

5: ADVOCACY

FAIR HOUSING JUSTICE CENTER POLICY GOALS

THE MISSION OF THE FAIR HOUSING JUSTICE CENTER (FHJC), A NONPROFIT CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATION, IS TO ELIMINATE HOUSING DISCRIMINATION; PROMOTE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT FOSTER OPEN, ACCESSIBLE, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES; AND STRENGTHEN ENFORCEMENT OF FAIR HOUSING LAWS IN THE NEW YORK CITY REGION.

The FHJC supports and advocates for local, state, and federal policies and programs that:

GOAL #1:

Help to ensure that all people, including populations whose housing choices have historically been restricted or are currently limited, are able to equally access and enjoy the full range of housing opportunities and communities that exist in the region. Place matters. Expanding housing choice increases access to opportunities, reduces inequalities, and enables people to enjoy the social, professional, and economic benefits of integrated living.

GOAL #2:

Reduce residential racial segregation, promote equitable development including in communities that have historically been disinvested or continue to be deprived of resources, amenities, benefits, and/or services, and foster the creation of more open, accessible, and inclusive communities. Residential segregation, concentrated poverty, and housing discrimination contribute to increased homelessness, fuel gentrification and displacement, and nourish a host of other harmful social, educational, and economic inequalities. Efforts to affirmatively further fair housing should be aimed at dismantling barriers to housing choice, promoting residential integration, and repairing the harm that has been and continues to be inflicted on people and communities of color.

GOAL #3:

Ensure that populations facing housing discrimination are adequately protected and that fair housing laws are vigorously enforced. The current passive, largely complaint-responsive, and under-resourced approach to government enforcement fails to document subtle and systemic forms of housing discrimination and leaves some of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations unprotected. A pro-active, systemic, and well-resourced enforcement approach, with testing as the centerpiece, can more effectively document and eliminate discriminatory housing practices and achieve greater compliance with fair housing laws.

LIST OF FAIR HOUSING POLICY ISSUES THAT STILL NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

In the New York City region, policies and programs could help address the following needs:

- Need to counter local opposition to affordable housing in areas that have historically resisted the development of such housing.
- Need to allocate greater resources to support more vigorous and pro-active enforcement of fair housing laws, including fair housing testing, by public enforcement agencies and private fair housing organizations.
- Need to ensure that developers design and construct new multifamily housing so that it is accessible to people with disabilities.
- Need to develop a regional mobility counseling and assistance program to aid people with rental subsidies to access housing in opportunity-rich areas.
- Need to reduce residential segregation and concentrated poverty by incentivizing the siting of more affordable housing in areas where few affordable or assisted housing units currently exist.
- Need to change land-use policies and/or zoning regulations that limit or preclude the development of affordable housing opportunities.
- Need to require condo and co-op boards to disclose a reason for rejecting applicants.
- Need to add protections for other marginalized populations that continue to face discrimination and exclusion in the housing market.
- Need to expand opportunities for home ownership by populations that have historically been underserved by lenders, real estate agents, and government financing programs.
- Need to remove regulatory barriers that limit access to housing opportunities by people with disabilities.
- Need for regional cooperation to ensure equitable development and a fair distribution of resources among all neighborhoods.
- Need to develop comprehensive revitalization strategies in distressed neighborhoods that include economic and infrastructure development, job-creating programs, and high-performing schools so that all neighborhoods become places of opportunity.
- Need to promote the development of more mixed-income housing that reaches all income levels.
- Need to eliminate local residency preferences that prevent all populations from having equal access to affordable housing opportunities and programs.
- Need for stricter licensing and training requirements for people in the business of renting and selling property.
- Need for the state and local governments to develop and implement strategies that affirmatively further fair housing by expanding housing choice and creating open, accessible, and inclusive communities.

30 WAYS YOU CAN ADVANCE FAIR HOUSING

1. GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS.

Becoming acquainted with your neighbors can open your mind to different experiences, faiths, cultures, and ways of life. These associations enrich your life and the lives of others. Welcome new residents to the community. Building a strong, caring community requires knowing your neighbors.

2. IDENTIFY HOW YOUR FAITH TRADITION AND OTHER FAITH TRADITIONS SUPPORT FAIRNESS, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSION.

