

# STATE OF NEW YORK

1482

2019-2020 Regular Sessions

## IN ASSEMBLY

January 15, 2019

Introduced by M. of A. EPSTEIN -- read once and referred to the Committee on Housing

AN ACT to amend the executive law, in relation to creating the office of the cooperative and condominium ombudsman; to amend the tax law, in relation to authorizing the residential unit fee; and to amend the state finance law, in relation to establishing the office of the cooperative and condominium ombudsman fund

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. The executive law is amended by adding a new article 49-C to read as follows:

### ARTICLE 49-C

#### OFFICE OF THE COOPERATIVE AND CONDOMINIUM OMBUDSMAN

##### Section 996. Short title.

996-a. Legislative declaration.

996-b. Definitions.

996-c. Office of the cooperative and condominium ombudsman.

996-d. Functions, powers and duties of the office.

996-e. Principal office and satellite offices.

996-f. Assistance of other state agencies.

996-g. Reports to the governor, attorney general and the legislature.

996-h. Contract authority.

996-i. Separability.

§ 996. Short title. This article shall be known and may be cited as the "cooperative and condominium ombudsman act".

§ 996-a. Legislative declaration. The legislature finds and determines as follows:

Cooperative and condominium housing constitutes a significant portion of New York state's residential housing stock. It is and has been the public policy of this state to encourage such forms of home ownership. A

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 wide variety of laws have been enacted to provide fairness in the  
2 conversion of rental properties to cooperative and condominium ownership  
3 and in the regulation and taxation of cooperatives and condominiums.  
4 State and local laws and regulations are also designed to ensure that  
5 the residents of such housing are provided with safe and habitable  
6 accommodations.

7 Inevitably, disputes have arisen among cooperative and condominium  
8 sponsors and developers, cooperative shareholders and condominium unit  
9 owners, prospective shareholders and unit owners, boards of directors  
10 and boards of managers. Such disputes often result in lengthy and costly  
11 litigation and uncertainty as to the rights of the parties pending the  
12 outcome of litigation. Such litigation diverts resources that could be  
13 better utilized to provide affordable and well-maintained buildings and  
14 grounds for the common good of the owners.

15 This article is necessary to provide a neutral, informative and acces-  
16 sible resource available to all parties involved in residential cooper-  
17 ative and condominium ownership and governance. The ombudsman appointed  
18 pursuant to this article will conduct outreach programs to educate unit  
19 owners and board members as to their legal rights and responsibilities.  
20 The ombudsman will encourage alternative dispute resolution when  
21 disputes do arise. The ombudsman will be available to provide dispute  
22 resolution services on consent of the parties. The ombudsman will also  
23 provide monitoring and supervision of cooperative and condominium  
24 elections.

25 § 996-b. Definitions. 1. "Cooperative" means a corporation organized  
26 and operating pursuant to the general business law or the cooperative  
27 corporations law for the primary purpose of providing residential hous-  
28 ing to its shareholders.

29 2. "Condominium" means a homeowners association or any association  
30 organized and operating pursuant to article nine-B of the real property  
31 law for the primary purpose of providing residential housing to its unit  
32 owners.

33 3. "Office" means the office of the cooperative and condominium  
34 ombudsman created by this article.

35 4. "Ombudsman" means the chief administrative officer of the office of  
36 the cooperative and condominium ombudsman.

37 5. "State agency" means any department, board, bureau, commission,  
38 division, office, council or agency of the state, or a public benefit  
39 corporation or authority authorized by the laws of the state.

40 6. "Local agency" means any department, board, bureau, commission,  
41 division, office, council, officer or agency of a city, town or village.

42 § 996-c. Office of the cooperative and condominium ombudsman. 1. The  
43 office of the cooperative and condominium ombudsman is hereby created  
44 within the department of law to have and exercise the functions, powers  
45 and duties provided by the provisions of this article and any other  
46 provision of law. The attorney general shall be responsible for over-  
47 sight of the office.

