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## **WRO RELEASES FAIR HOUSING TESTING REPORT Housing Discrimination Still Exists In Lower Hudson Valley, But Westchester Shows Improvement**

WRO conducted undercover fair housing tests to find out what levels of discrimination exist in housing in the lower Hudson Valley. The conclusion: Racial discrimination still exists.

The report found that Westchester County has made significant improvements since the last round of testing in 2005. At that time, 46.5 percent of test conducted found discrimination in rental housing. In the current round of testing, the percentage was 17.54 percent. For Rockland County discrimination was found in 34.6 percent of the tests and in Putnam 14.3 percent.

The details of these findings were unveiled in a study released today by WRO, at a news conference with County Executive Robert P. Astorino.

WRO credited the improvements in Westchester to a strong partnership with Westchester Putnam Association of Realtors, Westchester County Department of Planning and the Westchester Human Rights Commissions' shared focus on the education of Fair Housing laws.

WRO Executive Director Geoffrey Anderson stated, "We have a moral imperative to service people who are underserved and treated differently because of what they might look like, who they are married to, or their abilities."

Astorino said, "Any discrimination is unacceptable. However, this report shows that through education we can significantly decrease the instances. Westchester County will continue to support efforts by WRO and other housing agencies to educate realtors, management companies and the public about these important issues."

County Legislator Bill Burton, chair, Housing, Planning, & Operations Committee stated, "Education and eternal vigilance are the two interlocked components of combating discrimination. It's great to have this report, and I commend WRO not only for producing it but for setting many of the conditions that led to it."

The report, *WRO Fair Housing Testing: Equal Housing in the Lower Hudson Valley*, is based on an 18-month Fair Housing testing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). WRO conducted 111 "paired" audit tests in which minorities and whites presented themselves to various real estate offices, management companies and apartment complexes throughout 5 focus areas: Sound Shore, Peekskill and Mount Kisco in Westchester County and throughout Rockland and Putnam Counties. Any inferior or unequal treatment of the minority tester was assumed to be based on racial or ethnic discrimination.

Based on the test results, WRO has filed 4 complaints with HUD-certified agencies: three with the Rockland County Commission on Human Rights and one with the Westchester County Human Rights Commission. These included one real estate company in New City, two real estate companies in Pearl River and one management company in New Rochelle. Nine other real estate offices or management companies have received consultations and/or Fair Housing trainings from WRO staff regarding possible violations.

Founded in 1968, WRO is a HUD-certified non-profit housing counseling agency whose mission is to promote equal, affordable and accessible housing throughout the lower Hudson Valley region of New York.

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