

John R. Kellam  
19 Firglade Avenue  
Providence 6, Rhode Island

March 7, 1962

Rev. DeWitt C. Clemens, General Chairman,  
Msgr. Arthur T. Geoghegan, Chairman, Advisory Council, and  
Members of the Executive Committee and Advisory Council,  
Citizens United for a Fair Housing Law in Rhode Island

Dear Friends:

Please record my resignation as a Vice-Chairman  
and as a member of Citizens United for a Fair Housing Law  
in Rhode Island, effective immediately.

A separate letter of even date, detailing the  
reasons for this decision, is enclosed for the information  
of the entire individual membership of the organization.

You have my permission to release the enclosed  
letter, as a whole but not portions of it, to members; and also  
to the press if you consider it appropriate to foster, at  
this juncture, a free and open public discussion of campaign  
methods and of the relative merits of the two major proposals  
presently at hand in Rhode Island on this vital subject.

Sincerely yours,

S/ John R. Kellam

John R. Kellam



John R. Kellam  
19 Firglade Avenue  
Providence 6, Rhode Island

March 7, 1962

Rev. DeWitt C. Clemens, General Chairman,  
Msgr. Arthur T. Geoghegan, Chairman, Advisory Council, and  
Members of the Executive Committee and Advisory Council,  
Citizens United for a Fair Housing Law in Rhode Island

Dear Friends:

It is with a profound regret that I must declare my personal independence from the repeatedly confusing, self-contradictory, devisive, and opportunistic policies of Citizens United. For a very long time I have clung with increasingly strained patience to the hope that by waging a quiet internal campaign I could help to reestablish an open-handed policy and more guileless methods without withdrawing from the organization. But the demands recently mounted for unreserved support of our duly recorded but officially uncommunicated policy of February 9, 1962, are so insistent as to be impossible of handling except in terms of my resignation, which is tendered in an accompanying separate letter of even date.

My letters of internal protest dated February 12, 1962 and February 27, 1962, have continued to go unanswered, nor have they been acknowledged. In them I took direct exception to most of the following items of policy or procedure which I consider have been very much mistaken and even wrongful: 1) failure to sustain effort, 2) refusal to inform membership, 3) substitution of expediency for principle, 4) self-contradictory policy, 5) demands for loyalty to undisclosed policy, 6) suppression of internal discussion, 7) suppression of public information, 8) indifference to alternative legislative consequences, 9) raiding of other organizational loyalties, 10) refusal to unite on genuine proposal, and 11) duplicity of policy. These are detailed under their respective headings in the following paragraphs.

Failure to Sustain Effort. Beginning in 1959 there has been a chronic failure to sustain our campaign throughout each year, or to produce our own proposals for legislation. Last year a small group of members had to force the hand of the General Chairman in having the Citizens United bill introduced in the General Assembly, despite an unexplained reluctance caused by a few other members who insisted on his waiting upon the governor's good intentions. This reluctance was contrary to adopted policy and to previous experience.

Refusal to Inform Membership. In our meeting of January 18, 1962, which was very poorly attended, the members present refused a minority pleading for a definite assignment of executive responsibility for keeping the membership informed of policy changes with all reasonable promptness. The major policy change of February 9, 1962, is still without direct notification to the members, and has been merely hinted at in a letter addressed to "Friends" dated March 3, 1962. Many members may have missed the small newspaper story on Page 32 of the February 11, 1962, Providence Sunday Journal, which did not constitute official notice in any case.



Substitution of Expediency for Principle. A desperate expediency appears to have been substituted repeatedly in place of fundamental principle as the primary basis for selection, among the legislative proposals available in the General Assembly, of the bill to be supported by Citizens United. The eagerness to "get something or other passed" has often threatened to short-change the real needs of most of the people who await genuine solutions to the problem of discrimination in housing.

Self-Contradictory Policy. The following policy statement was adopted on February 9, 1962, without any change despite an urgent appeal for a resolving of the practical absurdity it contains by virtue of its self-contradictory language: "Citizens United shall support the bill now pending in the Senate, introduced at the request of Governor Notte, which support does not preclude us from working for more comprehensive legislation in the year 1962." The simultaneous doing of both within one General Assembly session is patently impractical in view of the governor's insistence against any attempt to amend his proposal in the slightest. I submit that Citizens United has shown absolutely no intention of carrying out the second half of that policy, and is inhibiting any member's attempts to do so, and that therefore its inclusion in the statement was curiously meaningless.

Demands for Loyalty to Undisclosed Policy. At least two "blind bids" for general loyalty have recently been issued, one dated February 9, 1962, addressed to the individual membership, and the other dated on or about February 23, 1962, addressed to organizations that had endorsed the 1959 Citizens United bill or subsequent bills we supported. Neither of these "blind bids" for loyalty made mention of the adopted policy statement quoted above. These are the current instances of the kind of irresponsibility mentioned in the first item of this list. Last year's most glaring instance is dealt with in the final item listed below.