There are deeply held and widely shared beliefs across every historic faith tradition. People from different faith traditions can be more unified and effective in advocating for fair housing if there is a greater understanding about why discrimination, inequality, and exclusion are contrary to the teachings and beliefs of different faiths.

3. MAKE SURE THAT POLICIES AND RULES IN YOUR BUILDING OR HOUSING COMPLEX COMPLY WITH FAIR HOUSING LAWS.

Sometimes, a housing provider's policies or rules are posted, attached to leases, or distributed to residents. Take time to read these policies or rules to make sure that there is nothing that raises concerns about discrimination or limits the ability of any population to access, use, or enjoy the housing opportunity. If you do see something that concerns you, call your local fair housing organization and they can help you figure out if a policy or rule appears to run afoul of fair housing laws.

4. GIVE YOUR BUSINESS TO COMPANIES THAT HAVE DEMONSTRATED A COMMITMENT TO FAIR HOUSING.

When you need housing or housing-related services, patronize real estate companies, landlords, insurance companies, and/or banks that have a solid track record of complying with fair housing and fair lending laws. When looking for a place to rent or purchase, do your level best to become an informed consumer and make sure the servicer that wants your business does not have a history of violating fair housing or fair lending laws. Does the entity advertise that they support equal housing? Do they include the equal housing logo or a policy statement on their website or in written materials? Do their advertisements use human models that feature diverse populations and convey the message that they welcome business from all populations? Do they employ people of all backgrounds? Exercise good judgment about where you invest or spend your hard-earned money.

5. REPORT HOUSING DISCRIMINATION YOU WITNESS OR EXPERIENCE.

If you are the victim of discrimination or you learn about discriminatory practices in your community, report them to a fair housing organization or government enforcement agency. Reporting this conduct is doing your part to stop housing discrimination. You can create change and help make your community more open to everyone.

6. LEARN ABOUT THE HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION.

Past is prologue. Understanding the past is essential to identify the changes we should be making now to build a more inclusive and equitable community. Unfortunately, this history is not always taught in our educational institutions. Read the history section included in FHJC's Fair Housing Toolkit to get started. Then do your own research and read periodicals and books that are devoted to the subject of housing discrimination, civil rights, and segregation. The Toolkit also includes a bibliography of books that you might want to consider reading.

7. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL FAIR HOUSING LAWS.

Private fair housing organizations and government enforcement agencies have brochures and literature describing existing fair housing rights and responsibilities. The FHJC's Fair Housing Toolkit provides information on this important subject as well. As a consumer, it is vital that you understand your fair housing rights. If you are a housing provider, it is equally important that you take some time to learn about your obligations under local, state, and federal fair housing laws.

8. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT DISCRIMINATION AND FAIR HOUSING.

Parents should talk with their children about discrimination and why their community may not be as diverse as they would like. Look for books and resources that help young children understand concepts of tolerance, equality, and inclusion. You should advocate that your faith community sponsor activities for children and young people that focus on these issues if that is not already done. There are also children's books and programs that touch on these issues, such as the book *The Fair Housing Five and the Haunted House* by the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center.

9. STAY INFORMED ABOUT FAIR HOUSING EVENTS AND ISSUES IN THE NEW YORK CITY REGION.

Follow the FHJC on social media and sign up to receive FHJC's Opening Acts e-newsletter. You can follow the FHJC on Facebook at [@fairhousingjusticecenter](#) and Twitter at [@fairhousingnyc](#) to keep apprised of upcoming fair housing events, conferences, legal action, policy issues, and other activities that you may want to know more about. If you are informed, you will be in a better position to do your part to make fair housing a reality

10. RECOMMEND A BOOK ABOUT FAIR HOUSING OR CIVIL RIGHTS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB.

There are plenty of very interesting books on fair housing and on civil rights. Some recent book we recommend are *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein; *Race, Not Place: A New Vision of Opportunity in America* by Sheryll Cashin; *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates; *The Fight for Fair Housing* edited by Greg Squires; and *Cycle of Segregation: Social Processes and Residential Stratification* by Marla Krysan and Kyle Crowder.

