

1: INTRODUCTION

FRIENDS OF FAIR HOUSING,

On April 11, 1968, the federal Fair Housing Act was signed into law. On that day, President Lyndon B. Johnson stated that, “Now, with this bill, the voice of justice speaks again. It proclaims that fair housing for all — all human beings who live in this country — is now a part of the American way of life.”

The hard-fought struggle for many decades to pass a federal law would not have been possible without organizing efforts led by civil rights organizations, religious leaders, and ordinary Americans who cared deeply about equality and justice. Demonstrations and marches occurred in many cities, demanding fair housing and an end to segregation. Tragically, in the end, it took the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968 and the subsequent eruption of violence in dozens of American cities to propel Congress to pass the Act.

Dr. King was deeply committed to fair housing and what he deemed to be the goal of the civil rights movement – the creation of the beloved community. He understood that residential segregation was the foundation for many of the inequalities of our society, and therefore, fair housing was a requisite cornerstone of a just society. Dr. King once said, “Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” In other words, to create the beloved community requires not only winning hearts and minds, but also both restraining the actions of the heartless who discriminate and instituting policies that foster the creation of more just, equitable, and inclusive communities. For Dr. King, the beloved community was not an abstract ideal or unattainable dream, it was a worthy goal that was fully achievable. The future Dr. King envisioned was a place free from discrimination and segregation, in housing and all facets of American life.

That is what the Fair Housing Act represented – a way to move this nation just a little closer to creating the beloved community that Dr. King and so many others envisioned.

But fifty years later, the promise of the Fair Housing Act remains unfulfilled and the beloved community unrealized. The Fair Housing Act’s goals of equal housing and integration remain elusive as illegal housing discrimination and residential segregation persist at unacceptable levels. The inequalities that flow from residential segregation continue to harm some of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations in our society.

For over four decades, my life’s work has been devoted to enforcing fair housing laws. While I acknowledge that, as a nation, we have made some progress and we are certainly better for having established fair housing as the law of the land, we still do not have fair housing. The social, political, and economic resistance to fully implementing fair housing policies and practices is still quite formidable. Housing discrimination based on race, national origin, disability, source of income, sexual orientation, and other protected characteristics is still pervasive.

After more than a decade of working to promote fair housing in the New York City region, those of us at the Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC) have come to recognize that we need to cultivate many more allies in this struggle who can work with us to advance fair housing. It is for this reason that the FHJC, along with our partners Union Theological Seminary and the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing (IAHH), launched the *Building the Beloved Community* interfaith initiative in honor of the 50th anniversary of the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act.

When we first thought about how we could engage people of faith to advocate on fair housing issues through this initiative, we realized that a guide about fair housing, past and present, did not exist. Therefore, we created this Fair Housing Toolkit to assist diverse faith communities in promoting fair housing.

This toolkit can be used as a resource to educate yourself about fair housing history as well as current issues, to inform you about your fair housing rights, and to empower you and your faith community to advance fair housing. Above all, we hope the information contained in this toolkit will inspire your religious congregation or faith community to join our Interfaith Action Network so that you can be engaged in this struggle for fair housing. If we hope to make more progress over the next fifty years than we did in the past fifty years, we need your support, your engagement, your voice, and your leadership. Please join with us in our effort to build the beloved community by working to promote fair housing and create a metropolitan region of more welcoming, open, and inclusive communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fred Freiberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fred Freiberg
Executive Director
Fair Housing Justice Center

ABOUT THE BUILDING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

The *Building the Beloved Community* initiative is aimed at harnessing the power of religious communities and faith-based organizations to work toward building the beloved community by advancing fair housing in the New York City region. The *Building the Beloved Community* is being organized by the Fair Housing Justice Center, and in partnership with Union Theological Seminary and the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act. This initiative is focused on educating faith communities and organizations across the region about our shared history of discrimination and residential segregation; providing information about fair housing rights and how to exercise them; and empowering individuals and communities to effectively act for justice on fair housing issues in order to create more equitable, welcoming, and inclusive communities. This collaborative effort between fair housing advocates and leaders from diverse faith communities will help move us much closer to realizing Dr. King's vision of the beloved community.



To learn more about this project, visit www.bbcfairhousing.org.

ABOUT THE FAIR HOUSING JUSTICE CENTER

The Fair Housing Justice Center (FHJC), a nonprofit civil rights organization is dedicated to eliminating housing discrimination; promoting policies and programs that foster more open, accessible, and inclusive communities; and strengthening enforcement of fair housing laws in the New York City region. The FHJC serves all five boroughs of New York City and the seven surrounding New York counties of Nassau, Suffolk, Rockland, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam and Westchester.



In order to achieve its mission, the FHJC:

- Assists individuals and organizations with housing discrimination complaints to exercise their fair housing rights.
- Initiates investigations to identify, document, and eliminate systemic housing discrimination.
- Advocates for programs and policies that create more open, accessible, and inclusive communities.
- Engages in outreach and educational activities to increase public awareness about fair housing rights.
- Provides technical assistance, training and other tools to upgrade and strengthen fair housing law enforcement.

The FHJC's counseling and investigative services are provided to the general public free of charge without regard to household income.

In the past 13 years, the FHJC as established itself as a leader in fair housing at the local, state, and national level. FHJC investigations have led to dozens of legal challenges that have changed the way many housing providers and other do business; opened tens of thousands of housing units to populations previously excluded; and yielded millions in damages and penalties for victims of housing discrimination. Most importantly, by empowering people to exercise their fair housing rights, the FHJC has changed lives. FHJC's work has influenced local, state, and national housing policies; increased public awareness about fair housing issues and rights; and improved how fair housing laws are enforced.

To learn more about the Fair Housing Justice Center, visit www.fairhousingjustice.org.

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