Suppression of Internal Discussion. Opportunity for a discussion of the two bills on their merits was ruled out at the February 9, 1962, meeting of the Advisory Council and Executive Committee of Citizens United. The counsels of expediency were listened to with patient favor, but the attempts by two members to explain the longer-range practicability of adhering to principle were thwarted during the same meeting and even characterized by a few afterward as "unnecessary obstructionism". If there is any member of Citizens United who prefers the Notte bill to the R.I.C.D.H. bill on its merits, or on any grounds other than its supposedly unique chance of passage, I have yet to hear him speak out. This is curiously similar to the inability of any member to defend on merit former Governor Del Sesto's bill in 1960 in full view of the then available improved version of the Citizens United bill of 1959. At present, everyone seems to agree individually that the R.I.C.D.H. bill is the best one he has ever studied, and is the one that really should be passed. The only reason for their rejecting it is their fear that it would have no chance of passage this year. But the few members who have led the rest in its rejection do not explain just why they are behaving as though this were our last year on earth, or for our cause. If their staying-power is running out, let us shift our reliance to the grass-roots support which is welling up increasingly, and to the organizations of grass-roots people throughout this state, whose support must be shown to their political representatives before any genuine bill can pass. Internal unity is never fostered by suppression of ideas.

Suppression of Public Information. Elaborate attempts have been made to suppress all analysis of the comparative value of the two bills, for fear this may disparage the Notte bill. Of course it would. These efforts have followed upon Citizens United's choosing to ignore the most significant contrasts in the merits of the two bills ever since they were introduced in the General Assembly during the opening week



of January, 1962. This belatedly reorganized group has made a prodigious effort since its reactivation on January 18, 1962, to prevent the expression of any "invidious comparisons" that would put the Notte bill in a disadvantageous light. But the fact is that any comparison whatever becomes invidious, however objective the wording may be. This effort has descended heavily upon the individual representatives of several of the twenty organizational members of the Rhode Island Committee on Discrimination in Housing. It has forced a somewhat ambiguous policy to be adopted by even that organization, i. e., promotion of their own bill without campaigning against any other bill. The R.I.C.D.H. is following that difficult policy officially, although they have a distinct understanding that no individual and no member organization or other group should feel bound or limited by that official decision, so long as he or it states clearly the identity of the maker of each statement. However, the public is nevertheless being kept ignorant of the information that is needed and that these proponent organizations could furnish, and must rely on what a few dissident and unsupported individuals can offer.

I consider the referral of the Notte bill yesterday to a separate committee of the House of Representatives as another device being used to separate all discussions over the comparative merits of the two bills, as well as a move to defeat that bill. It further illustrates the general muddle we are in, here in Rhode Island.

Indifference to Alternative Legislative Consequences. The Executive Committee and Advisory Council have been unwilling to consider seriously enough the importance of the unfair consequences of the Notte proposal now being promoted by Citizens United who are without any proposal of their own. This is being done with the solicited help of persons who are ignorant of the comparisons between it and the R.I.C.D.H. proposal for a genuine Equal Housing Opportunities Act. There is a kind of organizational arrogance in this situation. To illustrate the essential unfairness of the Notte bill, I offer the following: If I were a real estate dealer, I would logically have particular objections to the Notte bill because it would pit some dealers against others on the point of who could keep on using unfair bases of discrimination and who could not. If I were a home builder, I would likewise have objections peculiar to this bill that I would not need to have to the R.I.C.D.H. bill. If I were the owner-occupant of a four-family house, or the absentee-owner of a three-family house, or a developer of nine or fewer contiguous houses in a plat, or a subdivider of large residential tracts in cities or towns having subdivision control laws, I would wage a spirited fight against the Notte bill for certain competitive reasons that would not arise from the R.I.C.D.H. bill. If I were a Negro, I might well ponder the mystery of how my equal right to acquire housing with legal protection could be limited by Rhode Island law to certain types of housing only, while at the same time the United States Constitution guarantees me equal protection of the laws throughout the land. Finally, as a proponent of civil rights for everyone's benefit alike, I abhor legislation that would give lip-service to "equal housing accommodations and public accommodations opportunities" (whatever that may mean) as the Notte bill does, at the same time creating a most confusing array of unequal protections of law between some home seekers and others, and between some providers of housing and others. Washington lost their law that way in their Supreme Court, in a decision which generally respected the public's right to outlaw such unfair bases of discrimination throughout the private housing supply equally.

Some real estate dealers and home builders have, I think, been unfair at times in their zealous issuance of grossly inaccurate statements and charges about the real meaning of the provisions of the genuine legislative proposals for equal housing opportunity during the past three and a half years. But regardless of this, I feel that in our advocacy of legislation affecting their livelihood we must be



scrupulously fair, even toward them, in judging the worthiness of anyone's proposed bill. The R.I.C.D.H. bill is an example of such a thoroughly fair approach, in contrast to the discriminatory, capriciously constructed Notte bill.

