30th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series:
Opening Doors to Housing Choice

Crowd of 500 Celebrates 30 Years of Successful Fair Housing Events
The Fair Housing Center is very pleased to announce that a record 510 people registered to attend this year’s Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series on Thursday, April 27. The event kicked-off with sold-out workshops on Hot Topics in Fair Housing, Putting Out the Welcome Mat for Seniors, and Ensuring Fair Housing in Today’s Market. Luncheon keynote speaker Wade Henderson, long-time President & CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (LCCR), spoke on his experience as a civil rights lawyer and his life’s work to address systemic and individual cases of discrimination and injustice. Mr. Henderson connected the milestone legislative efforts intended to lift up the Civil Rights movement, and work adopted by small organizations, that have since then continued the civil rights mission for equal access and opportunities in all communities. On reflecting the importance of fair housing, Mr. Henderson shared the importance of why where you live matters, “of all the work you do, one of the fundamental takeaways is where you decide to live, or in some cases where someone else decides where you should live, is the single most important variable that effects your civil and human rights”. A sincere thank you to all who attended to mark this special occasion, our sponsors who made the day possible, and our incredible workshop panelists and keynote!

2017 Fair Housing Award Presented to Suzanne Schulz
Also on April 27, the Fair Housing Center presented a Fair Housing Award for Outstanding Effort by an Individual to Suzanne Schulz, Planning Director for the City of Grand Rapids. Ms. Schulz understands the importance of making room for all voices to be heard and has worked tirelessly to imbed the principals of access and equity into everything that she does. She shared words of encouragement to “stand up for Fair Housing in these difficult and uncertain times….[and] support the efforts” of the Center through membership and volunteering. She served on the Center’s Board of Directors for 10 years and, among many other roles, Co-Chaired the Center’s 49507! Project, an intensive 2+ year project of reinvesting settlement dollars in southeast Grand Rapids.

As part of the celebration, local spoken word artist Rachel Gleason provided a moving performance of her poem, “An Open Door”, which brought the crowd to its feet. Her poem weaves together the emotions and complexities that surround the idea of home, awareness of one’s own privilege, what it feels like to be turned away, and making self-observations that encourage those who have not encountered discrimination to consider the experiences of others. She is also a singer/songwriter and works with public school youth to develop writing and speaking skills.

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Our mission is to prevent and eliminate housing discrimination and ensure equal housing opportunity through education, advocacy and enforcement.
2017 Membership Drive Kicks Off
Founding member, staunch Fair Housing advocate and long-time donor, Carol Townsend, kicked off this year’s Membership Drive at the 30th luncheon to join the Center’s efforts as a member. Ms. Townsend stated that membership means knowing “that you are continuing to make a difference by being a part of an effort to open up housing opportunity” She highlighted the fact that the annual Membership Drive provides the Center unrestricted funding, which is critical to enabling the Center to meet its goals and achieve its mission. Membership dollars make it possible to take complaints, respond to requests for education and training, and conduct vital investigations without being limited by geographical or contractual constraints. The annual goal is to raise $12,000. Learn more and join online at www.fhcwm.org/giving.

Sold Out Workshop Series
The Center offered 3 concurrent morning workshops this year, attended by a record-setting 310 community members, fair housing advocates, and housing professionals.

The Putting Out the Welcome Mat for Seniors workshop featured several current hot topics and barriers faced by seniors in housing including hoarding, reasonable accommodations for assistance animals, aging in place, and other local services available to seniors throughout west Michigan. Panelists included Laura Arandes (Relman, Dane & Colfax), John Smith (Legal Aid of Western Michigan), Deb Davis and Becky Canale (Paws for a Cause), Grand Rapids Area Hoarding Taskforce Co-Chairs Eric Jordan (City of Grand Rapids) and Shelly Weiss (Grand Rapids Police Department); Elizabeth Stoddard (the Center’s Director of Advocacy) moderated. This workshop offered 3 hours of Continuing Education for social workers, and was made possible through the support of the Kent County Senior Millage.

The Ensuring Fair Housing in Today’s Market workshop started with a look at the history behind housing discrimination and segregation as the foundation for a lot of today’s inequities. Many topics were raised, including access to credit, the ongoing fallout of the foreclosure crisis, evolving forms of housing discrimination, and gentrification among others; the panel also shared efforts underway to address disparities and concerns brought forth by the community. Cathy Cloud (National Fair Housing Alliance), Ruth Kelly (Grand Rapids City Commission), E’toile Libbett (Real Estate One,) and Paul Isely (Grand Valley State University); Laurie Craft (Grand Rapids Community Foundation) moderated. This workshop was made possible by the City of Kent.

