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Assemblymember Miguel Santiago Introduces Legislation to Buck Trump Administration on Fair Housing

(Sacramento, CA) – This morning, **Assemblymember Miguel Santiago (D-Los Angeles)** introduced Assembly Bill 686 to maintain California’s commitment to fair housing. The measure, sponsored by a broad coalition including the Western Center on Law & Poverty, Public Advocates, and the National Housing Law Project, is intended to oppose recent federal efforts in this arena – specifically, H.R. 482 and S. 103, both introduced by Republicans in Congress in early January to undermine a core piece of the 1968 Fair Housing Act.

"As the representative of the third poorest district in California yet also one of the most expensive areas, I fought hard throughout my first term to emphasize and further affordable housing in our state," said Assemblymember Santiago. "To watch our new Congress and President throw some of these gains down the drain simply because they may be complicated for local governments is an insult to policymakers and poverty advocates who have worked on this issue for the past 50 years."

California’s Fair Employment and Housing Act, which is meant in part to be the state equivalent of the federal FHA, does not explicitly include an obligation for federal and local agencies to affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH) like that in the federal Fair Housing Act. Given the threats to fair housing under the Trump administration and H.R. 482 and S. 103, the time has come to enact a state AFFH law.

Sam Tepperman-Gelfant, Deputy Managing Attorney of Public Advocates and a co-sponsor of AB 686 said, "As the 50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act approaches, we must not cede the progress we've made against segregation and discrimination. California must hold the line on Fair Housing. We applaud Assemblymember Santiago's leadership on this critical issue."

"AB 686 will allow California to reject the backwards-looking policies emanating from Washington, to embrace the vision of inclusion put forward by the Obama Administration, and

to extend this vision in a way that gives all Californians a meaningful shot at inclusion and opportunity,” said **Jith Meganathan, Policy Advocate for the Western Center on Law & Poverty.**

Shamus Roller, Executive Director of the National Housing Law Project added that "At a time when many hard-fought civil rights gains are at risk, California must lead the fight to deliver opportunity for all families and communities. We thank Assemblymember Santiago for introducing this important bill."

Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (known as the Fair Housing Act) prohibits discrimination in the rental, sale, or financing of housing on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family status, and disability. In addition to prohibiting discrimination, the Act includes a powerful affirmative mandate that federal agencies actively work to dismantle segregation and create equal housing opportunities, known as the affirmatively furthering fair housing or “AFFH” obligation.

In 2015, the Obama Administration promulgated important regulations to flesh out the AFFH obligation. These regulations include a rule making it explicit that states, local governments, and housing authorities must take “meaningful actions, in addition to combating discrimination, that overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to opportunity based on protected characteristics.” (24 C.F.R. §5.152)

Republicans in Congress and the Trump administration want to see this important tool for combating discrimination overturned. Trump’s nominee for HUD Secretary, Ben Carson, has called it “Socialist” and “government-engineering.”

AB 686 will likely be heard in policy committee(s) within the Assembly in late February or early March.

Assemblymember Miguel Santiago is the Chair of the Assembly’s Communications and Conveyance Committee. He represents the 53rd District composed of the cities of Los Angeles, Huntington Park, and Vernon.

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