48 2. The head of the office shall be the cooperative and condominium  
49 ombudsman who shall be appointed by the attorney general. The ombudsman  
50 shall hold office until the end of the term of the attorney general by  
51 whom he or she was appointed and until his or her successor is appointed  
52 and has qualified. The ombudsman may be removed by the attorney general  
53 for cause, after being given an opportunity to be heard. A vacancy shall  
54 be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

55 3. The ombudsman shall receive an annual salary to be fixed by the  
56 attorney general within the amount made available therefor by an appro-

1 priation and shall be allowed his or her actual and necessary expenses  
2 in the performance of his or her duties. The ombudsman's salary shall be  
3 no less than the salaries of certain state officers holding the posi-  
4 tions indicated in paragraph (a) of subdivision one of section one  
5 hundred sixty-nine of this chapter.

6 4. The ombudsman shall be an attorney with extensive experience in  
7 real estate, cooperative and condominium law and in conflict and alter-  
8 native dispute resolution.

9 5. The ombudsman shall direct the work of the office and shall be the  
10 chief executive officer of the office. The ombudsman may appoint such  
11 officers and employees as he or she may deem necessary, prescribe their  
12 powers and duties, fix their compensation and provide for the reimburse-  
13 ment of their expenses, all within amounts made available therefor by  
14 appropriation. Such officers and employees shall include attorneys and  
15 other professionals with extensive experience in real estate, cooper-  
16 ative and condominium law and in conflict and alternative dispute resol-  
17 ution.

18 6. The ombudsman and officers and employees of the office shall adhere  
19 to a code of ethics in order to inspire public confidence and trust in  
20 the fairness and impartiality of the office. The ombudsman shall  
21 prescribe such code of ethics. Such code shall require that the ombuds-  
22 man and officers and employees of the office respect and comply with the  
23 law; that they not use or attempt to use their positions to secure priv-  
24 ileges or exemptions for themselves or others; that they not solicit,  
25 accept or agree to accept any gifts or gratuities from persons having or  
26 likely to have any official transaction with the office; that they not  
27 request or accept any payment in addition to their regular compensation  
28 for assistance given as part of their official duties; and that they  
29 shall not perform any function in a manner that improperly favors any  
30 person or party.

31 7. The ombudsman and officers and employees of the office shall not  
32 serve as officers or employees of a political party or a club or organ-  
33 ization related to a political party, receive remuneration for activ-  
34 ities on behalf of any candidate for public office or party position or  
35 engage in soliciting votes or other activities on behalf of a candidate  
36 for public office or party position.

37 8. The secretary to the governor shall assure that all state agencies  
38 provide the ombudsman with assistance in advancing the purposes of the  
39 office and to assure that the activities of the office are fully coordi-  
40 nated with the activities of state agencies providing related services.

41 § 996-d. Functions, powers and duties of the office. The office shall  
42 have the following functions, powers and duties:

43 1. To educate and inform shareholders of cooperatives and unit owners  
44 of condominiums, their boards of directors and boards of managers, prop-  
45 erty managers, professionals working with and for such boards and other  
46 interested parties of their legal rights and responsibilities under the  
47 federal, state and local laws and regulations applicable to cooperative  
48 and condominium housing in the state of New York and under the cooper-  
49 ative and condominium documents governing the respective properties.

50 2. To coordinate and assist in the preparation and publication of  
51 educational and reference materials about residential cooperatives and  
52 condominiums, to make such resources known and available to the widest  
53 possible audience.

54 3. To organize and conduct meetings, workshops, conferences, public  
55 hearings and forums and to utilize all forms of communications media to

1 disseminate accurate and timely information of interest to persons  
2 residing in, owning and managing cooperative and condominium housing.

3 4. To provide meetings, mediation, arbitration and other forms of  
4 alternative dispute resolution services to cooperative and condominium  
5 sponsors and developers, cooperative shareholders, condominium owners,  
6 their boards of directors and managers, prospective shareholders and  
7 unit owners and other parties so as to avoid costly and lengthy liti-  
8 gation and reduce expenses for those involved in disputes.

9 5. To subpoena and enforce the attendance of witnesses, administer  
10 oaths or affirmations and examine witnesses under oath and require the  
11 production of any books and papers deemed relevant or material to the  
12 resolution of any dispute pending before the office.

