Fair housing education for real estate professionals and consumers

Overview

Fair housing education has two primary functions. First, fair housing education aims to ensure that renters and prospective homebuyers are aware of their rights under the law; community members who are unfamiliar with the protections afforded by fair housing laws are unlikely to file a complaint when their rights have been violated.

Second, fair housing education helps landlords and other real estate professionals to understand their obligations so they can stay in compliance with fair housing laws. Fair housing educational materials can include pamphlets, guidebooks, and posters, with materials available either online or in print. Some cities, towns, and counties conduct social media outreach campaigns or do in person outreach during fair housing month (April) and throughout the year. Municipalities can also host workshops, trainings, or seminars for specific audiences, including landlords, home-sellers, housing choice voucher holders, and first-time homebuyers.

This section describes some of the considerations for cities, towns and counties interested in developing fair housing education for real estate professionals and consumers.

Approach

Federal, state and local laws protect renters and homebuyers from housing discrimination. Education helps ensure individuals and families know when their rights are being violated. Education also helps landlords and other real estate professionals understand their obligations under applicable fair housing laws. Many local agencies help increase awareness by providing education, in various forms, about fair housing law or supporting local non-profits who do this work.

Educating the general public about fair housing is intended to help renters and homebuyers or homeowners understand their rights under federal, state and local laws and equip them with the necessary tools to file a complaint if they face housing discrimination. These campaigns can be wide-ranging public service announcements, such as advertisements in print, radio, TV, or online. Education campaigns can also be
targeted to specific groups, including groups that receive special protection under the law. For example, a Spanish-language campaign might be designed to reach out to Hispanic immigrants, who are protected on the basis of national origin, or materials may be distributed at medical offices or rehabilitation centers in partnership with a local organization that supports rights for persons with disabilities. Some municipalities and non-profit organizations have developed fair housing education materials or curriculum for youth, which may be taught in local schools.

Education for the real estate community is intended to help landlords, realtors, lenders and others involved in housing transactions understand their responsibilities and learn how to avoid discriminatory actions. Some landlords, particularly those who are new landlords or who have few properties, may not realize what kind of behaviors constitute housing discrimination. These education efforts may include online or in person classes or other materials that explain fair housing laws. The workshops and materials may be offered and developed by local government offices or by local or national fair housing organizations.

Local governments may also support local non-profit organizations to conduct education and training on fair housing. For example, the South Suburban Housing Center in Illinois receives funding from local cities, townships and villages. HUD’s office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity also makes grants available for Fair Housing Education and Outreach activities annually through a program known as the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP). Cities and counties wishing to identify local fair housing organizations operating in their jurisdiction or in their state may wish to consult HUD’s lists of FHIP grantees, available for each annual grant here.

Eligibility

Some fair housing education programs are aimed at the general public. Others may reach out to particular groups that are protected by federal, state or local fair housing laws. Federal law prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin. State and local laws may add to the list of protected classes, for example to protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or source of income.

Education campaigns are also frequently targeted to real estate professionals such as landlords, real estate agents, and mortgage lenders. Fair housing laws prohibit such actions as refusing to rent a home or offering unfavorable terms or conditions in a real estate transaction based on the applicant’s protected status. Education campaigns target real estate professionals because they are involved in these types of transactions and decisions. Education about fair housing may be required for those seeking to
obtain or renew a real estate license, though requirements vary by state.

**Examples**

- Montgomery County, MD’s office of fair housing provides broad outreach in the community. The office promotes fair housing and provides education to the real estate community and to the general public. The office developed a curriculum for 10th graders on fair housing that is offered in all of the 23 area high schools. As part of the curriculum, students can participate in a poster contest which creates materials for public buses promoting fair housing during Fair Housing Month (April). The county also discusses fair housing as part of Human Rights Camp, open to 40 fifth graders each year.

- The NYC Commission on Human Rights and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development teamed up to create Fair Housing NYC. Fair Housing NYC has created educational materials in print and multimedia to educate the public about fair housing laws and also holds an annual Fair Housing Symposium.

- The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center is a non-profit that provides many educational materials and training programs on Fair Housing. The organization runs a Fair Housing University program which has trainings for specialized groups (including landlords, tenants, and mental health service providers). The organization also conducts youth education for grades 1st through 8th and has produced an original book Fair Housing Five & the Haunted House.

- The City of Winston-Salem observes Fair Housing Month by holding an annual housing summit and by issuing a proclamation about fair housing. The city’s Human Relations Commission also holds monthly landlord/tenant trainings.

**Related resources**

- Many HUD-developed fair housing education materials, including in posters and brochures, are available for download on HUDs website. Many of the materials are available in multiple languages including: Arabic, Chinese, English, Farsi, French, Hindi, Hmong, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. They are also sized such that they could be used in various ways, including in print and online.

- Government agencies, non-profit organizations and individuals share information about fair housing by using #FairHousing on social media platforms. The hashtag campaign is especially active during Fair Housing Month, observed in April.

- HUD’s makes available grants to local organizations to conduct education and outreach on Fair Housing. Details of the requirements and availability of funding are provided on HUD’s website. Recent awards (FY2015) totaled more than $7 million and supported fair housing organizations in multiple states.