

Happy Fair Housing Month!

This year's commemoration occurs at a time when a global pandemic is threatening the health of millions and dramatically changing the fundamental ways in which we socialize, travel, shop, even attend school. And there's no quick end to it in sight, so please continue doing all you can to keep yourselves and your families safe.

How the pandemic will affect housing choices in the weeks and months to come is not yet known, but there is no doubt that the potential exists for the fair housing and civil rights of certain individuals, particularly on the basis of race, national origin and disability, to be violated. In fact, in just the last couple of weeks we've heard stories about individuals allegedly being denied housing because of Coronavirus fears.

As HUD's Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, I invite all of you to join me in using the occasion of Fair Housing Month to renew our commitment to the principles of justice and equality, beginning with our response to discriminatory policies and practices associated with COVID-19.

We've already taken several steps in that direction. We recently issued guidance to our Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) and Fair Housing Assistance Program (FHAP) partner agencies pertaining to their use of HUD funding to carry out Coronavirus-related enforcement activities, and we have additional guidance in the works.

At the same time, we awarded more than \$40 million in grants to FHIP and FHAP organizations, some of which will be used to support their efforts to combat housing discrimination that may occur as a result of the global pandemic.

But any form of discrimination makes it difficult to create the nation our forefathers envisioned, which is why HUD and our fair housing partners are working hard to combat every form of unlawful housing discrimination.

HUD is particularly focused on continuing its commitment to protecting the right of individuals to enjoy their homes without having to endure degrading sexual harassment or unwanted sexual advances.

That's why the theme for Fair Housing Month 2020, "[Call HUD: Because Sexual Harassment in Housing is Illegal](#)," is especially appropriate. The theme not only reflects HUD's continuing efforts to combat this form of discrimination, it is a call to action, an appeal to those who experience discrimination, particularly survivors of sexual harassment, to contact HUD for help.

And our enforcement activities in this area are achieving results.

Just two weeks ago, HUD approved several Conciliation Agreements with housing providers in Napa Valley, California, resolving allegations that the on-site manager for one of their properties sexually harassed female residents. The settlements called for the owners to pay \$49,000 to women who filed complaints, remove the on-site manager and attend fair housing training.

No one should have to endure sexual harassment and degrading treatment in order to keep a roof over their head.

Another form of discrimination HUD is particularly active in addressing is discrimination against families with children.

Last fall, HUD charged a landlord in Hamburg, New York, with discrimination for refusing to rent a one-bedroom apartment to a single father because he has a son who would have lived with him three days a week.

Later in the fall, HUD charged housing providers in Billings, Montana, with discrimination for refusing to rent a single-family rental home to a mother because she has two daughters under the age of eighteen, and making discriminatory statements about the family. Two months ago the owners paid \$74,000 as part of a HUD Consent Order settling the case.

A family's housing choices shouldn't be limited just because they have kids.

HUD is also devoting more energy to fighting the discrimination many persons with disabilities too often face, including being denied the accessible unit they need to fully enjoy their home or being denied the right to keep a service animal or other reasonable accommodation they need to live independently.

In August 2019, HUD reached a historic settlement with the city of Los Angeles, California, resolving longstanding HUD findings of noncompliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ground-breaking settlement anticipates the development of 10,000 units of new affordable housing over the next ten years, including 1,500 accessible units for persons with disabilities.

HUD also, two months ago, charged an Oneida, New York, property owner with discrimination for denying the reasonable accommodation requests of a resident with mental disabilities.

And because the Department is aware that many housing providers continue to have questions regarding their responsibilities when it comes to emotional support and assistance animals, HUD, in January, issued guidance clarifying how housing providers can comply with the Fair Housing Act when assessing a person's request to have an assistance animal. The guidance also identifies the type of information a person may need to provide about their disability-related need for the requested accommodation, as well as guidance on the types of animals that typically may be appropriate.

Finally, at the beginning of the year, HUD announced a proposed rule that would recognize additional sets of standards and model building code editions that, when followed in the design and construction of new multifamily housing, will ensure compliance with the accessibility requirements of the Fair Housing Act.

No person with a legitimate disability should be denied access to the accessible housing or reasonable accommodation they need to live independently and enjoy the place they call home.

Today's housing challenges are considerable and there are no easy solutions, but the many initiatives HUD has underway are doing a lot to level the playing field.

More than 52 years after the Fair Housing Act was born, HUD remains firmly committed to creating a nation where every American has the same access to housing and economic opportunity.

Again, Happy Fair Housing Month, and be safe!

Anna María Farías  
HUD Assistant Secretary for  
Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity