

April is National Fair Housing Month – Part 1

Fair Housing History

By Jo Becker, Education/Outreach Specialist, Fair Housing Council of Oregon

In April 1968, shortly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Congress passed the federal Fair Housing Act to combat housing discrimination. It was the most controversial piece of civil rights legislation and the most difficult to pass. Twenty years later, the Fair Housing Amendments Act followed, further strengthening the law and adding additional protected classes. These federal laws protect everyone from discrimination in housing based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, familial status and disability.

The state of Oregon passed similar legislation and has extended it to include protection against discrimination based on marital status, sexual orientation and source of income. Similarly, the state of Washington has extended it to protect marital status, sexual orientation and honorably discharged veterans/military status. Some cities and counties have added additional protections; visit http://fhco.org/pdfs/matrix_ore.pdf or http://fhco.org/pdfs/matrix_wash.pdf for more info.

April marks the anniversary of the enactment of federal fair housing law protections and is celebrated as National Fair Housing Month.

As a former Realtor®, I know that complying with fair housing laws can be challenging. It may seem confusing and frustrating. I've heard the analogy of the irritation one can

feel waiting for a red light to turn green, late at night, with no other cars in sight. In that moment, you are annoyed. You might ask yourself, "What is the rationale?" or "Why do I have to stop at this light?" But try to imagine what life would be like without those traffic signals or without those rules. Imagine the harm and devastation that can (and often does) occur when we ignore the rules our society has mandated. In those instances, it makes no difference if the act was accidental or unintentional; the harm is done before you even know it.

As an agent, I knew that I could have all good intentions and do everything right and yet one complaint to HUD could threaten my very livelihood. I knew and understood that. Yet, that's not unique to fair housing. The same threat holds true from a complaint to the real estate agency and, let's face it, anyone can sue anyone else for anything at any time. Yes, there are frivolous claims and suits, but the laws were enacted for a reason, and that is to address real and intolerable injustices facing our society. I encourage you to find out more so that you can learn the reasons behind the causes and justification for fair housing laws and to help protect yourself in your daily practice. Please visit <http://www.fhco.org> to learn more.

This article brought to you by the Fair Housing Council; a nonprofit serving the state of Oregon and SW Washington. Learn more and/or sign up for our free, periodic newsletter at <http://www.fhco.org>.

Questions about your rights and responsibilities under fair housing laws? Visit <http://www.fhco.org> or call 1-800-424-3247 Ext. 2.

Questions about this article? Do you want to schedule an in-office fair housing training program or speaker for corporate or association functions? Contact Jo Becker at jbecker@FHC0.org or 503-453-4016.

Do you have property to promote? Advertise vacancies or for-sales free across the Portland/Vancouver market at <http://www.housingconnections.org>