

HUD Study Shows People With Disabilities Face Discrimination In Up To Half of Rental Inquiries

New study the most comprehensive disability housing discrimination study conducted

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WASHINGTON - Today, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development released a groundbreaking study, *Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities - Barriers at Every Step*, that showed people with disabilities are often discriminated against when trying to rent apartments. The agency plans to use the comprehensive study to educate consumers and landlords on their rights as well as provide fair housing advocates with new guidelines and strategies that will allow them to investigate and detect discrimination against people with disabilities. In addition, the study will assist the agency in continuing to monitor the progress of discrimination against persons with disabilities in the Chicago area and nationwide.

"The Americans with Disabilities Act, the landmark legislation signed fifteen years ago tomorrow, has made great strides in reducing barriers to people with disabilities in employment, government, and public places." HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson said. "At HUD, that means breaking down the barriers to affordable rental housing and homeownership that disabled individuals sometimes face. Through a combination of outreach, technical assistance, and enforcement of the Fair Housing Act, we've already accomplished a great deal but, we know more has to be done."

In the Chicago-based study, hearing-impaired people were discriminated against approximately 50 percent of the time when using a telephone-operator relay to search for rentals. Mobility impaired people using wheelchairs faced discrimination about a third of the time when they visited rental properties.

"We would all like to think we have made more progress in educating landlords about the Fair Housing Act but, this study paints a different picture of the problems faced daily by people with disabilities," said Jackson. "It is imperative that landlords provide people with disabilities the same attention and respect afforded all potential renters. We intend to educate both consumers and landlords about the rights of disabled individuals."

The study, conducted for HUD by The Urban Institute, is the most comprehensive effort to date to measure the extent of housing discrimination in the United States against people with disabilities. It specifically provides statistically valid measures of the level of discrimination faced by two groups in the Chicago metropolitan area: deaf persons using a TTY (text-telephone) relay system to inquire about apartments advertised for rent and persons in wheelchairs visiting rental providers in person in response to an advertised rental unit.

Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities - Barriers at Every Step uses "paired testing," where researchers compare the treatment of the person with a disability against a similarly qualified non-disabled person inquiring about the same advertised unit. Analysts look at objective measures, such as whether or not they were told the advertised unit was available, how many units they were told about, and if they were offered an application to complete.

Highlights of the study include:

- Deaf people using the TTY system to inquire about advertised rental units were refused service in one out of four calls. When leasing agents accepted TTY calls, users received significantly less information, than comparable hearing customers, about the application process.
- People with disabilities are frequently denied their requests for reasonable modification and reasonable accommodation necessary to make the available housing fully accessible.
- Both wheelchair users and deaf people using the TTY system received significantly less encouragement to pursue a rental agreement and were less likely to be offered a rental application than non-disabled customers.
- Nearly 20 percent of housing providers with on-site parking refused to make the reasonable accommodation of providing a designated accessible parking space for a wheelchair user.
- Discrimination is not the only obstacle that people with mobility impairments face in searching for rental housing. At least a third of the advertised rental properties in the Chicago area are not accessible to wheelchair users.

Based upon the methodology and results, HUD is releasing with this report, *Guidance for Practitioners* for fair housing advocates and include the study as part of the Fair Housing Academy's core curriculum. The findings of the study were also a major consideration when HUD recently decided to continue running its highly successful fair housing public service announcements.

HUD has also placed a greater emphasis on combating disability discrimination in recent years. The Department has invested over \$5 million in the Fair Housing Accessibility FIRST initiative, which has trained over 3500 builders, developers, and others on the how to design and construct apartments and condominiums with legally required accessibility features. Earlier this month, the Department announced a landmark settlement of a disability discrimination complaint, where a California developer will pay \$1.2 million to help retrofit units and common areas at San Diego condominium complex that allegedly failed to comply with the accessibility provisions of the Fair Housing Act. Under its authority to enforce Section 504, the Department has also conducted over a hundred compliance reviews of recipients of HUD funds in the past eighteen months, resulting in the creation of thousands of accessible dwelling units.

Copies of the study can be downloaded from www.huduser.org as well as ordered on line or by calling (800) HUD-USER.

HUD is the nation's housing agency committed to increasing homeownership, particularly among minorities, creating affordable housing opportunities for low-income Americans, supporting the homeless, elderly, people with disabilities and people living with AIDS. The Department also promotes economic and community development as well as enforces the nation's fair housing laws.

Anyone who believes they have experienced housing discrimination should contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777 or visit HUD's fair housing website at www.hud.gov.