

In This Issue...

Working for Justice in Housing through Education and Advocacy

It has been 15 years since our founding and in May 2007 we changed our name! Now doing business as the “Fair Housing Rights Center in Southeastern Pennsylvania” our new moniker better reflects who we are today and what we do. Our mission remains the same – to make sure that EVERYONE regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, familial status, or age has an equal shot at housing. We are still in business because even after 40 years of civil rights protections, discrimination occurs at almost the same rate as it did in 1968. What has changed is the manner of discrimination – it’s more subtle, but the impact is the same.

The new name reflects our role as **ADVOCATES**. We know that the typical victim of housing discrimination is usually someone who is vulnerable, someone who is both low income and....a minority...or an immigrant...or a single mother...or a person with a disability. They are often unaware of their rights.

Over the last 15 years, we have developed effective advocacy strategies. We assist persons with disabilities in making requests for reasonable accommodations or modifications so they can keep their homes. By intervening, we help preserve many more households than waiting for a case to wind itself through the legal process – often a win-win solution for everyone! For success stories see the article on page 2.

As a qualified fair housing organization, we investigate claims of discrimination and monitor practices in the housing industry through a testing program.

Because discrimination occurs as often as once in every four housing transactions, we knew that simply *responding* to incidents of discrimination is not enough! See page 6 for data on 2006 testing outcomes.

We have developed an extensive fair housing education and outreach program so that everybody is aware of the law. In the last two years, we’ve participated in over 160 fair housing trainings and presentations that reached over 3,800 people – from compliance seminars for the Apartment Association of Greater Philadelphia to statewide conferences for the Department of Aging, to tailored presentations at local agencies, to classroom programs for school age children. We have provided fair

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The mission of the Fair Housing Rights Center in Southeastern Pennsylvania is to ensure equal access to housing opportunities for all persons.

To achieve its mission, the Fair Housing Rights Center educates the public on fair housing laws, provides assistance to individuals who have experienced housing discrimination, monitors the community for compliance with applicable housing laws, and offers information and counseling on housing related issues.

Fair Housing Tools Part I

Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications

Some of the complaints we handle never see the inside of a courtroom and never result in the filing of a formal fair housing complaint. Why? Because we often find it quicker and more effective to intervene on behalf of a complainant by providing education to housing providers and advocating for the fair housing rights of tenants. These efforts are best exemplified through the Center's work in advocating for people with disabilities using two powerful tools provided for in the Fair Housing Act – reasonable accommodations and modifications.



Reasonable accommodations are changes in rules, practices, policies, or a change in the way services are provided. Reasonable modifications are physical changes to a dwelling or common use area that are necessary to allow the tenant to fully use their home. The strength of these tools is that they can be requested at any time during tenancy – from the time of application to preventing eviction – as long as the need for the requested change is linked to the person's disability.

Here are some examples of how we have used reasonable accommodations to effectively ensure fair housing rights:

"Mary" has been living in a nursing home for the past few years. Recently Mary decided that she was ready to move into her own apartment and applied to a subsidized housing complex in Philadelphia. She passed the screening process with flying colors. But much to her surprise, her application was rejected. The management had determined that Mary was incapable of caring for herself because she used a wheelchair and needed attendant care. Mary was devastated but fortunately the service coordinator who was

helping her move to the community contacted us. We immediately provided the leasing agent information about Fair Housing laws and **informed them that their decision to reject Mary's application was illegal housing discrimination!** After only one phone call, the apartment manager agreed to accept Mary's application.

However, the story is not over. Mary was offered an efficiency unit that was too small to store her medical equipment. She was told that the policy was "one person households were only entitled to efficiencies." Mary explained her situation but her request was rejected. Again, we intervened, asking for a reasonable accommodation to waive the policy and allow her a one bedroom unit so that she would have sufficient space to store her medical equipment. Today Mary is happy to be out of the nursing home and comfortably living in her own one bedroom apartment.

Fair Housing Tools Part I

continued

In June of 2006, "Margaret," a woman with a progressive neurological disability, moved into a one bedroom apartment on the ground floor. Recently, her mobility worsened and she began using a wheelchair. Because the main entrance to the apartment building was inaccessible, Margaret had to exit through a side porch door and wheel herself across her yard to get to the parking lot. The yard was rocky and uneven, which made it difficult for her to maneuver her manual wheelchair. The complex also lacked enough handicap accessible parking spaces and did not have curb cuts from the sidewalk into the parking lot. Margaret had been forced to wheel herself off the steep sidewalk curb backwards, making each trip a potential accident.

