of Racial Equity strongly supports H.169, which would add immigration status as a protected class under Vermont's Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act and prohibit landlords from requiring Social Security numbers during the rental application process.

Discrimination in housing is a significant problem in Vermont, with undocumented families, asylum-seeking families, and mixed-status households facing particularly high barriers. According to the 2024 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing, a report conducted by the State of Vermont every five years, “30% of respondents said that they experienced housing discrimination. Of those that reported discrimination, 56% cited a landlord or property manager as the source of the discrimination” (Vermont Department of Housing & Community, 2024, p.5). Immigrant families have faced emotional and verbal abuse from landlords who take advantage of their power and charge more those without Social Security Numbers (Cotton, 2025). This shows that discrimination still plays a role when some families, particularly from historical excluded groups and communities of color, try to access housing.

The discriminatory practices faced by immigrant families in Vermont reflect a nationwide pattern. As documented by Human Rights Watch (2022), “recent immigrants often encounter discrimination in employment, education, and housing as a result of persistent racism and xenophobia.” This discrimination has deep consequences, as housing stability is key to family well-being, economic participation, and community integration.

Housing access is a human right issue. The United States has acknowledged its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which it signed in 1966 and ratified in 1994. This convention clearly establishes that “differential treatment on the basis of citizenship or immigration status will constitute discrimination”. While both federal and state fair housing laws provide important protections, they are insufficient in addressing the specific barriers immigrant families face. Research has shown the “pervasive effects

of undocumented status on many aspects of well-being,” (Hall & Greenman, 2014) with housing being a critical dimension for the integration of everybody into our State.

Housing discrimination is more than just an individual hardship. It represents a systemic barrier that contributes to “diminished educational opportunities for minorities; lack of equal access to capital, credit markets, and technology” (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Immigrant families make significant contributions to Vermont, filling a vital gap in key economic sectors such as agriculture, hospitality, and construction. In order to make our State a truly welcoming place, everyone should have access to housing. Landlords should not be permitted to discriminate against applicants due to their immigration status. Immigrant families are our neighbors and active members of our communities. They strengthen our economy and make the State more diverse and vibrant.

H.169 is an opportunity to address one significant consequence of systemic racism by ensuring that Vermont’s commitment to fairness and equal opportunity extends to all residents, regardless of immigration status. This bill aligns with both our values as Vermonters and our obligations under international human rights frameworks.

Thank you for your consideration.

Source

Cotton, E. (2025, January 13). Citing discrimination, Vermont immigrants push for fair housing legislation. *VT Digger*. <https://vtdigger.org/2025/01/13/citing-discrimination-vermont-immigrants-push-for-fair-housing-legislation/>

Hall, M., & Greenman, E. (2013). Housing and neighborhood quality among undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants. *Social Science Research*, 42(6), 1712–1725. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2013.07.011>

Human Rights Watch. (2022). Racial Discrimination in the United States. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/08/08/racial-discrimination-united-states/human-rights-watch/aclu-joint-submission>

Vermont Department of Housing & Community. (2024). The State of Vermont Fair Housing Analysis. Executive Summary. https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/Housing/Fair-Housing/Analysis-of-Impediments/2024_FHA_ES.pdf

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