

**OregonLive.com**

Everything Oregon

Fair housing: Unlawful discrimination still a problem in Oregon

Published: Saturday, August 06, 2011, 4:45 AM

**Guest Columnist**

By

By Moloy K. Good

We all want to live in an open, tolerant and accepting society. As Oregonians, we pride ourselves on the many successes we have made toward achieving this goal. Despite our triumphs, there are hurdles that remain. This was evident by the recent finding that almost two-thirds of the tests of rental housing the Fair Housing Council of Oregon conducted for the Portland Housing Bureau showed unlawful discrimination. Similar testing projects in other areas of our state have also found disturbing levels of discrimination. Our tests provide a random and valid snapshot of barriers to housing that still exist in our community and that FHCO, the city of Portland and the Bureau of Labor and Industries are working together to eliminate.

FHCO's mission is to eliminate illegal housing discrimination throughout Oregon and southwest Washington. We focus on three important areas:

Teaching the concept of fair housing in our community.

Enforcing the law through testing, investigation, advocacy and litigation.

Working with local jurisdictions to eliminate unlawful housing discrimination.

Each of these functions is vital to fulfilling FHCO's mission, and we pursue each with passion and vigor.

Through education and outreach we spread the message of fair housing to ensure that all people are aware of where to get help with fair housing problems. We distribute information at housing fairs, host an annual poster contest for schoolchildren, and provide our popular bus tour of historic discrimination in Portland. Since 2004 we have conducted 580 fair housing classes and collaborated with advocates and providers to develop several resource materials and handbooks for public use.

Unfortunately, this can only take us so far. Enforcement of the law is the linchpin to eliminating unlawful housing discrimination. The FHCO staff screens approximately 2,000 calls a year to identify potential fair housing violations. We perform investigations, interview witnesses, review documentation, provide advocacy and file complaints. In the past two years, FHCO filed 56 complaints with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and BOLI, the agencies responsible for formally investigating fair housing violations.

We also help jurisdictions conduct analyses of impediments to fair housing choice (AI). An AI is required for jurisdictions receiving certain federal funding and is comprised of an equity study to determine how best to allocate resources to address fair housing issues. Our audit testing projects have given these jurisdictions snapshots of what is happening in their communities to help identify appropriate steps to achieve housing parity. These snapshots are intended for planning purposes, but they are also the first step in investigation and enforcement. They provide a general "testing of the waters" to determine if additional investigation is merited.

As a result of recent testing FHCO performed for the city of Portland, the city has called for increased audit testing in its Fair Housing Action Plan to ensure that discriminatory practices will be identified and addressed, a proposal FHCO heartily applauds. This increased testing will also strengthen cases FHCO and its partners bring to fight illegal discrimination.

Our quest to live in an open, tolerant and accepting society means that we must keep asking uncomfortable questions. The answers we find will undoubtedly reveal that ignorance, bias and prejudice have not gone away, but continue to affect our lives. The Fair Housing Council of Oregon will continue its work to eradicate discrimination so that the promise of the American dream becomes a reality for all Oregonians.

Moloy K. Good is the executive director of the Fair Housing Council of Oregon.

© 2011 OregonLive.com. All rights reserved.