

April is Fair Housing Month

The Fair Housing Act was signed on April 11, 1968, just one week after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This landmark bill, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, resulted from the hard work and leadership of Dr. King and others in the civil rights movement and was an important step toward confronting discrimination against minorities in housing. Throughout the early 1960's civil rights activists around the country petitioned Congress for a comprehensive fair housing law. However, it wasn't until 1966, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led marches throughout the City of Chicago, that fair and open housing became a national topic.

The enactment of the Federal Fair Housing Act came only after a long and difficult journey. From 1966-1967, Congress regularly considered the fair housing bill, but failed to garner a strong enough majority for its passage. However, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, President Lyndon Johnson responded, in part, to this national tragedy by urging the bill's speedy Congressional approval. Since the 1966 open housing marches in Chicago, Dr. King's name had been closely associated with the fair housing legislation.

While Dr. King was a leader in the struggle for open housing, his acts alone would not have changed America. It was thousands of people across the US who participated in marches, sit-ins and other numerous protests that swayed opinions and ultimately changed this country.

Housing Rights, Inc. is one of many agencies in the Bay Area (and one of the oldest) processing thousands of complaints each year and striving to educate the public about their housing rights and responsibilities.



Fair Housing Month is a time to celebrate the progress we've made in opening the doors of housing opportunity to every citizen of this nation, regardless of race, gender, color, nationality, religion, family status, or disability. It is also a time to acknowledge the fair housing challenges that still remain, and collectively commit to finding viable solutions to those challenges. **JOIN US. We invite you to celebrate Fair Housing Month. Contact HRI staff for speakers, handouts and ideas. Or check out our website: www.housingrights.com**

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

At least 3.5 million incidents of housing discrimination are investigated a year. We know that only a very small percentage of people who experience housing discrimination report it. This leaves us with a staggering national epidemic. "Housing discrimination is a national problem that still affects millions of people. Housing choice plays a crucial role in determining one's ability to access critical societal and economic functions; quality schools, jobs, health care services, recreational facilities, public services, and transportations."

The Department of Urban Development has commissioned studies in recent years

which document a significant amount of discrimination against African American, Latinos, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islanders and People with Disabilities. National studies show that while progress has been made, racial discrimination in housing still exists at unacceptable levels in our country. One out of every four or five Hispanics, African Americans, Asians, or Native Americans still faces discrimination in renting, buying, or financing housing. No one knows how these numbers translate at the local level.

One out of every five Americans has some type of disability and in a study commissioned by HUD and reported on in 2005 it appears that People with Disabilities are more likely to experience discrimination in housing (more than 50%) than are people who experience discrimination based upon race.

Low-income people, seniors and the disabled, seeking to purchase, refinance, or secure a reverse mortgage, are often targets for predatory lenders or loan fraud. Predatory lenders take advantage of borrowers with a variety of abusive practices such as charging excessive interest rates or loan fees.

Illegal housing discrimination can take many forms, some quite subtle: realtors showing apartments or homes only in certain neighborhoods, advertising housing only to preferred groups of people, denials of property insurance, discriminatory property appraisals, or refusals to make reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

Whether people are trying to rent, buy, sell, or finance a home or apartment, as a tenant, homeowner, or landlord, they need to know the rights and protections provided by the Federal Fair Housing Act, and state and local fair housing laws. It's equally important for people to know where to file a complaint if they suspect they are a victim of discrimination or predatory lending.

Federal and State of California law makes it unlawful to discriminate in housing based on race, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, source of income, age, marital status, disability or family status (families with children under the age of 18, or who are expecting a child).

BARRIERS TO SERVICE

Of interest is a study funded in 2002 by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop a survey of a random sample of the American Public. Some of the more significant findings include:

38% of those surveyed disapproved of discriminatory acts and knew that they were illegal.

28% disapproved of illegal acts but didn't know that they were illegal.

21% approved of illegal acts and did not know that they were illegal and,

13% approved of illegal acts and knew that they were illegal.



They also found that "persons who are highly knowledgeable about fair housing laws are in a better position than others to be able to identify or detect situations involving discrimination."

One of the biggest barriers to housing choice is lack of knowledge. Celebrating 'April Is Fair Housing Month' is one of the many ways that we use to reach out to the public increasing awareness and 'fairness'.

SOLUTIONS

Discrimination in housing was the law of the land until fairly recently (1968). With a legacy of over 200 years of institutionalized discrimination, we can expect it to take us a few more years to undo the damage done. Join us in making sure that landlords and tenants, real estate agents and homebuyers and the general public understand their housing rights and responsibilities so that EVERYONE will have a real opportunity to live in decent, affordable housing wherever it may be located.