



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 2008
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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FAIR HOUSING ACT

WASHINGTON - The Department of Justice hosted a ceremony today celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, enacted on April 11, 1968, and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose tragic death spurred passage of the Act. The keynote speaker for the event, held in the Great Hall of the Robert F. Kennedy Justice Building, was Stephen J. Pollak, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division when the Act became law. Deputy Attorney General Mark Filip and Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Grace Chung Becker also gave remarks.

President George W. Bush has proclaimed April 2008 National Fair Housing Month. Last week, Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey said in a statement commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act: "As we mark this anniversary of the Fair Housing Act and celebrate National Fair Housing Month . . . we re-dedicate ourselves to combating housing discrimination in all its forms, from home sales to apartment rentals, and from home mortgage loans to property insurance. More generally, we recommit ourselves to the principle that housing must be available to all Americans without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status or disability."

FACTS ON FAIR HOUSING

Operation Home Sweet Home:

- In February 2006, the Department announced Operation Home Sweet Home, an Attorney General initiative to expose and eliminate housing discrimination through improved and increased discrimination testing and public awareness efforts.
- In Fiscal Year 2007, the Department conducted more than 500 paired tests, 20 percent more than the number conducted in any other year since the inception of the testing program in 1991.

- Paired testing is an important investigatory tool in fair housing enforcement which involves undercover efforts to determine whether potential buyers or renters are being treated equally in compliance with fair housing laws.

- In September 2007, the Department filed its first case based on testing evidence alleging housing discrimination against Asian prospective tenants. In that case, the defendants agreed to the entry of a consent decree requiring them to pay up to \$158,000 in monetary damages to the victims of discrimination and civil penalties to the government.

Civil Violations of the Fair Housing Act:

- In Fiscal Year 2007, the Department filed 33 civil lawsuits alleging unlawful housing or lending discrimination and obtained settlements and judgments in those areas requiring the payment of over \$7 million in monetary damages to victims of discrimination and civil penalties to the government. Cases filed last year included:

- A redlining case involving one of the largest banks in Gary, Ind., and three other fair lending cases;

- Four pattern or practice cases based on evidence from the testing program;

- Six cases alleging violations of the accessibility provisions of the Fair Housing Act;

- Several other types of cases including pattern or practice sexual harassment by a landlord; discrimination against a group home for persons with disabilities; rental discrimination on the basis of national origin; and rental discrimination on the basis of race and familial status.

- In the first six months of Fiscal Year 2008, the Department has obtained a series of strong outcomes in key fair housing cases. The Department obtained two judgments that local governments violated the Act by imposing illegal restrictions on, or improperly denying permits for, group homes for persons with disabilities. Major settlements included:

- A case involving systemic sexual harassment of female credit applicants by a bank vice president was resolved for \$350,000;

- A case involving discrimination against a group home for persons with disabilities was resolved for \$760,000;

- A systemic national origin discrimination case was resolved for \$211,000;

- A case involving claims of familial status discrimination was resolved for \$185,000.

Criminal Violations of the Fair Housing Act:

- In addition, the Department has successfully used the criminal provisions of the Fair Housing Act to protect homeowners and renters from violence and threats. Since 2001, the Department has obtained convictions against more than 60 defendants who used burning crosses to intimidate others.

- Individuals in Indianapolis and Detroit were successfully prosecuted for burning crosses outside the homes of biracial families with the intent to interfere with the victims' housing rights.

- In Ohio, two men were convicted for their roles in pouring mercury, a highly toxic substance, on the front porch and driveway of an interracial couple and their young child, in an attempt to force the victims out of their home.

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