



Press Release for Immediate Use

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Fair Housing Center of West Michigan Announces Startling Increase in Housing Discrimination

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., April 22, 2008 -- Despite 40 years of federal Fair Housing law, the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan and its Board of Directors announced today that the rate of illegal housing discrimination in west Michigan is the highest ever recorded in the region. In recent years, the Center and its staff found evidence of discrimination in roughly 1/3 of its investigations into housing discrimination allegations, based on protected classes under law (race, color, religion, national origin, disability, familial status, gender, marital status and age). During 2007, the Center investigated 154 complaints of housing discrimination and **uncovered evidence in a startling 40% of its investigations**. Even more staggering, evidence of housing **discrimination based on race was found in 45%** of the investigations. Race remains the most common basis for investigation at the Center and has the highest rate of evidence in investigations each year.

Nancy Haynes, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan, stated, "While we commemorate forty years of work to eradicate illegal housing discrimination in this month nationally dedicated to fair housing, the Center remains committed to this important work as evidence of housing discrimination rises to historic levels in west Michigan. These high rates point to several areas of concern as we look at attracting talent, investments and business from around the globe. If the first thing an individual or family relocating to the area experiences is discrimination or steering, are they going to feel welcome? Are they going to stay in west Michigan and invest in our communities?" Discrimination markedly limits housing opportunities throughout Kent and the ten surrounding counties serviced by the Center, thus deterring consumers, homebuyers, renters, investors, and others from freely entering and participating in the community. Limited housing choice often gives way to lost housing choice as many people ultimately relocate to alternative regions. Ms. Haynes commented, "Opening doors to housing choice is a key component of healthy, growing communities. How will we continue to grow and succeed if people are turned away?"

The Fair Housing Center of West Michigan is a private, non-profit organization established in 1980 to eliminate practices of housing discrimination and promote diverse open communities through education and advocacy. The Center's education and enforcement-oriented programs are designed to further Title VIII of the 1968 Civil Rights Act, also known as the Fair Housing Act. The Center works to eliminate housing discrimination based upon the federally protected categories of race, religion, national origin, color, gender, familial status and disability status as well as the state protected classes of age and marital status. The Fair Housing Center also works with municipalities to enforce local fair housing ordinances protecting sexual orientation and legal and verifiable sources of income. More information is available online at www.fhcwm.org.

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