

A SHORT HISTORY OF NATIONAL FAIR HOUSING MONTH



Prepared by the GBCHRB
P. O. Box 66180 Baltimore, Maryland 21239-6180
410-453-9500 / <mailto:wkladky@gbchrb.org>

March, 2010

What is It?

National Fair Housing Month celebrates the passage of The Fair Housing 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 to produce what is in 2010 the Fair Housing Law of the United States.



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 fell heaviest 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

Specialized organizations like the NAACP, the GI Forum and the National Committee Against Discrimination In Housing lobbied hard for the Senate to pass the Fair Housing Act and remedy this inequity. Senators Edward Brooke and Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts argued deeply 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 Act was a follow-up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The 1968 act expanded on previous acts and prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, (and as amended) handicap and family status. Title VIII of the Act is also known as the Fair Housing Act (of 1968).

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



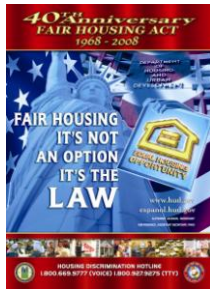
To aid community development and enforce the Fair Housing Law, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was created. The department was established on September 9, 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Department of Housing and Urban Development Act into law. It stipulated 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.

In 2010, HUD is administered by the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Shaun Donovan, a former New York City housing commissioner and former

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, is the current Secretary, having been confirmed by the United States Senate unanimously on January 22, 2009.

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. In 2010, there will be several conferences and trainings, including one on April 28th on Accessibility & Condominium Associations, co-sponsored by the GBCHRB; the Baltimore County Human Relations Commission; Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc.; and several other organizations. Please contact the GBCHRB at <mailto:wkladky@gbchrb.org> or 410-453-9500 for more information. In addition, the HUD Baltimore Office, several governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private groups - including the GBCHRB - will hold a Fair Housing Conference in April. Everyone is invited to attend these free events.

