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Text Size

Select Language ▼

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Search

Search

Secondary Navigation

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Mayor de Blasio Signs Legislation to Establish Testing Programs for Housing and Employment Discrimination and Increase Transparency for the Human Rights Commission

April 20, 2015

Video available at: <https://youtu.be/1EXJpQGUqAE>

Mayor de Blasio Presides Over Bill Signing Ceremony



NEW YORK—Mayor de Blasio today signed into law five pieces of legislation – Intro. 421-A, in relation to increased reporting by the Human Rights Commission; Intro. 689-A, in relation to establishing a housing discrimination testing program; Intro. 690-A, in relation to establishing an employment discrimination testing program; Intro. 656, in relation to the establishment of the South Shore Business

Improvement District; and Intro. 497-B, in relation to the interest rate and discount percentage recommendations provided by the New York City Banking Commission.

The first set of bills – Intro. 421-A, Intro. 689-A, and Intro. 690-A – strengthen the transparency of the Human Rights Commission in its efforts to enforce the Human Rights Law, which protects New Yorkers from discrimination. Intro. 421-A requires the Commission to report additional information related to its investigations of discrimination, including the total number of investigations and the number of investigations that result in civil action. Intro. 689-A requires the Commission to test for housing discrimination, and Intro. 690-A requires the Commission to test for discrimination in employment practices. These tests would involve sending a pair of testers who have similar qualifications, but differ in a characteristic such as race or gender, who would apply for housing or employment to determine if discriminatory practices are being used. These bills also require the Commission to report the results of these tests, and to refer any incidents of discrimination to the Law Enforcement Bureau for assessment. These bills were approved by the City Council during the Stated Meeting on March 31.

“Discrimination in any form is contrary to everything we stand for as a city. With increased transparency and these additional measures to combat discrimination, the Human Rights Commission will be able to better protect New Yorkers from harmful practices that interfere with their everyday lives,” said **Mayor de Blasio**. “Today, we are taking another step toward ensuring New York City fulfills its promise as a city where everyone can thrive, regardless of who they are or where they come from. I want to thank Speaker Mark-Viverito for her leadership, and Council Members Brad Lander and Darlene Mealy for sponsoring these bills.”

“This Council is proud to stand up for Human Rights and equality in New York City,” said **Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “Strengthening the Human Rights Commission is a vital step in ensuring that all New Yorkers are treated with dignity and protected from discriminatory practices. I thank my colleagues in the City Council and the de Blasio Administration for their partnership on these important measures. Additionally, I’m excited to see the city move forward on the South Shore BID which will spur excellent growth in Staten Island.”

“Landlords who discriminate against people based on their race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or whether they have a housing voucher violate our basic sense of right and wrong, make our housing crisis worse, segregate our city, and break NYC’s Human Rights Law. Unfortunately, in recent years, we’ve done almost nothing about it. This law will help us get back on track,” said **Council Member Brad Lander**. “Matched-pair testing is one of the strongest proactive ways to go after those landlords and employers who repeatedly discriminate against New Yorkers. With systematic testing, increased funding and staff levels, more accountability, and an updated Human Rights Law, NYC can renew its effort to combat discrimination and ensure equal justice under the law. Thanks to Mayor de Blasio’s leadership, and under the new leadership of Commissioner Carmelyn Malalis at the NYC Commission on Human Rights, we are making real progress toward a New York City that upholds everyone’s human rights.”

“As Chair of the Council’s Civil Rights Committee, I’m proud to have sponsored Intros 421-A and 690-A, and I congratulate my colleague, Council Member Brad Lander, on Intro 689-A. These bills will provide our Human Rights Commission with the framework to become a truly proactive agency. For too long, the Commission has been starved of the funds and staffing required to fulfill its statutory duties. Intros 689-A and 690-A will not only create housing and employment testing programs, but will require the Commission to hire additional staff for implementation. This will add much-needed personnel to a Commission whose budget and staff have been drastically reduced since 1992,” said **Council Member Darlene Mealy**. “In addition to the testing programs created by 689-A and 690-A, Intro 421-A will shed

much-needed light on the investigations that the Human Rights Commission initiates by requiring the Commission to include those investigations in its annual report. I'm grateful to Mayor Bill de Blasio for his dedication to reinvigorating the Human Rights Commission by signing this necessary legislation. I also thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito for her support for the bills, and her commitment to the civil rights of all New Yorkers. I look forward to the implementation of the legislation, and seeing the results of a newly energized Human Rights Commission."

The fourth bill, Intro. 656, establishes the South Shore Business Improvement District. Business Improvement Districts are voluntarily-formed community organizations that promote business development and improve the quality of life in neighborhoods across the City. The South Shore BID consists of three commercial strips located in Great Kills, Eltingville, and Annadale in Staten Island. It is the first BID to contain three nearby, but non-contiguous, areas. Community Board 3 approved the BID's District Plan on November 25, 2014, and the City Planning Commission approved a resolution for the BID on January 7. This bill was approved by the City Council during the Stated Meeting on March 31. In his remarks, the Mayor thanked the bill's sponsor, Council Member Vincent Ignizio.

"The South Shore Business Improvement District has been a labor of love for me and members our business community for more than five years, and I am extremely excited to finally see it come to fruition. When it formally begins to operate later this year, it will be the largest geographical BID in the city, and perhaps the most unique, with its use of the Staten Island Railway to connect three distinct 'towns' and three commercial districts. And it will not only provide valuable services for our merchants and residents, but compliment the vibrant development throughout the South Shore," said **Council Minority Leader Vincent Ignizio**.

The fifth bill, Intro. 497-B, requires the New York City Banking Commission to include a formal report when submitting early payment discount rate recommendations to the Council, detailing which factors were considered when determining the rate, and a comparison to other interest rates. Intro. 497-B also moves up the deadline for these recommendations from May 25 to May 13, and institutes a new default rate in the event the Council does not adopt an early payment discount rate. This new default rate will be a formula based on the Six-Month Treasury Bill. The New York City Banking Commission is responsible for recommending the interest rate for delinquent property tax and water/sewer payment discount rate for early payment of property taxes. This bill was approved by the City Council during the Stated Meeting on March 31. In his remarks, the Mayor thanked the City Council Finance Committee Chair, Council Member Julissa Ferreras, and the bill's sponsor, Council Member Helen Rosenthal.

"By requiring a justification analysis, this legislation, most significantly, brings transparency in the way in which the Banking Commission makes recommendations to the Council for the interest rates for the late payment of property taxes and water charges; and the discount rate for early payment of property taxes. The justification analysis would provide much-needed insight about the deliberations and considerations of the Banking Commission," said **Council Member Julissa Ferreras, Chair of the Committee on Finance**. "I am proud to be a co-sponsor of this bill, and I congratulate the prime sponsor, Council Member Rosenthal, on her efforts to bring this legislation to fruition."

"By signing this fiscally responsible bill into law, the Mayor is shedding light on the quiet and little understood process of setting the property tax prepay discount rate and late charges," said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**. "The bill allows the Council to take into account the City's need for cash, current interest rates, and fiscal stability, so the property tax prepay discount rate and late charges reflect the City's current fiscal needs."

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