11. SPONSOR A COMMUNITY SEMINAR ON FAIR HOUSING OR INVITE A SPEAKER TO YOUR COMMUNITY TO TALK ABOUT FAIR HOUSING ISSUES.

The FHJC and other local fair housing organizations are always willing to make presentations to faith-based organizations and communities. There are also academic experts and government officials who are often willing to speak to groups as well about fair housing issues.

12. SPONSOR SEMINARS ON MULTICULTURALISM, DISABILITY AWARENESS, RACIAL SENSITIVITY, LGBTQ ISSUES, AND OTHER ISSUES IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 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.” Helping your community become more knowledgeable about issues such as multiculturalism, disability awareness, racial sensitivity, etc. is one way to push forward the qualitative change of souls, and thereby make your community more open, accessible and welcoming to all. Check to see if you can partner with an organization experienced with hosting seminars on these issues, and let the conversation begin.

13. HOST A SCREENING OF A FAIR HOUSING FILM IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

Whether you pick a classic like “Raisin in the Sun” or a more contemporary documentary short like the FHJC’s “A Matter of Place,” film is a great medium for provoking thought and conversation. After the film is shown, lead a discussion about the film. Do the situations depicted in the film resonate with the people in attendance or have things changed, and if so, how? What more must still be done to bring about fair housing?

14. SPONSOR AN EVENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY THAT USES ART TO HIGHLIGHT FAIR HOUSING ISSUES.

Art can be a compelling vehicle for raising awareness about discrimination and exclusion. Produce a local theater production, hold a poetry reading, sponsor a slam-poetry competition, organize a concert or dance recital, or host an art or photographic exhibit on civil rights. These types of activities can increase awareness of and build support for fair housing in an informative and entertaining way.

15. SPONSOR OR PARTICIPATE IN AN EVENT FOR FAIR HOUSING MONTH.

April is designated as National Fair Housing Month because the federal Fair Housing Act was enacted on April 11, 1968. Many organizations plan special events to commemorate the passage of the law. Consider working with your faith community to sponsor an event of some kind to recognize and affirm the concepts of fairness, equality, and inclusiveness in housing.

16. VOLUNTEER AT YOUR LOCAL FAIR HOUSING OR CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATION.

The FHJC and most local fair housing and civil rights organizations are always looking for volunteers who can be trained to help with event-planning, fundraising, conducting research, making presentations, and other activities. For high school and college students, there are often opportunities to gain academic credit and experience by interning with fair housing organizations. It is a great way to learn more about current fair housing issues while making an important contribution to your community.

17. SPONSOR OR WORK ON A FUNDRAISING BENEFIT FOR YOUR LOCAL FAIR HOUSING ORGANIZATION.

There is always more work to be done. Fundraising events, donors, and contributions from the community are vital sources of revenue to sustain fair housing programs. Your contribution matters.

18. ENCOURAGE YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY OR RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION TO JOIN THE FHJC'S INTERFAITH ACTION NETWORK.

Collaborate with diverse faith communities who are committed to building more open, just, and inclusive communities. Joining this network will help you stay informed about fair housing issues in the region and keep you apprised of fair housing cases, community events, and other activities. Sign up for the Interfaith Action Network at www.bbcfairhousing.org.

19. SHARE YOUR FAIR HOUSING STORY.

Share the story of how where you live has impacted your life and why you support fair housing in your community. You can share your story with the FHJC by emailing it to fhjc@fairhousingjustice.org with the subject line "My Fair Housing Story" or by posting on your Facebook and Twitter with the hashtag #MyFairHousingStory. Talk to your friends, family, and co-workers about why fair housing matters to you. By lifting up fair housing in your network, you can educate others about this issue and encourage others to support fair housing in their communities.

20. REGISTER TO VOTE AND GET INVOLVED IN REGISTERING OTHERS TO VOTE.

While it is vital that you register to vote and exercise your right to vote, it is equally important to learn whether the candidates support fair housing and, if elected, will dedicate more resources to ensure that fair housing laws are vigorously enforced; embrace policies that expand housing choice and reduce segregation in schools and housing; and support equitable community development so that all neighborhoods become places of opportunity. Attend candidate forums, voice your concerns, and write letters letting them know that fair housing is a priority issue for you and your community. If you are not already registered, visit <https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote> to find out how you can register to vote in your state. You can find out who your elected representatives are and how to contact them here: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.

