



FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

Volume II — 2018

50th Anniversary Draws Record Support for Fair Housing

Honoring 50 Years of Fair Housing

A record-setting 530 people attended the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan’s annual *Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series* on Thursday, April 19, 2018. This year’s event honored the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Fair Housing Act on April 11, 1968. The event kicked-off with three powerful morning workshops: *Challenging Implicit Bias*, *Changing Assumptions about Housing for Seniors*, and *Fighting for the Future of Fair Housing*.



Luncheon keynote speaker **John Relman** is the founder and director of Relman, Dane & Colfax, PLLC, one of the nation’s most distinguished civil rights law firms. Mr. Relman shared compelling fair housing cases, maps and statistics that highlighted historical patterns of discrimination, segregation and disparity and their relationship to current issues impacting fair housing and equity.

Mr. Relman challenged the audience to recognize and confront current, systemic barriers to fair housing. Mr. Relman’s presentation demonstrated the importance and relevance of ongoing work against housing discrimination, and continuing to work toward the goals of the Fair Housing Act set over 50 years ago.

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 speaker!

Powerful Poetry Performance, “The Stories They Share”, Debuts



During the luncheon, local spoken word artist **Marcel ‘Fable’ Price** provided a moving, debut performance of his poem, “The Stories They Share”. This poem, written in honor of this event, draws from Fable’s experience delivering fair housing curriculum to Grand Rapids high school students in a partnership between The Diatribe and the Center. “The Stories They Share”

touches on how the curriculum arms youth to be “woke” about present/past civil rights issues, national tragedies, and current events. It weaves in the power and strength of our youth, how their voices can be used to stand up for inequality, especially if they continue to educate themselves, and the need to protect and uplift those voices. The poem ends with a call to, “March on.”

The Center was privileged that students from both Union High School and CA Frost Environmental Science Academy, who participated in the fair housing curricula delivered by The Diatribe, were able to attend the event and witness firsthand Fable’s compelling performance.

Record-Setting Membership Kick Off

Thanks to a successful kick off at the event, a record-setting 70 individual, business, and corporate members have joined the Center’s membership drive to date, providing over \$7,000 in unrestricted funds! See P. 2 for more on the Membership Drive, and comments from membership drive co-chairs **Julie Reitberg** and **Dale Zahn**.

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...Fair Housing Center Notes & News...

2018 Membership Drive Kicks Off



Fair Housing partners and long-time advocates, **Julie Reitberg**, CEO of Greater Regional Alliance of REALTORS, and **Dale Zahn**, CEO of West Michigan Lakeshore Association of REALTORS, very successfully launched this year's Membership Drive at the annual luncheon. Ms. Reitberg cited the historic and vital relationship between the housing industry and civil rights efforts. Mr. Zahn spoke to the importance of becoming a member, and provided a powerful call to action to the luncheon attendees, urging those to get involved. 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.



Membership Drive
Progress to Date





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Fair Housing Workshop Series

This year's concurrent morning workshops were attended by a record-setting 320 housing professionals, community members, and advocates.

The **Changing Assumptions about Housing for Seniors** workshop opened with a legal update featuring fair housing cases in senior housing from civil rights attorney Yiyang Wu (Relman, Dane & Colfax). Alan Headbloom (Headbloom Cross-Cultural Communication) joined the panel to highlight common assumptions made based on a person's age or disability, to provide an understanding of cultural assumptions and implicit bias, and to assist participants in finding ways to identify and challenge such behavior; 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 **Fighting for the Future of Fair Housing** workshop started with Lisa Rice (President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Fair Housing Alliance), who framed a conversation around sustaining the momentum of fair housing in west Michigan, especially given the rising concerns around the future of our cities and equal access for all persons to housing and related opportunities. Maurice McGough (Region V Office of HUD), Connie Bohatch (Community Services, City of Grand Rapids), and Pam Kisch (Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan) joined the panel to provide regional and local perspectives; Lee Nelson Weber (FHCWM's former Executive Director) moderated. This workshop was made possible by the County of Kent.