13 6. To engage with the housing courts, other trial courts, state and  
14 local agencies and with alternative dispute resolution programs main-  
15 tained by the office of court administration in order to provide  
16 specialized expertise in the resolution of cooperative and condominium  
17 disputes as an alternative to litigation.

18 7. To offer procedures, monitors and vote counting services to assure  
19 fair elections for members of cooperative boards of directors and condo-  
20 minium boards of managers. Fifteen percent of the total voting inter-  
21 ests in a cooperative or condominium or shareholders or owners of six  
22 residential units, whichever is greater, may petition the office to  
23 attend and conduct an election of directors or managers. All costs asso-  
24 ciated with the election monitoring process shall be paid by the cooper-  
25 ative or condominium.

26 8. To refer any complaint received to the appropriate law enforcement  
27 agency for prosecution, if deemed appropriate by the office.

28 9. To perform any other functions that are necessary or appropriate to  
29 fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the office.

30 § 996-e. Principal office and satellite offices. The office shall  
31 maintain its principal office in the city of New York and shall have  
32 satellite offices in other locations within the state of New York where  
33 there are significant concentrations of cooperative or condominium hous-  
34 ing.

35 § 996-f. Assistance of other state agencies. To effectuate the  
36 purposes of this article, the ombudsman may request and shall be enti-  
37 tled to receive from any state agency, and the same are authorized to  
38 provide, such assistance, services, facilities, and data as will enable  
39 the office to carry out its functions, powers and duties, and such  
40 temporarily or permanently assigned personnel as the director of the  
41 budget may approve.

42 § 996-g. Reports to the governor, attorney general and the legisla-  
43 ture. The office shall make an annual report, to be received on or  
44 before January first, to the governor, attorney general and the legisla-  
45 ture concerning the activities undertaken by the office, recommendations  
46 for legislative proposals, data concerning program activities and other  
47 pertinent information as may be required.

48 § 996-h. Contract authority. The office is hereby empowered to enter  
49 into any agreement or contract with any state or local agency necessary  
50 or convenient to carry out the provisions of this article.

51 § 996-i. Separability. If any clause, sentence, paragraph, section or  
52 part of this article shall be adjudged by any court of competent juris-  
53 isdiction to be invalid, such judgment shall not affect, impair or invali-  
54 date the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to  
55 the clause, sentence, paragraph, section or part thereof directly

1 involved in the controversy in which such judgment shall have been  
2 rendered.

3 § 2. The tax law is amended by adding a new section 186-h to read as  
4 follows:

5 § 186-h. Residential unit fee. A cooperative housing corporation or a  
6 homeowners association, as such terms are defined in section two hundred  
7 ten of this chapter, shall pay an annual fee of six dollars per year for  
8 each residential unit located in a building or buildings owned or oper-  
9 ated by such corporation or association. Such fee shall be payable to  
10 the department. All revenue from the fee imposed pursuant to this  
11 section shall be paid by the department to the state comptroller to be  
12 deposited to and credited to the office of the cooperative and condomin-  
13 ium ombudsman fund, established pursuant to section eighty-one-a of the  
14 state finance law.

15 § 3. The state finance law is amended by adding a new section 81-a to  
16 read as follows:

17 § 81-a. Office of the cooperative and condominium ombudsman fund. 1.  
18 There is hereby established in the custody of the state comptroller a  
19 special fund to be known as the "office of the cooperative and condomin-  
20 ium ombudsman fund".

21 2. The office of the cooperative and condominium ombudsman fund shall  
22 consist of monies appropriated thereto, funds transferred from any other  
23 fund or sources, and monies deposited therein pursuant to section one  
24 hundred eighty-six-h of the tax law.

25 3. The monies in the office of the cooperative and condominium ombuds-  
26 man fund shall be kept separate from and shall not be commingled with  
27 any other monies in the custody of the state comptroller. Such monies  
28 shall be allocated to and expended by the department of law solely for  
29 the staffing and administration of the office of the cooperative and  
30 condominium ombudsman of such department.

31 § 4. This act shall take effect on the one hundred eightieth day after  
32 it shall have become a law.