



## Portland Commissioner Nick Fish presents city's first comprehensive fair housing plan

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By **Nikole Hannah-Jones, The Oregonian**



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Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian (left) and Portland Commissioner Nick Fish talk about a city plan to combat housing discrimination at a news conference today.

**Portland Commissioner Nick Fish** presented the **city's first comprehensive fair-housing plan Friday**, launching a five-year effort to fight discrimination and increase affordable housing.

Standing in City Hall with **John Trasviña, U.S. Housing and Urban Development assistant secretary**, and state **Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian**, Fish said his 10-page plan will send a clear message.

"Today with one voice we are here to say we will not tolerate discrimination in housing in Portland or in Oregon," Fish said. "As promised, it is bold and comprehensive and designed to get at the root of persistent problems in our community, which are barriers to housing choice."

The plan follows coverage in **The Oregonian in recent weeks detailing how the city did not seek enforcement against landlords found in an audit last year to have discriminated against black and Latino testers**. Amid the scrutiny, Fish forwarded the landlords' names to the state Bureau of Labor and Industries for investigation.

### Portland Commissioner Nick Fish announces fair housing plan

Portland Commissioner Nick Fish announced a five-year plan to address housing discrimination and affordability Friday morning.

The city commissioned the audit as part of a required analysis of fair housing impediments tied to as much as \$11 million in **federal funding**. **Fish said Friday he found the results -- discrimination occurred in 64 percent of 50 tests -- alarming.**

The plan "represents the first time the city of Portland has placed fair housing issues at the top of the agenda," he said, and includes a broad coalition of local governments, tenant advocates and rental industry

representatives.

If the City Council approves the plan, expected this summer, the city will:

- Establish an independent fair-housing advisory committee
  - Increase enforcement of fair-housing laws
  - Create a central place for victims to file claims
  - Increase fair-housing education for tenants and landlords
- Conduct annual audit testing here and test more protected which include race, national origin, religion, sex, family status, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, source of income, military status and domestic violence victims.
  - Develop a citywide housing strategy
  - Provide local and federal money to increase affordable housing
  - Track access to city-run affordable housing by protected classes and work to increase that access
  - Invest in programs and services to gentrification and address housing disparities among communities of color
  - Advocate strict compliance with city policy that calls for setting aside at least 30 percent of money raised in most urban renewal areas for affordable housing
  - Find new affordable-housing funding sources

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Several community members thanked Fish for his work and praised the plan.

"As an African American resident and Portland lawyer representing fair housing, this issue hits home for me," said Cashauna Hill, an attorney for the **Oregon Law Center** and a member of the committee that produced the impediments to fair housing analysis. "I support and appreciate Commissioner Fish's leadership."

#### Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian talks about enforcement of fair housing laws.

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Avakian, whose agency investigates housing discrimination and enforces state law, also supports the plan. He said

repeatedly that education is crucial.

"We don't eradicate discrimination strictly through enforcement," he said. "A single act does not change hearts and minds."

But **Daryl Dixon, who heads Multnomah County's Office of Diversity and Equity**, objected at a public forum after the news conference. Dixon said he wasn't alarmed by the audit results because he and other African Americans face discrimination every day.

"What was alarming was the response on the city's part," Dixon said. "How far would we have gotten during the civil rights movement if we had waited for the hearts and minds of people to change? I encourage you to enforce the law."

Trasviña agreed that government can't wait for hearts and minds to catch up with a 43-year-old federal law. He said many jurisdictions "are in complete denial when they get these tests" and his agency can hold up federal funds if it believes they aren't working seriously to enforce fair-housing laws.

"I am convinced the city of Portland has the will and the capacity to tackle this problem," he said. "It's not going to do it alone and not going to do it overnight."

**John Trasviña, assistant secretary of U.S. Housing and Urban Development, talks fair housing.**

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But Trasviña said the media attention has been beneficial and that the city won't get a rubber stamp. "HUD will not necessarily

bless the process today," he said. "We know what good practices are. We provide dollars. We want to see those dollars provide access to fair housing."

Still, it remains unclear whether the city will seek enforcement against discriminatory landlords found in future audits. When asked, Fish said: "It's certainly possible."

-- **Nikole Hannah-Jones**

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