



Common Practices of Fair Housing Commissions

Where we live determines the quality of our children's education, our access to jobs and social networks, as well as aspects of our health and well-being. Housing discrimination is illegal, immoral and debilitating to thousands of Massachusetts residents seeking housing, whether to rent, buy or finance a safe place to raise their family, or simply a roof over their head.

Extensive paired testing done by the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston (FHCGB) has documented discrimination in the Commonwealth in the rental, purchase, and financing of properties to people of color, families with children, and people receiving housing assistance.

Tests show that:

- People of color experience discrimination in **at least half** of their attempts to secure housing in Greater Boston.
- Families with children and people receiving housing subsidies experience discrimination in roughly **two-thirds** of their attempts to rent in the region.

In communities across the Commonwealth, Fair Housing Commissions, Human Rights Commissions and other like organizations are working to address this problem through education and outreach efforts, providing assistance for people who experience discrimination, and local and state policy advocacy to promote open communities.

Education and Outreach: It is essential that people are aware of their rights and their responsibilities under the law.

- Host a Community Forum on Fair Housing. For example:
 - Invite the authors of the two studies "We Don't Feel Welcome Here" and/or "More than Money" to discuss their findings about residential segregation and perceptions of discrimination.
 - Sponsor the viewing of Race: the Power of an Illusion, a PBS Series that traces the historic roots of housing discrimination. Follow the video with a guided discussion on how these issues impact your community today.
- Distribute brochures on fair housing that are appropriate for different audiences – first time homebuyers, sellers, realtors, landlords, lenders, etc. (*FHCGB has these resources to offer.*)
- Build awareness around the issue by including it in other events that are already happening in the community. For example, include information about fair housing at the annual Martin Luther King Day celebration.
- Reach out to the local schools:
 - Sponsor storybook reading in elementary schools of "When Chocolate Milk moved In" by Ken Harvey
 - Organize an art contest for the creation of a fair housing month poster with the winner's being highlighted on the community website and in other locations

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- Partner with a technology class at the high school to create a short advertisement or spotlight on the issue to be aired on public television
- Tap into local media:
 - Write a letter to the editor
 - Submit editorials to the local paper
 - Add a link on the town website to the FHCGB website and other resources
 - Sponsor advertisements and programs on public access television or other places
- Organize a tester recruitment event – The FHCGB is always in need of volunteer testers from all backgrounds to help document instances of housing discrimination.
- Participate in the Massachusetts Council on Banking Don't Borrow Trouble Campaign that addresses predatory lending practices. For more information go to www.masscommunityandbanking.org

Assisting residents who experience housing discrimination:

- Screen complaints to determine if they are a fair housing issue, in which case the person can be referred to the FHCGB. *The FHCGB offers full case advocacy services, including testing for proof of discrimination, representing the complainant throughout HUD's or the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination's (MCAD) administrative processes, and securing pro bono legal counsel if litigation is required.*
- Sponsor trainings for realtors and bankers, home buyers/home seekers, landlords, Housing Authority and other city/town employees to educate them on their fair housing rights and responsibilities. *(The FHCGB can provide these trainings.)*
- Host a training session for advocates and other nonprofit professionals in your community so that they are prepared to identify housing discrimination with their clients and know how to respond. *(The FHCGB can provide do this training.)*
- Respond to the needs found in your community's Analysis of Impediments. If your community receives CDBG or other HUD grants, the federal government requires that the community complete an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing.

Policy:

- Work with your town government to create a Fair Housing Action Plan. All communities that receive state or federal CDBG funds are required to conduct an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice and a corresponding action plan, but any community can develop one!
- Get involved in statewide initiatives as they relate to fair housing and your community.

*For more information please contact the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston
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www.bostonfairhousing.org*

*The Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston works to eliminate housing discrimination
and promote open communities throughout the region.*