Raiding of Other Organizational Loyalties. There has been an unabashed raiding of the loyalties of individual members of R.I.C.D.H., N.A.A.C.P., and other organizations, pressuring them away from their plans to apply resolutely their own adopted statements of principle known as the "three essential requirements" for judging the adequacy or the inadequacy of each bill on these three criteria. These statements had been adopted by five different organizations as a defense against just such an unprincipled stampede as has been attempted by Citizens United with its urgent direct appeals to support the contrary Notte bill on the sole basis of expediency. The key to this emotional and reckless appeal, as noted above, has been the claim that the Notte bill "alone has any chance of passage this year"; and various members in each of these five organizations have been pressured to abandon the use of the three essential requirements as a yardstick for their rational examination of the competing proposals. The Notte bill fails miserably on all three counts.

Refusal to Unite on Genuine Proposal. Citizens United leaders successfully counselled the organization's refusal to unite with its parent organization, the R.I.C.D.H., in supporting, as citizen advocates should, the only available bill that meets all, or even any, of the three essential requirements. As all these active leaders must have realized, because they were all kept fully informed during the months prior to its introduction, the R.I.C.D.H. bill was a further development of their own organization's 1959 and 1961 bills, and proposes the identical housing coverage as their 1959 bill. This refusal to unite has been accompanied by a further refusal to leave to the political strategists within the General Assembly the responsibility for preparing or promoting politically-based compromises from the high standard set by the R.I.C.D.H. proposal. Instead, the R.I.C.D.H. bill appears to be getting exploited as an "umbrella bill", under the cover of which the Notte bill is supposed to plod its sheltered way toward passage!

Duplicity of Policy. From a variety of remarks made, and questions begged, by some leading members of Citizens United since the 1961 legislative session adjourned, it has become apparent that there had actually been two conflicting but concurrent policies within Citizens United last year. The documented one consistently supported Citizens United's own bill throughout the entire session, while the other policy was a completely undocumented support given behind the scenes to the contrary Notte bill. Noone I have asked has openly admitted to or denied the existence of this duplicity, but the many subtle signs consistently point toward this speculative conclusion. If the charge fits, the responsibility for it rests upon the conscience of those who may have earned it. Members who continued to support the announced policy and who followed explicit instructions on procedure at the State House during the final day were accused covertly and in circuitous language of being disloyal to the other, undisclosed, contrary policy. This was charged despite the fact that the subtle portents of this confusing ambivalence had forced such members to explain carefully to the legislators at each point that they were speaking only as individuals up there.

Just as it should always be possible to ascertain the true aims of an individual advocate on matters of public policy which he expounds, so also should it be possible to trust an organization of citizens to have one single advocacy on any one matter at any one time, rather than two mutually contradictory ones. We cannot be free to criticize duplicity in any of our public officials including legislative representatives and senators, if we adopt equally corrupt methods involving duplicity of policy in a private organization such as Citizens United. This may well be a



naive point of view, but I feel that as private citizens we are in an especially inappropriate position to engage in the more questionable tactics of some opportunistic politicians who occasionally embarrass their more conscientious colleagues.

- - - - -

In recounting all of the above items of protest, I must express my extreme regret that these methods are being adopted by an organization composed of many of my dear friends, who appear themselves to be embarrassed over the comparative inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the measure they feel obliged to support this year. I continue to have a very high regard for the personal integrity of Citizens United members as individuals, even while deploring this desperate resort to such methods in the operational techniques of the organization. These methods are so serious that they have given rise to a considerable doubt about whether the Citizens United organization can continue to have any constructive function to perform in the longer-range movement toward equal opportunity in the private housing market.

I respectfully suggest that the proponents of equal housing opportunity should now face up to the stark reality that Rhode Island citizens are not united over the question of what may constitute a truly fair housing law. I grant that only a majority, at this stampeding moment, have suddenly attempted to show "unity" over the impetuous desire to "get something, anything, on the books this year". This is a terribly wrong, reckless decision in my opinion. I have never favored such an uncalculating attempt to get just any fair housing bill enacted, and have always striven to convince everyone that to be fair, the legislation must be designed to establish equality of opportunity.

Any member of Citizens United should be entitled to read or have a copy of this letter; and this also applies to both of my unanswered letters of February 12, 1962, and February 27, 1962. I realize that the personal opinions and speculations contained in these three letters may have errors of interpretation or of observation in them, for the inevitable reason that each of us thinks through a different mind using a unique background of experience. For this reason I take responsibility for factual references only to the extent that my present knowledge may be correct and adequate, assuring you that I have attempted with diligence to make it so. I have carefully considered the reasoning of many other members before deciding upon my resignation from our group. Only one member has urged me to resign. One other suggested my doing so. Five others declared in various ways their hope that it would not seem necessary for me to do so. None of these seven has had an undue degree of influence, although I much appreciate their contributions to my thinking.

Please understand that no other person nor organization takes any responsibility for or against my individual decision to tender my resignation, nor for the manner in which I have done so. Neither do I take any such responsibility with respect to the individual acts of others who in several instances I know of are refusing to let their names be used in support of the contrary, obstructive and unworthy Nette bill.

Sincerely yours,

S/ John R. Kellam

John R. Kellam