



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, DC 20410-2000

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
FAIR HOUSING AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

May 28, 2008

Brent Jones
Letters to the Editor
USA Today
7950 Jones Branch Dr.
McLean, VA 22108-0001

Dear Mr. Jones:

Your May 27 article, "Housing complaints increase, but fewer charges are filed," misrepresents the efforts of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and its state and local partners to reduce housing discrimination.

For the record, the Department takes seriously its responsibility to enforce the nation's fair housing laws and would never engage in "throwing out" legitimate complaints. To suggest that the Department does so falsely maligns both the integrity and professionalism of the civil servants entrusted with investigating those allegations.

Further, your article distorts the trends we are seeing in fair housing enforcement. Your headline and the article invite the reader to compare the number of charges filed by HUD in 2006 and 2007 with the 10,000 complaints filed each of those years. Your failure to mention early in the article that 108 state and local agencies investigated 7,500 of those 10,000 complaints misleads readers into thinking that HUD had, in fact, four times as many complaints in its inventory and charged a smaller percentage than it actually had. Then, it says nothing about the hundreds of "findings of cause" by state and local agencies in the other 7,500 cases.

If your article had included information on the outcomes of these State and local agencies, that data would show that, nationwide, fair housing enforcement agencies are actually finding discrimination in a greater number of cases today than they did in 1999. In 1999, the Department and these agencies found cause to believe that discrimination had occurred in 288 complaints. The Department and these agencies found discrimination in 609 cases in 2007. Contrary to the central thrust of your article, this is an increase in findings of discrimination.

In addition, your article states, "Federal housing officials say cases may take years to resolve in court, so they prefer to negotiate settlements for victims. This is incorrect. The Department reaches a settlement or conciliation in about 37% of the complaints that come to the Department, but this is not because the Department prefers to settle cases of discrimination, but rather the federal Fair Housing Act requires HUD to make a good faith effort to conciliate every case of discrimination filed with the Department. These settlements allow victims of discrimination to obtain relief comparable to that which they would have obtained in court, but more quickly. The parties enter into these agreements voluntarily and only when they are satisfied with the terms of the

agreement. In addition, the Department ensures that conciliation agreements signed by the Department include relief to vindicate the public interest.

Finally, it is distressing to know that USA Today will publish a story with this degree of bias. Faulty reporting not only misinforms your readers, it needlessly tarnishes the image of one of America's most widely-read publications.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Kendrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K".

Kim Kendrick