The Hot Topics in Fair Housing: Sales and Lending Legal Update workshop provided fair housing legal updates on sales and lending cases, examples of cases and best practices learned from systemic investigations under fair housing and fair lending laws. Panelists included Steve Dane (Relman, Dane & Colfax), Erin Kemple (Connecticut Fair Housing Center) and Jim McCarthy (Miami Valley Fair Housing Center); Lee Nelson Weber (Fair Housing Center’s former Executive Director) moderated. This session offered 3 hours of Continuing Education for real estate professionals, and was made possible by the City of Grand Rapids Community Development Department.
The Center’s Fact Sheet on Occupancy Standards

The Fair Housing Center of West Michigan is pleased to provide a NEW fact sheet focusing on best practices relating to occupancy standards. The Center has seen an increasing number of fair housing cases challenging overly restrictive occupancy standards that limit the number of people that can reside in a manufactured home, apartment, townhome or condominium. The Fair Housing Act specifically allows housing providers to adhere to reasonable local, State, or Federal restrictions regarding the maximum number of occupants permitted to occupy a dwelling (42 U.S.C. 3607(b)(1)). Such restrictions may include property maintenance codes, zoning codes, or other similar provisions. These occupancy restrictions often take into account factors such as the number and size of sleeping areas or bedrooms, the overall size and/or configuration of the unit, and/or other physical limitations of the housing, such as septic capacity.

Reasonable occupancy standards have become a hot topic due to the outdated “two people per bedroom” standard coming under heightened scrutiny; it has been found to be discriminatory against families with children in an increasing number of fair housing cases. Occupancy standards should be no more restrictive than local health and safety standards or other governmental restrictions that limit the maximum number of occupants within a dwelling. The allowable number of occupants is usually based on the size of the unit, with particular emphasis on the square footage (SF) of the bedrooms and living areas. These requirements can often be found in the “Property Maintenance Code” or other similar provision of the city or township where the property is located. Many cities and townships have adopted the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). The chart below details the area requirements under the 2015 IPMC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>1-2 occupants</th>
<th>3-5 occupants</th>
<th>6+ occupants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living Room</td>
<td>120 SF</td>
<td>120 SF</td>
<td>150 SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining Room</td>
<td>No requirement</td>
<td>80 SF</td>
<td>100 SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedrooms</td>
<td>50 SF per occupant (minimum of 70 SF for a bedroom for one occupant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please visit our website to download copies of this new Fact Sheet as well as other resource materials at fhcwm.org/publications.

Client Corner

The Fair Housing Center was contacted by a family that had been ordered to vacate their condominium that they had owned for almost 6 years because after they had a second child the total number of people in their two-bedroom condo rose to 4. The antiquated bylaws held by the condominium association stated that no more than 3 people could reside in the condominium. The Center assisted the family in asserting their fair housing rights, and educated the condominium association about fair housing protections regarding families with children. The Center directly corresponded with the condominium association and informed them that the occupancy standards outlined in the association’s bylaws were more restrictive than what local code dictated; the Center explained that the bylaws had a discriminatory impact on families with children.

With the information about fair housing laws, the condominium association reversed their decision to order the family to vacate, and also voted to cease enforcing the occupancy standards in the bylaws until they were reviewed and updated by an attorney.

After the successful resolution of the case, the client stated, “I am so thankful for the advocacy, quick resolution and empowerment that was provided to me and my family. Thankfully, I was not only able to stay in my home, but also this situation has become the catalyst for the association updating their bylaws to ensure they are in compliance with Fair Housing Laws.”

Fair Housing Center Case Update

Since April 1, 2017, the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan has filed over 10 complaints of illegal housing discrimination with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights in the name of the Center and/or individuals. These cases involved the following allegations, among others:

- Overly restrictive occupancy standards resulting in refusal to rent to families with children
- Refusal to accommodate an individual’s need to park a motorized wheelchair in an accessible location when leaving the building
- Differences in treatment on the basis of race
- Differences in treatment on the basis of national origin
- Refusal to accommodate assistance animals
- Refusal to make accommodations to application procedures requiring in-person submission

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Please visit our website: www.fhcwm.org
The Fair Housing Center of West Michigan and local spoken word collective, The Diatribe, are partnering to create a fair housing and social justice themed course for high school students. The program is still under review and in a pilot-period. Students who participated in the pilot program were asked to complete a survey. Many students indicated an increased understanding of fair housing, systemic discrimination, and wanted to learn more about community projects and initiatives. The Center will announce when this program is available to the general public, but invites those interested in learning more to contact the Center’s office!

**Fair Housing Book Club**
The Fair Housing Center’s Book Clubs have been reading some great books: *Detroit Hustle: A Memoir of Life, Love and Home* by Amy Haimerl and *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond. Read along with us: [www.fhcwm.org/booksweveread](http://www.fhcwm.org/booksweveread) or send an email request to contact-us@fhcwm.org to be added to our Book Club email alerts! We meet at **11:45 am** in our office (20 Hall Street SE, Grand Rapids) or the Coldwell Banker office (466 E. 16th St. Holland). Bring a lunch, a friend and join the discussion!

**Fair Housing Trainings**
The Fair Housing Center offers fair housing trainings, including Fair Housing & Advertising, Fair Housing Training for Rental Professionals and Fair Lending sessions. Costs vary depending on the type of training. Each training is 3 hours and includes a comprehensive packet of reference materials.

Some sessions are held at the Fair Housing Center; we can also come to your location. Call Liz Keegan at (616) 451-2980 to learn more or register. **Check our website home page for upcoming dates: [www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org).**

The Fair Housing Center hosts **tester trainings** each month. Testers are volunteers that play the role of a homeseeker and receive a stipend in return for their time and services. In order to accommodate differing schedules, one training will take place during business hours while the other will be held in the evening. For the specific training dates, to register, or any other questions contact Gabe Chapla at (616) 451-2980.