



Abstract

Testimony presented to members of Planning Committee of the Los Angeles City Council, in behalf of an ordinance to prevent segregation and discrimination in the housing projects of the Community Redevelopment Agency, by David Ziskind, Chairman Legal and Civic Action Committee, Los Angeles Chapter, AJ Committee. August 2, 1950

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Testimony

Mr. Chairman and members of the Planning Committee:

My name is David Ziskind. I am here at the request of the Community Relations Committee of the Los Angeles Jewish Community Council. That Council represents 386 Jewish organizations - virtually the entire Jewish community of Los Angeles. It is the desire of the Jewish Community Council to convey to you and the rest of the City Council its unequivocal support of the proposed ordinance to ban race discrimination and segregation in Redevelopment housing projects.

Other witnesses before your committee will speak of our basic democratic traditions that make this ordinance imperative. In this era when the entire world is being put to the test of democracy or demagoguery, action on such matters may make our city a place of pride or mark it with shame. I too stress the moral and social values of our American democratic way of life. But today I wish to speak particularly of the unnecessary cost in uprooting families in blighted area without adequate provision for their rehousing; and I wish to point out how other cities and other states have saved themselves that cost.

If you run through a directory of the residents in any of our poor housing areas, you will find a Sanchez, a Sakimoto, a Shapiro and a Smith living side by side. Mexican, Japanese, European born and native Americans are neighbors in blighted housing areas. Negroes, mongolians and caucasions; Protestants, Catholics and Jews, are intermingled in those neighborhoods in which houses will be condemned for redevelopment projects. They are now living together in democratic harmony.

When their homes are torn down, board by board, and sold for kindling, will their democratic way of life be preserved? Our public and private relief agencies will be called upon to get many of the displaced families temporary residence. Many may be located elsewhere permanently. But it is the repeated

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experience of city after city in which slum clearance and redevelopment housing have occurred that unless the same area is opened to the old residents without discrimination or segregation on the basis of race, color, creed or national origin, there will be created a new and heavy burden of relief for the dispossessed.

The problem is not eliminated automatically by new housing. If the new building involves race segregation it invariably involves a housing shortage for certain races, colors and creeds. That shortage means higher relief costs for county, municipal and private agencies.

This is the time when economy in government is an absolute necessity. One way to assure ourselves of economy, in fact, to avoid increasing relief expenditures unnecessarily, is to prohibit discrimination and segregation in redevelopment housing projects.

Please observe also that the redevelopment procedure involves the condemnation of private property with public funds. The rentals and taxes paid by the Sanches, Sakimotos, Shapiros and Smiths help pay for that land. The land is deeded to private developers with public assistance. How can we possibly justify the public expenditure, including the contributions of the Sanches, Sakimotos, Shapiros and Smiths, if these people are displaced and are not permitted to find new homes in the project they and the rest of the community have helped to support?

The legislatures of other cities and states have recognized the economy as well as the broad social and moral principles involved in keeping public housing and private redevelopment projects free from race discrimination. At least five large cities, Boston, Cleveland, Hartford, New York and San Francisco, and at least nine states, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, have enacted laws against discrimination in housing.

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A quick perusal of the salient features of these laws should give us the benefit of their precept.

In Connecticut, a law of 1949

1. Pub. Act 291, Acts 1949, approved July 13, 1949

provides that all persons shall be entitled to equal accommodations in all places of public accommodation including all public housing projects.

In Illinois, the Blightened Area Redevelopment Act of 1947

2. SB 548, Laws 1947, approved July 2, 1947

provides that in all sales of land by the Land Clearance Commission no deed shall contain a covenant prohibiting occupancy because of race, color or creed. An earlier statute

3. Ch 38, Sec 128K, L. 1937)

requires that no official or employee of the state or a municipality shall deny any person full and equal enjoyment of any services or property under his care on account of race, color or religion.

In Indiana, the Urban Redevelopment Act of 1945

4. Ch 276, Acts 1945, approved March 7, 1945

contains an explicit statement against any interpretation [sic] that might result in the exclusion of any citizens from a redevelopment project because of race, creed, color or national origin.

In Massachusetts, the General Laws of 1948

5. Ch 51, L 1948, approved February 11, 1948

provide that in the selection of tenants for public housing no person shall be subjected to discrimination by reason of race, creed or religion.

