

April is Fair Housing Month

WASHINGTON - This month the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is marking the 49th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, landmark housing legislation that became law on April 11, 1968.

HUD kicked off Fair Housing Month 2017 at its national headquarters in Washington by announcing this year's theme: "Fair Housing Equals Opportunity." During the coming year HUD will highlight the idea that equality in housing is a foundation upon which personal aspirations can be achieved and affirm the Fair Housing Act's ongoing role in confronting housing discrimination.

The opening celebration included remarks by HUD Secretary Ben Carson and Acting Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity,

Bryan Green.

"Equal access to housing is a fundamental promise of America," said Greene. "When access to housing is unfairly limited, it, in turn, limits access to good paying jobs, quality schools, and economic opportunity."

Through an array of enforcement activities, fair housing policy initiatives, and education and outreach efforts, HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity continues to take action against individuals and housing providers that discriminate. Last year, HUD and its Fair Housing Assistance Program partner agencies received more than 8,000 complaints

alleging discrimination based on one or more of the Fair Housing Act's seven protected classes.



Fair Housing's Protected Classes

The Fair Housing Act protects seven classes of individuals from discrimination in housing. Those seven classes are: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability.

HUD used a network of state and local agencies to enforce the Fair Housing Act and investigate complaints filed against housing providers.

State human rights laws and local city

or county ordinances may add additional classes of individuals protected from discrimination.

For instance, many states have included sexual orientation and/or gender identity to the list of protected classes.

All housing providers should have written anti-discrimination policies.

MHI recommends all community operators and retailers take proactive steps to guard against Fair Housing Act discrimination claims. A few “Best Practices” are listed below:

- Adopt, post and uniformly enforce written Fair Housing policies that comply with all appropriate federal, state and local laws (sample template policies are available from MHI).**
- Include proactive Fair Housing language in your leases.**
- Educate and train all employees about the need to obey Fair Housing laws. Sanction employees who do not comply with your policies. Self-testing is one way to see if your employees are following your policies.**
- Never ignore a complaint from a resident. Adopt a written procedures to investigate complaints and follow that process. Make the process interactive with residents.**
- Adopt a written incident report for property managers. One way to defeat a frivolous complaint is: DOCUMENT. DOCUMENT. DOCUMENT.**
- Use the Equal Housing Opportunity logo (shown below) on your advertisements, including Craig’s List and other social media.**
- Maintain a current list of available units, so that all prospective tenants are given the same information in real time.**
- Treat everyone entering your property like they are a tester from HUD.**



For more information, questions, or to get copies of past Updates, contact MHI’s General Counsel, Rick Robinson.

