

Barriers to Housing in Hampton Roads for African- Americans and People with Disabilities

A study conducted by Housing
Opportunities Made Equal, Inc.

With funding provided by the U. S. Department
Of Housing and Urban Development

About HOME

- Non-profit fair housing and housing counseling organization
- founded in 1971
- Based in Richmond, serves large part of the Commonwealth
- **MISSION:** to ensure equal access to housing for all persons through counseling, education and advocacy.

What we do:

- All forms of Housing Counseling:
 - Pre and post-purchase, mortgage default, rental, landlord/tenant, home equity conversion mortgage, outreach to the homeless, informal mediation
 - Information on affordable housing options

More services

- Financial Assistance:
 - Down payment assistance
 - Regional Loan Fund Administrator
 - Homeless Intervention Program
 - TANF housing funds
 - HOPWA (housing assistance for persons with HIV/AIDS)

And more

■ Fair Housing:

- Consumer education
- Testing and Investigation of fair housing complaints
- Systemic investigations
- Advocacy
- Fair housing audits
- Assistance to local governments
- Training for the housing industry
- Technical assistance
- Serves all protected classes: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, elderliness
- Covers all forms of housing and housing-related services

Testing

- HOME has been testing for housing discrimination for 30 years
- HOME's tests upheld by U.S. Supreme Court
- Testers trained to be objective observers

Discrimination in the rental market: Race-based audits

■ Methodology

- Paired tests (white/
African-American)
- Matching profiles
(Black tester slightly
better qualified)
- Written test reports
- Objective observation

■ Sites

- < 75% white census
tracts
- Professionally
managed complexes
- 70 test sites

■ Factors compared

- Ease of access
- Length of contact
- Level of service
- Amount of information provided
- Nature of information
- Number & type of units available
- Costs (fees, deposits, rent)
- Stated qualifying standards
- Comments

- 70 paired tests conducted:
 - 60% (42/70) favored white tester
 - Hampton 100% (one test site)
 - Newport News 54%
 - Virginia Beach 62%
 - Norfolk 64%
 - Portsmouth 80%
 - Suffolk 100% (one test site)
 - 23% (16/70) provided similar treatment
 - 17% (12/70) favored the Black tester

Test summary

- White tester invited to visit complex and meet with staff person on a specific date
- Black tester who called less than an hour later told office would be closed the same day the white tester was meeting with the staff person

Test summary

- White tester offered more units
- Black tester told of fewer units, told rent \$20 more per month; application fee and security deposit double those told white tester

Test summary

- White tester left message in afternoon, call returned
- Black tester left several messages on same day, calls not returned.

Test summary

- White tester offered a one bedroom apartment, encouraged to put down deposit immediately, given application, reference forms, etc.
- Black tester told no one bedroom apartments available, referred to another complex

Test summary

- White tester told of units renting for \$470-\$515 in one segment of complex, and offered an application
- Black tester only told of unit renting for \$575 in another part of the complex, not offered an application

Test summary

- White tester asked for 2 BR apartment May 1; told some might be available in June and that a 1 BR was available. White tester shown "guest apartment".
- Black tester asked for 2 BR apartment May 1; told availability "no time soon". Not shown an apartment and referred to another complex.

Accessibility

■ Background:

- Federal & Virginia fair housing laws require residential buildings of 4 or more dwelling units with first occupancy after March 1991 to be accessible to people with disabilities.
- All units of covered buildings with elevators, and ground floor units of those without elevators must meet requirements
- Law covers common use areas and amenities as well as individual units

What accessibility means

- According to Virginia Fair Housing Office:
 - Building entrance wide enough for a wheelchair, accessible by a route without steps
 - Accessible public and common use areas
 - Doors wide enough for wheelchair
 - Accessible route into and through unit
 - Light switches, thermostats, etc., accessible
 - Reinforcements in bathroom walls allowing for grab bars
 - Kitchens and bathrooms with room for a wheelchair to maneuver

methodology

- Identified covered multi-family buildings (1st occupancy after 3/91)
- Testers made site visits to determine accessibility – asked about accessible apartments, took measurements, made observations, submitted written reports
- Test coordinator compared reports with accessibility guidelines

What is non-compliance

- All deficiencies considered lack of compliance
- Major v. technical deficiencies
 - Major: person in wheelchair unable to get into office, model or unit; unable to use laundry or fitness center; unable to get into or maneuver in bathroom or kitchen; unable to manipulate wheelchair readily in main unit corridor
 - Technical: wouldn't prevent use by person in wheelchair, but do not meet guidelines and render use of unit and amenities unnecessarily difficult

Accessibility results

- 26 site visits
 - 96% (25/26) out of compliance
 - 46% (12/26) with major deficiencies

Results consistent

- Race audit results consistent with results of national audits conducted by HUD in 1977 and 1989 – African-Americans experienced less favorable treatment 50% of the time
- 1997 race audit in Northern Virginia by Equal Rights Center: African-Americans experienced less favorable treatment 56% of the time
- Accessibility audit by ERC: 100% of northern Virginia complexes out of compliance

Impact

- Many Virginians are illegally denied housing
- People with disabilities have difficulty finding accessible housing
- Need for affordable housing well-documented, but access to existing affordable housing continues to be limited by discrimination and non-compliance

Now what?

- The issue of housing discrimination in the Commonwealth should be a focus of open debate
- More studies should be done of other segments of the market, including rental experiences of Hispanics and Asians
- Additional outreach and education needed for both housing providers and consumers
- Fair housing enforcement should be strengthened; more funds for VFHO; progress on JLARC study reviewed

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