Although Margaret requested a reasonable accommodation, her request was rejected by management. Because she wanted the situation resolved without filing a complaint, we immediately contacted the resident manager and the management company and set to work to advocate for Margaret's fair housing rights.

Today Margaret is able to freely enter and exit her unit and can easily access the parking lot and her van. She enjoys a wide parking space that allows her to get from her wheelchair into her van and she has installed a ramp from her porch door to the sidewalk. In addition, a curb cut was installed so that Margaret no longer has to wheel herself backwards off the steep curb.



The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of:

- Race
- Color
- National Origin
- Religion
- Gender
- Familial Status
- Disability

Working for Justice

continued

housing materials to elected officials, trained planning boards, and staff at local legislator's offices. All of our materials are available in English and Spanish, both in print and on our website.

We know it is tough out there. We help by being an Information & Referral Center for persons who need information on predatory lending, emergency shelter, rental assistance, affordable housing, basic landlord tenant information, 1st time homebuyers' programs, tenants' rights, mortgage assistance, or credit counseling. To help those in desperate need of affordable rental housing we publish a weekly [Home Seekers List](#) – our most popular publication.

A new name is necessary to reflect the work we have been doing in the region. Our services are not limited to Montgomery County – we respond to complaints, conduct testing, and run educational programs throughout the greater Philadelphia region. So a new name is necessary to reflect the work we were already doing. To meet the challenge, we renovated and doubled the size of our office, expanded our funding streams, and produced a new fair housing video just for kids! We have a lot more exciting projects and programs in the works – stay tuned!



Fair Housing in the News

Habitat for Humanity, New Orleans LA.

In May 2007 Fair Housing Rights Center staff Beth Albert and Elizabeth Vázquez joined other members of the National Fair Housing Alliance in New Orleans to work on rebuilding some of the destroyed houses in the Upper Ninth Ward, St. Bernard's Parish. It was an effort worth making – seeing the devastation in New Orleans almost two years post-Katrina was unbelievable. 40% of New Orleanians have been displaced with no return in sight. We spent two days working on building homes, hammering a ton of nails, framing up a house, and sweating in the humidity. We stayed at Camp

Hope, a converted elementary school that is used as basic housing for volunteers. The situation in New Orleans and the slow rebuilding efforts seem overwhelming but we applaud Habitat and its volunteers for rebuilding and helping one family at a time.

Funding Updates

We are pleased to announce that the Fair Housing Rights Center was awarded a \$70,000 Community Development Block Grant from Montgomery County. This is our 14th year of CDBG funding from Montgomery County. Additionally, we received \$17,000 in CDBG from Lower Merion and \$36,000 from the Borough of Norristown. The Center is

also in its 2nd year of a 3 year fair housing enforcement grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A big thank you to our funders for their continued support in our fight against housing discrimination!



Fair Housing Rights Center Staff and NFHA Members in New Orleans

Local Groups Say Federal Decision to Strike Down Discriminatory Anti-Immigrant Law in Hazelton Applies to Bridgeport Ordinances

On July 26, 2007, local advocacy groups hailed the federal court decision that held that Hazelton's anti immigrant ordinance is unconstitutional and that similar ordinances adopted by the Borough of Bridgeport are also unenforceable.

Last fall the Borough of Bridgeport adopted ordinances which required all tenants to register for rental permits. In addition it prohibited renting to and employing undocumented immigrants. Several local groups and community members had threatened to file a lawsuit against the Borough of Bridgeport for its copycat anti-immigrant ordinances. Bridgeport then agreed to postpone enforcing the ordinances pending the court's decision in Hazelton.

According to Elizabeth Albert, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Rights Center in Southeastern Pennsylvania, "The federal court's decision to strike down the Hazelton ordinance reinforces our stance that Bridgeport should publicly rescind the three anti-immigrant ordinances it adopted last fall. The ruling should come as a relief to people living and working in Bridgeport who were fearful that they would lose their homes or face fines if the Bridgeport ordinance was enacted."

