

Valley & State

Study: bias against black renters

Those with children and disabilities also faced discrimination, state housing commission finds

By [Hannah Guzik](#)

Ashland Daily Tidings

April 15, 2010 2:00 AM

A study commissioned by the city shows a "shockingly high rate of discrimination" against blacks seeking to rent housing in Ashland.

The Fair Housing Council of Oregon found that six of nine landlords, or two-thirds, expressed racial bias when showing a rental to a black tester.

The study, completed in June, also found that three of seven testers with children and three of seven with disabilities, or about 43 percent in each category, received discriminatory treatment.

The council completed 33 housing discrimination tests in all in spring 2009.

"It's unfortunate that, still in the day and age, this type of discrimination is commonplace, but it is — even in Ashland," said Brandon Goldman, senior planner with the city.

The city used federal community development block grant funds to pay for the study, he said. The research was needed because the city's documents on housing impediments hadn't been updated since 1996, Goldman said.

As part of the study, the Fair Housing Council sent employees to inquire separately about housing listed for rent. Afterward, the testers compared notes.

"Some were told the property was no longer for rent, but then another person would come and it would still be for rent," said Goldman.

Sometimes the discrimination was more subtle, as when the landlords gave certain testers a better tour or more information about the rentals, he said.

"A lot of people, especially those with mother-in-law units in their backyard, have the assumption that they can rent it to someone they like," Goldman said. "But they have to rent it to the first qualified person."

D.L. Richardson, chairman of Southern Oregon University's communication department, said he wasn't surprised by the findings.

"I've had students who clearly have said they thought they were being discriminated against," he said.

Richardson, who is black, said he hasn't personally experienced racial discrimination when searching

for housing in Ashland.

"Since I've been here, I've always been treated fairly," he said. "What I've gathered as a whole has always been positive."

The high number of rentals maintained by homeowners instead of property management companies in Ashland could contribute to the rate of discrimination, Richardson said.

"People's prejudices can come into play more because so many more people are renting out the units themselves," he said.

The council completed 33 housing discrimination tests, focusing seven each on disabilities, familial status and sexual orientation. Three tests were focused on national origin and nine on race.

"We were really surprised at the different treatment of people based on race," said Moloy Good, the housing council's executive director. "It was really eye-opening and troubling."

No discrimination was detected based on national origin or sexual orientation, according to the study.

Although the study's sample size was small, the results are useful, Goldman said.

"The sample size is so small that it's not statistically significant, but it does at least show that there are instances of discrimination occurring," he said. "It may be anecdotal, but it is useful in showing that there are individuals out there that are being discriminated against on a daily basis."

The Fair Housing Council completed a similar study in Beaverton and found an even higher racial bias there, according to The Oregonian.

Landlords who don't comply with fair housing laws can face administrative law hearings, private lawsuits and U.S. Department of Justice investigations, Good said.

"Through education and outreach, my hope is we would reach more potential victims and they would come forward to complain," he said.

As a result of the findings, the city of Ashland will look at appointing a staff member as a fair housing officer to help field questions or complaints, Goldman said.

The city will continue to sponsor local workshops on fair housing laws for landlords, real estate professionals, property managers, homeowner associations and tenants, he said.

"The more we can do to educate people who may be inadvertently discriminating, the better," he said.

Contact staff writer Hannah Guzik at 482-3456 ext. 226 or hguzik@dailytidings.com.