

This Activist Has Long Been Polarizing. Mamdani Is Standing by Her.

Cea Weaver, a tenant advocate named to a high-profile role in Mayor Zohran Mamdani's administration, is facing criticism for past comments calling homeownership "a weapon of white supremacy."



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For the second time in three weeks, Mayor Zohran Mamdani is facing intense scrutiny for the years-old social media behavior of a high-level appointee — an episode that has once again forced him to answer for his vetting processes.

Mr. Mamdani named Cea Weaver, a housing activist, to run the Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants on Jan. 1, during his very first news conference on his very first day in office.

In past social media posts that have since been deleted, most of which predate 2020, she called homeownership a "weapon of white supremacy" and said that it was important to "impoverish" the white middle class. That rhetoric had played a role in raising her profile within New York housing circles, even as it seemed to hobble her 2021 bid to join the city's powerful Planning Commission. Her calls to "elect more Communists" and "seize private property" had been well documented in *The New York Post*.

But days after her appointment, right-wing activists circulated those posts, and on Tuesday, *The Washington Post* editorial board and the right-wing conspiracy theorist Laura Loomer were among those who weighed in on Ms. Weaver's 

remarks. Harmeet Dhillon, who runs the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, warned: "We will NOT tolerate discrimination based on skin color:"

Former Mayor Eric Adams, a small property owner, also offered criticism. Ms. Weaver's contention that homeownership was merely a weapon of white supremacy, he said on social media, "only comes from extreme privilege and total detachment from reality."

"You have to be completely out of your mind," he said in the post, adding an expletive, "to call that 'white supremacy.'"

Ms. Weaver declined an interview request but issued a statement via Mr. Mamdani's press office.

"Regretful comments from years ago do not change what has always been clear — my commitment to making housing affordable and equitable for New York's renters," Ms. Weaver said.

The controversy came less than a month after Mr. Mamdani accepted the resignation of a former aide to Bill de Blasio whom he had named his director of appointments, after antisemitic social media posts from her youth were resurfaced.

But this time, Mr. Mamdani was not caught off-guard.

"She was vetted," a spokeswoman for Mr. Mamdani, Dora Pekec, said on Tuesday. "We were aware of all of these tweets."

Asked about Ms. Weaver's posts at an unrelated news conference on Tuesday, Mr. Mamdani responded briefly, saying he had appointed her because of the work she had done to protect tenants. Then he hopped into a waiting car.

Ms. Weaver, 37, has long been a divisive New York figure whose messaging has alienated some legislators, even as her political prowess has helped reshape New York rent stabilization law.

She has said she began organizing tenants in the city in 2010, when the nation was still recovering from a financial crisis rooted in predatory real estate practices.

Living as a white transplant from Rochester, N.Y., in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights, which has a large Caribbean and Orthodox Jewish population, gave her a firsthand view of how a housing boom coincided with property speculation and an exodus of Black and low-income residents.

As a pro-tenant activist, her characterization of property ownership earned her progressive bona fides but made her a boogeyman in the eyes of the real estate industry.

The posts that spread this week tap into a longstanding debate over homeownership, which has long been seen as both a driver and effect of racial inequality, but also as a way to build generational wealth. The homeownership rate of Black Americans lags far behind that of white Americans.

“Look I’m not going to defend every one of these old tweets, and I doubt Cea would either, but property, race and political power have been intertwined since this country’s founding,” said Ben Thypin, a real estate developer who has fought with and against Ms. Weaver and considers her a friend.

“The notion that pointing out that history — however callously — disqualifies New York’s most consequential tenant advocate of the last decade demonstrates an ignorance of both New York politics and real estate,” he added.

In 2019, despite the opposition of influential real estate donors, Ms. Weaver helped lead a push in New York to pass some of the most tenant-friendly laws in the nation, which limited the ways landlords could raise rents in rent-stabilized apartments.

It was successful, Ms. Weaver said in an interview last year in the left-leaning *Dissent Magazine*, because she and her allies were able to unite organizations like the Working Families Party and the Democratic Socialists of America with younger activists who had been inspired by Senator Bernie Sanders and in opposition to Donald J. Trump.

Years later, in 2024, Ms. Weaver helped persuade lawmakers to pass another fiercely debated measure known as good cause eviction, which limited the ways landlords could evict tenants in market-rate apartments.

And last year, Ms. Weaver advised Mr. Mamdani on housing policy as he ran for mayor.

She has consistently called for greater public involvement in housing. But she has also acknowledged the role private ownership plays.

“In an ideal world, the government is regulating market costs for renters through things like rent stabilization and rent control, but also by intervening in the development market directly,” she said in the magazine interview.



In 2020, when she worked at the tenants’ rights group Housing Justice for All, Ms. Weaver hung a banner from her car calling for a rent strike. Stephen Speranza for The New York Times

Her effectiveness as an activist on the outside, though, has raised concerns among members of the political and real estate classes about how well she would operate inside government, where public scrutiny and the potential for political fallout may hamper her ability to be as outspoken.

She has been openly, scathingly critical of Gov. Kathy Hochul, whose participation will be crucial to passing much of Mr. Mamdani's agenda. (Ms. Hochul's spokesman declined to comment.)

And her attacks on the real estate sector come as Mr. Mamdani prepares to rely on that industry to build 200,000 affordable apartments.

"To get the supertanker that is New York City government to turn, you need everyone rowing in the same direction," said Jordan Barowitz, a public relations consultant who works with real estate interests.

"She is not a lunatic," said Kathryn Wylde, the outgoing head of the pro-business Partnership for New York City. "She is actually quite smart."

But Ms. Wylde, who worked to help develop affordable housing decades ago, when the city owned a substantial amount of real estate in poor neighborhoods, warned that Ms. Weaver might not appreciate the downsides to more public control of housing.

"These young people have no experience of what it was like in the '80s," Ms. Wylde said. The city, she said, "was the world's worst landlord."

Vicki Been, a former deputy mayor for housing who was involved in negotiations over the 2019 tenant laws, recalled Ms. Weaver's ability to bring together opposing political factions and make smart compromises to get the laws passed.

She credited Ms. Weaver's success in part to understanding the power of messaging: highlighting abuses against tenants.

"I think people underestimate her if they think she's just an ideologue," Ms. Been said. "She's very savvy, strategic. Ideologically driven, of course, but also practical."

The debate over the role of race in homeownership is longstanding in activist circles. For many decades, Black people were shut out of entire neighborhoods, both by private actors like banks and homeowners associations and through explicit practices like redlining. Today, Black home buyers face routine discrimination.

But homeownership has also proven a significant boon for some Black New Yorkers, for whom owning property is a way to build wealth they can leave to their children or other family members. This is especially true in eastern parts of Brooklyn and Queens.

“Homeownership is how immigrants, Black, Brown, and working-class New Yorkers built stability and generational wealth despite every obstacle,” said Mr. Adams, who often cast himself as the defender of Black landlords in New York City during his term.

Ms. Weaver’s social media activity caused her problems in 2021, when the city’s public advocate, Jumaane Williams, nominated her for the planning commission and then withdrew her application.

“It was a lot of the same stuff being talked about now,” said Kalman Yeger, a state assemblyman and a conservative Democrat who served on the City Council at the time. “Weird home-ownership-is-white-supremacy stuff, seizing private property.”

Ms. Weaver “just seemed to be a bit too far out there,” he said.

But Mr. Williams described Ms. Weaver as “a fierce fighter for tenants” in a statement on Tuesday.

“There’s no question that there have historically been racial inequities in homeownership which we’ve worked to fight against,” he said. “It’s unfortunate that people are denying that to try to smear her important work.”

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