



Housing Research & Advocacy Center
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Fair Housing Group Finds Widespread Discrimination in Internet Ads Files 53 Complaints Alleging Preferences Based on Familial Status, Race, and Other Grounds

On November 10, 2008, the Housing Research & Advocacy Center (the “Housing Center”) filed 53 separate complaints with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development alleging discrimination in the advertisement of Cleveland-area housing on the internet. The complaints allege that craigslist.com, several other internet service providers, and individual housing providers violated federal and state fair housing laws by posting illegal advertisements for housing that expressed preferences and/or exclusions based on familial status (the presence of children), race, national origin, and sex.

The complaints were based on a project undertaken by the Housing Center earlier this year in which it monitored local on-line housing advertisements in the Cleveland, Ohio, metropolitan area. During this time, the Housing Center found numerous ads with language indicating familial status violations, using language such as “adults only,” “no children,” and “for one single adult.” A smaller number of ads were also found indicating a preference or limitation based on race, national origin, and gender.

“Discriminatory advertisements for housing not only discourage individuals from seeking out certain housing but they also convey to the community at large that it is acceptable and legal to choose tenants based on race, national origin, familial status, or other similar grounds,” noted Jeffrey D. Dillman, Executive Director of the Housing Center.

Federal and state fair housing laws prohibit discrimination based on an individual’s race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, and disability. Under these laws, it is illegal to make a statement or place an advertisement for housing expressing a preference or limitation based on one of these grounds. Both the individual who places such an ad, as well as a publisher, such as a newspaper or magazine, are potentially liable. Regulatory guidance from HUD indicates that internet service providers such as craigslist.com are required to follow the same rules as print publishers.

Mr. Dillman continued, “In filing these cases, we want to ensure that landlords, property managers, and other housing providers do not express illegal preferences or limitations in violation of federal and state law. But we also believe that the internet companies that are allowing such ads to be posted should implement screening mechanisms, which newspapers and other print publications already use, to prevent such illegal advertisements from running.”

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.

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