Bridgeport, a borough in Montgomery County, is one of dozens of Pennsylvania communities who followed Hazelton's lead last year by enacting laws which mimic Hazelton's ordinances. These ordinances sought to punish landlords and employers for doing business with undocumented immigrants. Residents in Bridgeport, especially those who speak Spanish, were concerned that the local laws would lead to discrimination, increased hostility from community members, as well as a loss of housing and employment based upon negative public opinion.

"We welcome this decision and hope that Bridgeport will get the message that their local statute is unconstitutional. The decision makes clear that immigration matters are left to federal jurisdiction not to local governments." says Michael Churchill, Chief Counsel at the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia.



Under the Fair Housing Act, the following activities are illegal:

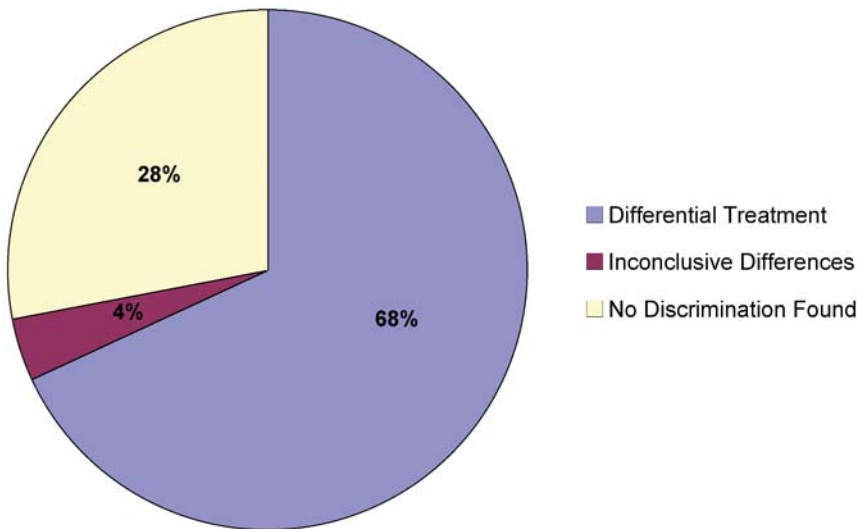
- **Refuse to rent or sell housing**
- **Refuse to negotiate for housing**
- **Make housing unavailable**
- **Set different terms, conditions, or privileges for sale or rental**
- **Provide different housing services or facilities**
- **Falsely deny that housing is available for inspection, sale or rental**
- **For profit, persuade owners to sell or rent (blockbusting)**
- **Deny any access to or membership in a facility or service (such as a multiple listing service) related to the sale of housing**
- **Refuse to make reasonable accommodations in rules or services if necessary for a disabled person to use the housing**
- **Refuse to allow a disabled person to make reasonable accommodations to his/her dwelling**
- **Threaten or interfere with anyone making a fair housing complaint**

Fair Housing Tools Part II

2006 Testing Results Reveal High Levels of Discrimination

After analyzing its 2006 testing data, the Fair Housing Rights Center identified differential treatment in 35.8% of the tests it completed. Additionally, 37.8% of tests showed inconsistencies in rental practices. These differences, while not clearly illegal, identified inconsistent rental practices which present barriers to homeseekers. Overall, 26.4% of the Center's tests yielded no evidence of discrimination or differences in rental practices.

