

A SHORT HISTORY OF NATIONAL FAIR HOUSING MONTH



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What is It?

National Fair Housing Month celebrates the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and familial status in the sale or rental of housing. This Act was subsequently amended and revised by legislation in 1974 and 1988. The most recent change in the law was HUD's [February 11, 2021 announcement](#) that it would enforce discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Historical Background

From 1966-1967, Congress regularly considered the Fair Housing bill, but failed to garner a strong enough majority for its passage. However, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson utilized this national tragedy to urge for the bill's speedy Congressional approval. Since the 1966 open housing marches in Chicago, Dr. King's name had been closely associated with the Fair Housing legislation. President Johnson viewed the Act as a fitting memorial to the man's life work, and wished to have the Act passed prior to Dr. King's funeral in Atlanta. Another significant issue during this time period was the growing casualty list from Vietnam. The deaths in Vietnam disproportionately fell upon young, poor African-American and Hispanic infantrymen. However, on the home front, these men's families could not purchase or rent homes in certain residential developments on account of their race or national origin.

Passage of the Act

Advocacy organizations like the NAACP, the GI Forum, and the National Committee Against Discrimination In Housing, lobbied hard for the US Senate to pass the Fair Housing Act and remedy this inequity. Senators Edward Brooke (D-Mass.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) were among the leaders in pushing for the passage of this legislation. Senator Brooke, the first African-American ever to be elected to the Senate by popular vote, spoke personally of his return from World War II and inability to provide a home of his choice for his new family because of his race.

Legally, The Civil Rights Act of 1968 was an expansion and follow-up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which prohibited discrimination in housing but had no federal enforcement provisions. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in hiring, promoting, firing, public accommodations, and federally funded programs. It also strengthened the enforcement of voting rights and the desegregation of schools. Passage of the Act legally ended the application of "Jim Crow" laws, which had been upheld by the Supreme Court in the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which the Court held that racial segregation that was "separate but equal" was constitutional.

The 1968 Act prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, (and as amended) handicap and family status (families with children). Titles VIII and XIX of the Act are known as the Fair Housing Act (of 1968). Victims of discrimination may use both the 1968 act and the 1866 act's section 1983 to seek redress. The 1968 act provides for federal solutions while the 1866 act provides for private solutions (i.e., civil suits). The act also made it a federal crime to "by force or by threat of force, injure, intimidate, or interfere with anyone... by reason of their race, color, religion, or national origin, handicap or familial status."

The Act could never have been passed without both the strong leadership of President Lyndon B. Johnson and the creation of bi-partisan support in the Senate. The Majority Whip Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minnesota) and the Minority Leader Senator Everett McK. Dirksen (R-Illinois) were instrumental in forging a compromise that led to passage.

Creation of HUD

To aid community development and enforce the Fair Housing Law, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was created. The department was established on September 9, 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Department of Housing and Urban Development Act into law. It stipulated that the department was to be created no later than November 8, sixty days following the date of enactment. The actual implementation was postponed until January 13, 1966, following the completion of a special study group report on the federal role in solving urban problems (Wikipedia, 2010). President Nixon tapped then Governor of Michigan, George Romney (Mitt's father), for the post of Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. While serving as Governor, Secretary Romney had successfully campaigned for ratification of a state constitutional provision that prohibited discrimination in housing. President Nixon also appointed Samuel Simmons as the first Assistant Secretary for Equal Housing Opportunity.

Fair Housing laws now are enforced by a combination of federal, state, local, and nonprofit agencies and organizations.

Celebration of the Act

HUD initially held a gala event marking the first year of the Act's passage. The tradition of celebrating Fair Housing Month has grown larger and larger. Governors began to issue proclamations that designated April as "Fair Housing Month," and schools across the country sponsored poster and essay contests that focused upon fair housing issues. Regional winners from these contests often enjoyed trips to Washington, D. C., for events with HUD and their Congressional representatives.

Under former Secretaries James T. Lynn and Carla Hills, with the cooperation of the National Association of Homebuilders, National Association of Realtors, and the American Advertising Council, these groups adopted fair housing as their theme and provided free billboard space throughout the nation. Every HUD administrative region across the country also has its own celebrations, meetings, dinners, contests and radio-television shows that featured HUD, state and private fair housing experts and officials.

In Maryland

In Maryland, Fair Housing Month also celebrates the passage of Article 49-B of the Annotated Code of Maryland prohibiting discrimination in the sale or rental of housing. The Governor traditionally issues a Proclamation declaring April as Fair Housing Month in the State, and various celebrations are held.

The HUD Baltimore Office, several governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private groups - including the GBCHRB - hold various events and webinars in connection with Fair Housing Month. Everyone is invited to attend these free events.

For More Information

Maryland

[Baltimore City Office of Equity & Civil Rights Fair Housing Month Film Festival](#). For any questions, contact Lauren Jackson at <mailto:Lauren.Jackson@BaltimoreCity.gov>.

National Fair Housing Alliance, [“Seven Days - History of the Fair Housing Act”](#).

Maryland Center for History and Culture, [“A History of Housing Discrimination & Redlining in Baltimore,”](#) short film.

[The 2021 Fair Housing Month Exhibition Student Artwork Call for Entry](#) seeks student art from Elementary School, Middle School, and High School students in Baltimore City for the 2021 Fair Housing Month Student Exhibition in April 2021. Students are encouraged to create artwork based on home, community, and housing discrimination. The exhibition will be a dynamic curated outdoor art event installed in the Parks and People Foundation location at 2100 Liberty Heights Avenue, Baltimore, MD, 21217 from Thursday, April 1, until Saturday, May 1, 2021. The deadline for submissions is Monday, March 1, 2021. [Submit Your Artwork here!](#)

[Greater Baltimore Community Housing Resource Board \(GBCHRB\)](#)

National

[US Department of HUD](#) - The Department's main website.

[HUD Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity National Office](#) - For information about Fair Housing and Fair Housing Month, among other equity subjects.

[2021 HUD Fair Housing Month 2021 Outreach Materials](#) - A variety of materials free to download including posters, guides, PSAs, and others.

[File with HUD a Complaint of Housing Discrimination](#) - Form for filing a complaint.

[Housing Discrimination Under the Fair Housing Act](#) - Describes the various parts of the Law.