21. SUPPORT PROPOSED FAIR HOUSING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS.

So much work must still be done to prevent discrimination and to repair the harm caused by past discrimination and decades of segregation. You can help by lending your support for programs, policies, or legislation that would advance a fair housing agenda. Speak with your local fair housing organization to find out ways you can be involved in these efforts.

22. SPEAK OUT AGAINST HATE CRIMES, BIGOTRY, INTOLERANCE, AND DISCRIMINATION OF ANY KIND WHEN IT SURFACES.

Use your voice individually and through your networks to condemn acts of hatred, bigotry, and intolerance of any kind and insist that your community remain open and welcoming to all. Show your support for people who are the target of hate crimes.

23. ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC SPACES AND HOUSING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO BE OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

Fair housing is also about ensuring that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to fully participate in the life of the community. That is not possible when public spaces and/or much of the housing is not accessible. Accessibility is a civil right. Work with local fair housing groups and disability rights organizations to advocate for more accessible housing and public spaces.

24. ADVOCATE FOR INTEGRATED, EQUITABLE, AND HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS.

Educational equality and fair housing go hand in hand. Integrated, equitable, and high-performing schools can foster more housing integration, and housing integration can lead to more integrated schools. If you are on a PTSA, school board, or are simply a concerned parent, get involved and find out if there are ways to ensure that schools in your community serve diverse student populations in an equitable manner and are delivering a high-quality educational experience to all.

25. ADVOCATE FOR SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMS THAT FOSTER GREATER UNDERSTANDING, TOLERANCE, AND RESPECT FOR OTHERS.

Find out if the curriculum at your children's schools teaches the history of discrimination and residential segregation. Work with schools to ensure that this history is taught in social studies, American history, and other classes. Encourage your school to include fair housing as part of special programs designed to better prepare students for living in a pluralistic, multiracial, and multicultural world.

26. PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN HIGH-POVERTY OR ECONOMICALLY DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES.

For every neighborhood to become a place of opportunity, a substantial infusion of public and private resources will need to be devoted to economic development, job-creation programs, school improvements, infrastructure development, etc. Local neighborhood organizations, community development corporations, and tenant organizations offer opportunities for people to become involved in advocating for these and other changes.

27. COMPOSE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OR OP-ED ARTICLES SUPPORTING FAIR HOUSING ISSUES.

Op-eds and letters to the editor are excellent ways to express your concerns and make your views known on vital fair housing issues. A dispute over the construction of affordable housing, a hate crime incident, proposed legislation that would weaken fair housing laws, and a decision to zone out group homes for people with disabilities are just a few of the issues that might prompt you to compose an op-ed article. Check with your local newspapers and other media outlets for their guidelines on submitting op-eds and letters to the editor. If you need assistance with your op-ed, call your local fair housing organization.

28. ATTEND A FAIR HOUSING COURT HEARING OR TRIAL TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE VICTIM OF DISCRIMINATION.

Fair housing hearings and trials do not happen often as most cases settle, but when they do go forward, it is important for the trier of fact to see that the community finds housing discrimination a matter of great public importance by showing up in the courtroom to watch the proceedings. Your local fair housing organization can provide you with notice about when a hearing or trial is scheduled so that you can try to attend.

29. TESTIFY AT PUBLIC HEARINGS AND BEFORE LEGISLATIVE BODIES ON PRESSING FAIR HOUSING ISSUES.

Voice your concerns or support for proposed legislation or regulations that impact fair housing rights and opportunities. Too often, legislators make decisions without the benefit of hearing from people who care about fair housing and those who place a high value on ensuring that their communities are open to all. If you are unable to attend a hearing, write to your legislators and let them know your opinion, that you vote, and that you support fair housing.

30. ORGANIZE OR PARTICIPATE IN A RALLY, DEMONSTRATION, OR PETITION-DRIVE ON A FAIR HOUSING ISSUE.

Join with local fair housing and civil rights organizations when actions are planned to support or protest an issue that impacts fair housing within the region. Organized, non-violent action campaigns were often necessary fifty years ago to pass fair housing laws and there may be occasions when such tactics are still necessary to see that these laws are enforced and that fair housing rights are fully protected.