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## **Housing Discrimination Complaints Reach 19-year High in Northeast Ohio: Most Filed Based on Race and Disability**

Complaints of housing discrimination in Northeast Ohio reached their highest level in 19 years in 2008, with 254 filed – more than twice as many as in 2007 – according to a new report issued by the Housing Research & Advocacy Center in Cleveland. In addition, the number of cases filed based on race, disability, national origin, and religion reached a 19-year high in 2008.

The report, based on the number of complaints filed in the region with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), also examined trends in discrimination complaints over the last ten years, finding a 73% increase in complaints filed from 2004-2008, when an average of 160.6 complaints were filed each year, compared to the previous five-year period, when the yearly average was 92.8. This increase was due to a doubling of the number of cases brought for discrimination based on disability (from 130 to 268) and a 65% increase in the number of cases brought based on race (from 163 to 269). The most common bases of discrimination alleged in complaints filed in 2004-2008 were race (33.5% of complaints filed), disability (33.4%), and familial status (12.1%).

Jeffrey D. Dillman, Executive Director of the Housing Center, stated, “It is disturbing that we continue to see such a high number of discrimination complaints filed in the region – the most in 19 years – at a time when many in our community are struggling with the impact of foreclosures, unemployment, and an unprecedented economic crisis.” The Housing Center estimates that there are annually at least 33,690 instances of housing discrimination in the region against African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the rental and sales markets, meaning the vast majority of cases are never reported to a government agency.

The report, entitled “The State of Fair Housing in Northeast Ohio: April 2009,” is the Housing Center’s fourth annual comprehensive survey of fair housing in Northeast Ohio, analyzing housing discrimination and segregation in a six-county region (Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina Counties). The other findings of the report include that:

- the number of cases brought based on religion, sex/gender, familial status, and national origin also increased from the period 1999-2003 to the period 2004-2008;
- from 1990 to 2008, cases filed based on race accounted for 40.9% of the total, compared to 24.2% for handicap, and 17.1% for familial status
- *upper* income African Americans were denied more home mortgage loans than *low* income whites, and for those individuals who obtained loans, upper income African Americans were two and one-quarter times more likely to obtain high-cost home purchase loans as low-income whites (37.1% compared to 16.6%);
- 54 local governments in the region have passed fair housing ordinances – 35 in Cuyahoga County, compared to nine in Lorain County, four in Medina County, three in Ashtabula County, and three in Lake County. There are no local fair housing ordinances in Geauga County.

Dillman continued, “This past year has brought about huge political changes across the country. But what we need now is a commitment by governments at all levels to address the continuing problems of housing discrimination and housing segregation.”

Federal law prohibits discrimination in the rental or sale of housing, and in the mortgage lending and homeowners insurance markets, based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status and handicap. In addition, Ohio law prohibits discrimination based on ancestry, and military status.

The report recommends enacting stronger local fair housing laws, restoring Ohio’s fair housing law to make it equivalent to federal fair housing law, implementing comprehensive education efforts, vigorously enforcing fair housing laws at all levels through systemic testing for discrimination as a means of addressing housing discrimination in the region, and increasing monitoring and investigations of mortgage lenders.

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The Housing Research & Advocacy Center is a nonprofit fair housing organization whose mission is to eliminate housing discrimination and assure choice in Northeast Ohio by providing those at risk with effective information, intervention and advocacy. The Housing Center is a member of Greater Cleveland Community Shares.