



Spring 2019

Winston-Salem City Council

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Tu Comunidad Liason



Adolfo Briceño

If you have any suggestions for a featured service or program, please contact Adolfo Briceño, Human Relations Specialist, at 336.734.1225.

**Service and Assistance
 Animals in NC**

By Adolfo Briceño

The North Carolina Legislature is studying two bills related to assistance and emotional support animals that would criminalize willfully lying or misrepresenting that the animals are in fact needed by a disabled individual. It would also require these animals to be registered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.



The proposed bills are House Bill 680 and House Bill 796. At the close of this edition, House Bill 796 was unanimously approved by the NC House of Representatives. The State Senate would also have to approve the bill before the Governor signs it into law. House Bill 680 is pending a vote by the state legislature.

A summary of the most important aspects of both bills is offered below.

House Bill 680

- Defines an assistance animal as being trained to assist a person with a disability.
- Defines emotional support animal as an animal that provides emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship but it is not trained to assist a person with a disability.
- Willfully killing an assistance animal or an emotional support animal will be a Class H felony.
- Willfully causing harm or attempting to cause harm to an assistance or emotional support animal will be considered Class I felony or Class I misdemeanor.
- A person with a disability has to register the service or the emotional support animal before the NC Department of Health and Human Services. After the registration, the service animal will receive a tag stamped with a registration number that

qualifies it as a service animal that has received training or is in training. The emotional support animal does not have to receive training, but has to be registered as well. The animals will have to be registered on an annual basis.

-Disguising the animal as an emotional support or service animal will be a Class C misdemeanor.

House Bill 796 (emotional support animals only)

Any person who does the following shall be guilty of a Class C misdemeanor:

- Misrepresents to a landlord that the person has a disability or a disability related-need for the use of an emotional support animal.
 - Makes a materially false statement to a health service provider for the purpose of obtaining documentation or verification that the person has a disability-related need for the use of an emotional support animal.
 - Provides a document or verification to a landlord that misrepresents that an animal is an emotional support animal.
- As a health provider does any of the following:
- Verifies a person's disability status and need for an emotional support animal without professional knowledge of the person's condition adequate to provide a reliable verification.
 - Charges a fee to provide a written verification for a person's disability status and need for an emotional support animal and provides no additional service to the person.
 - A landlord who permits a person with a disability an emotional support animal shall not be liable for an injury to another person caused by a person's emotional support animal.

**14th Annual Fair and
 Affordable Housing Summit**

By Adolfo Briceño

On April 25, 2019, the City of Winston-Salem Human Relations Department celebrated the 14th Annual Fair and Affordable Housing Summit, where approximately 150 specialists from



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the industry and government officials convened to discuss the most recent trends and new challenges in the area. The keynote speaker, Dr. Stephen Sills, from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), set the tone by framing the issues of housing affordability and gentrification.

Dr. Sills explained that growth is the “problem” of housing affordability. “The success of Winston-Salem in attracting new business, developing a thriving downtown, retaining talented young people, and become a destination to move has resulted in a population of over 240,000 and a growth of 4.42% in the last five years. This equates to the need for about 1,000 housing units per year to keep up with current levels of population increase,” he said.

Since the demand for housing is greater than available units, the prices for both renters and homeowners are increasing. Dr. Sills estimated that rent, from January 2016 to April 2019, has increased an average of 14% or about 5% annually. For those who own homes, the picture can be demoralizing. He estimated that 21% of homeowners, or about 20,000, people are cost burdened, which means that they pay more than 30% of their monthly income to cover their mortgage or other housing related costs.

For renters, things can also be precarious. According to the Eviction Lab at Princeton, in Winston-Salem there were over 3,000 evictions in 2016 or nine households experiencing eviction every day. With rent prices increasing, there are over 2,500 families on the Housing Authority of the City of Winston-Salem’s voucher list and more than 2,000 waiting for public housing.

As a solution, Dr. Sills suggested a mantra of “build, build, build,” but not 3,000 plus square feet houses but smaller, efficient and more affordable units packaged into creative solutions, such as co-housing, duplex/triplex/quadruplexes in residential neighborhoods, as well as other alternative housing models.

According to Dr. Sills, the only thing that will really solve this imbalance is building more units to replenish the housing stock, not at the expense of displacing individuals from their historic and traditional neighborhoods. The gentrification that tends to negatively affect people of color in heritage neighborhoods, traditionally populated by African-Americans, is also a problem raised by Dr. Sills.

“Growth without the negatives of gentrification, the replacement of one community for another, is a difficult tight rope requiring intentional and careful planning and full involvement of residents from the community,” Dr. Sills suggested.

After the keynote speaker, a panel of specialists discussed issues like opportunity zones, a new federal initiative intended to attract investment to economically depressed areas by

offering tax incentives. Other topics included community land trusts, low-to-moderate income tax credits, and fair housing testing.



Facebook and Fair Housing

By Adolfo Briceno

On March 2019, Facebook made headlines in the Fair Housing world for two reasons: First, the social media giant settled a complaint filed against them in federal court by the Fair Housing



Alliance and several other non-profit organizations for discriminatory housing ads. Secondly, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) filed a complaint against the company for housing discrimination based on the company’s advertising platform.

As of the printing of this Tu Comunidad Spring 2019 edition, it is unknown yet if HUD will take Facebook to federal court or not.

According to a HUD press release, issued on April 16, 2019, Facebook was accused of giving advertisers the possibility to exclude people from watching the ad whom Facebook classifies as parents; non-American born; non-Christian; interested in accessibility; interested in Hispanic culture and a wide variety of other interests that align closely with the Fair Housing Act’s seven protected classes (Race, Color, Sex, Religion, Disability, National Origin and Familial Status). HUD General Counsel, Paul Compton, said “even as we confront new technologies, the fair housing laws enacted over a half a century ago remain clear: discrimination in housing-related advertising is against the law. Just because a process to deliver advertising is opaque and complex doesn’t mean that it exempts Facebook and others from our scrutiny of the law of the land. Fashioning appropriate remedies and the rules of the road for today’s technology as it impacts housing are a priority for HUD.”

The filing of the complaint came on the heels of the historic \$2.4 million settlement between the Fair Housing Alliance, et al and Facebook also based on discriminatory housing advertising. The Fair Housing Alliance, as the lead complainant, took Facebook to federal court on March, 2018. The court documents from the case showed that the Fair Housing Alliance posed as a landlord who wanted to rent a house and were able to show that on the company’s platform, they could exclude several populations from watching the advertisement, like African-Americans, Hispanics, and children with families. They could also exclude people with interests in disability-related websites or by sex.

As part of the settlement, the Fair Housing Alliance will train, for six months, several Facebook Departments like the Ads Leadership Team, Regulated Ads Solutions, Machine Learning, Ranking Feature Engineers, Ads Policy and Advertising Product Counsel, among others. The Fair Housing Alliance will also test the platform to make sure changes are being implemented and will meet with executives, if necessary, to make sure the suggested changes are being implemented.