In Minnesota, Public Housing and the Urban Redevelopment Laws of 1947 and 1949

6. Ch 487, L 1947, amended Ch 505 L 1949, approved April 20, 1949

establish a preference in housing for local inhabitants and for those displaced from the blighted areas; and expressly add that in the selection of tenants there is to be no discrimination because of religious, political or other affiliation.

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In New Jersey, a 1946 statute

7. Ch 323 L 1946, approved October 1, 1946

providing public housing for veterans prohibits racial or nationality discrimination; and a series of amendments to various housing laws including the Urban Redevelopment Law adopted in May of this year

8. SB 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, approved May 5th, 1950

provides that no one shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, religious principle, color, national origin or ancestry.

In New York discrimination was banned from limited dividend housing and public housing in 1939

9. Ch 808 L 1939

and from all housing accommodations receiving public assistance of any sort in the Laws of 1950.

10. Ch 287, L. 1950

The recent status provides not only money damages but also injunctive relief against any violation.

In Pennsylvania, the Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945

11. Act 385 L 1945, approved May 24, 1945

requires private developers to contract with the housing authority that no person will be deprived of the right to live in the housing project or be denied any of the facilities therein because of race, creed, color or national origin. Leases or deeds are also required to be free from discrimination. Similar provisions were written into the 1947 law for veterans' housing.

12. Act 549, Acts 1947

And in 1949, the Public Housing and Redevelopment Act

13. Act 493, Acts 1949, approved May 20, 1949

was amended to provide that any housing with any form of state assistance must be offered without race discrimination.

In Wisconsin all persons entitled to the benefits of the Public Housing and Urban Redevelopment Act

14. Ch 592, L 1949, approved August 2, 1949

of 1949 are guaranteed their rights without discrimination on the basis of race, creed or color.

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These are the state statutes establishing the principles involved in the ordinance now before your Committee.

Precedents have been set for this Committee also by City Council in municipalities with housing and racial patterns very much like those of Los Angeles.

The Boston City Council passed a resolution on June 28, 1948, calling for covenants in all contracts between developers and the City Housing Authority against discrimination in the selection of tenants, fixing of rentals, or operation of housing projects.

Cleveland adopted an ordinance in practically the same terms on December 21, 1949.

Hartford Connecticut passed a resolution on January 24, 1949, prohibiting race discrimination in any public or private housing project in which the city has a financial interest, or which is constructed with the aid of city funds, tax waiver or abatement, land grant, land development, or any other assistance from the city.

New York City, after a very sad experience with one large discriminatory project (Stuyvesant Town), enacted two ordinances to prevent any further race discrimination. In 1944 it provided that no tax exemption would be granted to any housing project that refused or withheld or denied its facilities on the basis of race, creed or color. In 1949, New York City also provided that any deed by the city disposing of land for housing shall contain a positive covenant protecting all applicants for occupancy against race discrimination.

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Similarly, the Board of Supervisors for the City of San Francisco on November 21, 1949, adopted a resolution against discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin and ancestry in the administration of public housing projects.

These legislative enactments indicate that the ordinance before this committee is not only consistent with the democratic traditions of our country but is also in accord with precedents established for housing projects by numerous legislatures.

The principles involved have been recognized also within Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Housing Authority has formulated the following policy for its projects:

"The policy of this authority is that there shall be no discrimination in any development against persons because of race, color, creed or national origin. This policy shall be explained clearly to the applicant". A copy of this statement is presented to each prospective tenant.

The experience of the Los Angeles Housing Authority demonstrates that the American policy of non-discrimination can be applied successfully in this city. There has been no difficulty at all with the intermingling of persons of various races, color and creeds in Los Angeles. On the contrary, the Los Angeles Housing Authority has received in this community and in cities throughout the country well deserved praise and emulation.

Now, if that policy of non-discrimination is to be assured in private redevelopment projects, private housing created with public assistance, it is necessary that the policy be enacted into law. To fail to do so will mean the destruction of democratic patterns now existing; it will also mean the dispossession of families who help pay for the new development; and it will mean incurring new

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relief costs for displaced families. If on the other hand we follow the policies adopted by the Los Angeles Housing Authority and by the municipalities of Boston, Cleveland, Hartford, New York and San Francisco, and by the States of Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, we will live up to the best traditions and the most economical policies of American government. That can be done by the adoption of the ordinance before you. The Los Angeles Jewish Community Council wishes to add its urgent appeal to that of the other civic organizations appearing here today for the early enactment of that ordinance.

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