The **Challenging Implicit Bias** workshop began with presentations from Jillian Olinger and Kelly Capatosto from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University. The co-authors of a recent report, "Challenging Race as Risk: How Implicit Bias undermines housing opportunity in America—and what we can do about it", shared information to help attendees understand and recognize implicit bias, and discuss ways to move forward. Amy Nelson (Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana) discussed current fair housing trends, common fair housing sales and lending violations, and best practices; Gwen Moffitt (Michigan Department of Civil Rights) 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.



...Fair Housing Center Notes & News...

Fair Housing Act and ASL Interpreters:

Equal Access for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

The Fair Housing Act (FHAct) protects the right of people who are deaf or hard of hearing to request a reasonable accommodation or modification in housing or a housing-related transaction; this includes the right to request an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter or use of other interpretive or communication services. A refusal of a housing provider (i.e. landlord, leasing agent, property manager, real estate agent, mortgage lender, etc.) to provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpretations for critical communications pertaining to the lease or other housing-related negotiations may constitute illegal housing discrimination under the FHAct. Fair housing case law supports the need for the housing provider to engage, and potentially provide, interpretive services, especially where the context of the communication is related to significant housing-related services, such as lease negotiations or signing legal documents. A refusal to grant a reasonable accommodation request for an ASL interpreter for such significant housing-related services may likely violate the FHA.

Here are some case examples:

Kerr v. Heather Gardens Association (2010) raised the question around a housing provider's responsibility to provide ASL interpreters. Ms. Kerr needed a sign language interpreter available during board meetings and other Community Center events. The court found that the housing provider was required to provide effective communication at board meetings, as the meetings were essential to the housing process.

Fair Housing Justice Center, Inc. v. Allure Rehab. Services, LLC (2017) found that the facilities' policy and practice of refusing to provide ASL interpreters to potential or future residents or to even *consider* providing interpreters, would constitute a violation of the FHAct. The court also found that such outright refusals would be discriminatory statements made in connection with the housing market, and therefore a violation of the FHAct as well.



Best practices might include:

- Maintaining contact information for local, professional American Sign Language interpreting services for in-person contact and video relay service (VRS) for phone calls.
- Incorporating practices and policies that would provide communication with those using ASL, at no cost to the prospective or current resident.
- Making communication access and service available and appropriate for housing applicants and residents who are deaf and hard of hearing, including, but not limited to, the following: qualified sign language interpreters; oral interpreters; and certified deaf interpreters.
- Providing ASL interpreters in person for any physical visit, and through video relay services, at no cost, for telephone calls.
- Ensuring that all employees are aware of their obligations to communicate and negotiate with deaf or hard of hearing individuals and to provide reasonable accommodations or permit reasonable modifications when needed.
- Being prepared to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing individuals who are not fluent in the English language.
- Handling all requests for interpreters or alternative communication with prompt attention, respect, and meaningful engagement in the interactive process of a reasonable accommodation.
- Training staff about working with ASL interpreters, video relay service, and other interpretive services.

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Please visit our web site: www.fhcwm.org

...Fair Housing Center News & Events...



Save The Date!

The FHCWM invites you to mark your calendar for Thursday, October 4, 2018 for our 12th Annual Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing Breakfast! This event will feature Bob Schwemm (the Ashland-Spears Distinguished Research Professor and Everett H. Metcalf, Jr Professor of Law at the University of Kentucky College of Law) as the keynote speaker. Mr. Schwemm will discuss fair housing cases of note as well as share his thoughts on the 50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act. If you are interested in sponsoring this event, please contact Liz Keegan at (616) 451-2980.

Follow Us on Facebook!

Did you know? The FHCWM is posting information weekly on Facebook as we continue to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act. Posts include case data on specific trends and/or protected classes; client stories and photos; book and movie recommendations; infographics, PSAs and much more. Please follow our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/fhcwm>.



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.**

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.

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