



Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Announcing: Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California Releases Report of Investigation into Discriminatory Housing Policies Related to Source of Income and Race

San Rafael, CA – This month Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California (FHANC) released a report of their investigation into discrimination against prospective Black housing choice voucher holders in Marin, Sonoma, and Solano counties. While discrimination on the basis of a renter’s source of income has been illegal in California for some time, it was not until 2020 that these protections were extended to voucher holders – most commonly people with Section 8 vouchers – who have historically experienced barriers to housing opportunity based on their voucher status as well as membership in other protected classes.

The investigation of sixty-nine (69) rental properties in the tri-county area was carried out from December 2021 through April 2022, with 27 properties in Marin County, 22 in Solano County, and 20 in Sonoma County. Trained pairs of testers – one Black, one white – posing as potential renters with housing choice vouchers, called to inquire about whether the property accepted Section 8 vouchers and, if so, whether voucher holders were required to meet a minimum income threshold in order to qualify for the unit. At over 70% of the housing providers FHANC tested, there was evidence of discrimination on the basis of race and/or source of income; with evidence of discrimination at 62% on the basis of source of income, and 42% on the basis of race.

Tests conducted in Sonoma County revealed the highest incidence of race discrimination (63%) and source of income discrimination (88%), with 92% revealing at least some evidence of either or both. Housing providers in Solano County evidenced the least discrimination, with 32% of tests revealing evidence of race discrimination and 44% revealing evidence of source of income discrimination.

Tests at large properties showed significantly less evidence of source of income discrimination (36%) than tests conducted at small and medium sized properties (both around 68%). Email and phone tests uncovered evidence of source of income discrimination at almost the exact same rate.

“The results of our investigation plainly show that despite the recent expansion of California’s fair housing laws protecting source of income, people with housing subsidies still face significant barriers in housing,” said Caroline Peattie, Executive Director of FHANC. “It’s clear that more enforcement actions are needed, as well as increased education and outreach to property owners and managers, particularly those of smaller properties and in areas where instances of discrimination were the highest. The fact that housing providers were willing to

A local non-profit helping communities eliminate housing discrimination

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openly state their discriminatory voucher policies suggests that at least some may have been unaware of their legal obligations, which really points to the need for increased education and outreach.”

The report makes a number of recommendations, including disseminating the report to officials in the tri-county area as well as the general public, media, and advocacy groups as an important educational tool; monitoring the sites where there was an indication of differential treatment and taking possible enforcement action; training private and public housing providers (e.g. public housing authorities) and working with them to ensure they understand the law; conducting additional audits; assessing whether a public housing authority’s payment standards are at appropriate levels and increasing search times for voucher holders given the limited housing options and barriers they face; and spreading the word to potential targets of discrimination.

“It’s really difficult to find any kind of affordable housing in the Bay Area now,” said Peattie. “This report points out how much more difficult it is for someone who has a housing voucher to find a place to live – and for a Black renter with a housing voucher, it may feel impossible. We need to redouble our efforts to make sure housing providers not only understand the law but comply with it, and start removing barriers for those with housing subsidies.”

If you feel you may have experienced housing discrimination, contact FHANC’s office to complete an interview. Fill out an online intake at <https://www.fairhousingnorcal.org/> or contact FHANC at fhanc@fairhousingnorcal.org or 415-457-5025 x101.

Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California (FHANC) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to ensure equal housing opportunity and to educate our communities on the value of diversity in our neighborhoods. FHANC serves several Bay Area counties and provides free counseling, enforcement, mediation, and legal or administrative referrals to persons experiencing housing discrimination. Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California also offers foreclosure prevention counseling, pre-purchase education, seminars to help housing providers fully understand fair housing law, and education programs for tenants and the community at large. Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California is a HUD-Certified Housing Counseling Agency. Please call Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California at (415) 457-5025 or TDD: (800) 735-2922 for more information. Note: This material is based on work supported by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under FHIP PEI Grant FPEI190035. Any opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of HUD.