REFFKIN, Phyllis

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OBITUARIES

Phyllis Reffkin, 76, dies; early fair-housing advocate

WARWICK — Phyllis Reffkin, 76, of Elmwood Avenue, an advocate for fair housing whose efforts helped pass the Rhode Island Equal Housing Opportunity Law of 1968, died Wednesday at Kent County Memorial Hospital.

Mrs. Reffkin, a retired medical secretary, helped form the Rhode Island Committee on Discrimination in Housing in 1955, and later served on the Urban League of Rhode Island's Health, Welfare and Housing Committee, which sought fairness in public and private housing.

She was the wife of the late Sanford Reffkin. Born in Providence, a daughter of the late Benjamin and Augusta Kaufman, she was a lifelong resident of Warwick.

Mrs. Reffkin was one of the people whose efforts sparked the campaign to pass the 1968 fair housing law, which said that a person could not be denied housing on the basis of race, religion, color, or country of ancestral origin.

The law, which served as models for such legislation elsewhere, gave enforcement power to the Rhode Island Commission Against Discrimination, which was later renamed the Commission for Human Rights.

"She was philosophically a person of good will and she didn't like to see people victimized," said John R. Kellam, a housing advocate who also worked on the campaign. "Being Jewish, she came out of an ethnic group that has suffered a great deal of unfairness in this world."

She was a volunteer for various organizations, and had studied piano.

She leaves two sons, David and Gene Reffkin, both in California, and two grandchildren.

Burial was held in Lincoln Park Cemetery.