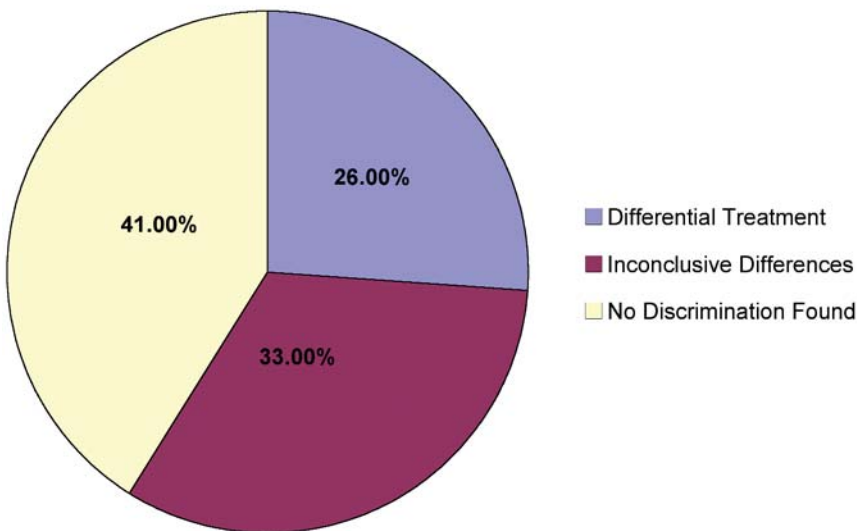
2006 Complaint Based Tests



Testing is an investigative tool used by the Center to document how people are treated during their housing search. The Center utilizes trained testers who, with assigned profiles, act as apartment seekers while visiting particular test sites and then report on their experiences. Through this controlled and objective process, the Center is able to compare testers' experiences.

The Center conducts two types of tests – complaint based and audit tests. Complaint tests result from calls or complaints received from individuals who feel they have been discriminated against. Looking at the results of testing based upon an individual complaint, the Center found evidence of discrimination in 68% of tests conducted! This high percentage indicates that a majority of complaints were substantiated with evidence of discrimination through testing. These results strongly suggest that those who are discriminated against in housing are usually correct in their claims and should encourage those who believe they have faced discrimination to pursue filing a complaint.

2006 Audit Based Tests



Audit tests monitor housing providers for compliance with the Fair Housing Act. These tests often take place in areas that have had demographic shifts or incidents of ethnic or racial tension. Amongst the audit based testing conducted in 2006, the

Center found evidence of discrimination in 26% of tests. These results are strikingly similar to findings in HUD's 2000 Housing Discrimination Study, where discrimination in metropolitan rental markets was seen against African Americans 21.6 percent of the time and against Hispanics 25.7%.

Fair Housing Tools Part II

continued

After reviewing the testing results, the Center is confident of the program's value in identifying discriminatory practices. While the rates of discrimination found in the Center's testing results are startling, it is important to remember that proving housing discrimination without testing is often difficult. The National Fair Housing Alliance estimates that 3.7 million instances of housing discrimination occur annually. Therefore, many people who are victims of housing discrimination do not recognize it nor report it. Our results illustrate the extensive nature of housing discrimination in our region and are a mandate to continue our fight to eradicate housing discrimination.

Fair Housing In the News

continued

School Program

For the past 10 years the Fair Housing Rights Center has been educating school children about fair housing and conducting a poster contest, which is co-sponsored by the Montgomery County Association of Realtors. This year we conducted the program for over 450 children in Pottstown, Souderton, Elkins Park and Norristown and awarded 11 prizes to the winning entries, including a \$100 Savings Bond to the top winner.

2007 winner Jackson Fuhrman, a 5th grader at Salford Hills Elementary for his work entitled "Every Face Deserves a Place" with his family at the awards ceremony.

Congratulation to all the children and teachers who participated in the program.

The top winners were:

- Yahnae Brown, 6th grade Stewart Middle School – Mrs. Wright
- Yinka Coker-Toyosi, 5th grade Elkins Park School – Mrs. Conway
- Kyra Paul Fowler, 5th grade Salford Hills Elementary School – Miss Hunsicker
- Jackson Fuhrman, 5th grade Salford Hills Elementary School
- Tilequa Jones, 6th grade Eisenhower Middle School – Mrs. Matthews/Mrs. Foncla
- Hong Bee Kim, 6th grade Elkins Park School – Mrs. Brickman
- Victoria Johnston, 5th grade Elkins Park School – Mrs. Conway
- Tiffany Ramos, 5th grade Eisenhower Middle School – Mrs. Matthews
- Andrew Shan, 5th grade Salford Hills Elementary School – Mr. Purnell
- Nicholas Way, 5th grade Salford Hills Elementary School – Mrs. Smith



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In This Issue...

**Working for Justice in Housing
through Education and Advocacy**

Upcoming Event

FREE Fair Housing Training

When: Thursday October 4th, 2007
1:00 -3:30 p.m.

Where: Liberty Resources, 714 Market
Street, Philadelphia PA 19106

Lunch from 12:00 – 1:00

Registration is Required.

Register by e-mail to
balbert@fairhousingrights.org, include your
contact information in the e-mail.

Learn About:

- Fair Housing Laws
- Recent Cases
- Guidance from HUD

Best Practices in:

- Serving Persons with Disabilities
- Handling Reasonable Accommodation Requests



REGISTER