



North Penn Legal Services is pleased to announce April as Fair Housing Month. All of our work is made possible by the funders of the Lehigh Valley Fair Housing Project. Since 2012, NPLS has partnered with Lehigh County, Northampton County, the city of Allentown, the city of Bethlehem, and the city of Easton to help low-income people with their fair housing issues. More than 1,000 people have received training to recognize housing discrimination.

## **Why is April Fair Housing Month?**

Across the country, fair housing organizations, community justice and advocacy groups, along with federal and state housing agencies recognize April as Fair Housing Month. On April 11, 1968, the Federal Fair Housing Act was enacted. The Fair Housing Act prohibited discrimination in the rental, purchase and financing of dwellings based on race, color, national origin and religion. Each year thereafter, we commemorate the efforts to outlaw discrimination in housing and ensure equal enjoyment of housing opportunities to all. Outreaches, trainings and public events are plentiful during April; information is available online and there may be an event in your community.

This year, we recognized the 47th anniversary of the Federal Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. §§3601 – 3619.2 (1968), Title VIII of Civil Rights which made illegal housing discrimination because of an individual's race, color, ethnicity, or religion. ([http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/aboutfheo/history](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/aboutfheo/history)). The enactment of the Fair Housing Act on April 11, 1968, came 7 days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A short film, created just over a year ago, depicts the efforts to pass this important legislation as a legacy to the efforts of Dr. King to end housing discrimination. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/07/mlk-fair-housing-act-seven-days-documentary\\_n\\_4745951.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/07/mlk-fair-housing-act-seven-days-documentary_n_4745951.html)

On April 1, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. the Office of Housing and Urban Development is hosting a celebration to begin Fair Housing month, and a live stream is available of the speakers.

<http://portalapps.hud.gov/HUDMediaChannel/liveplayer.jsp> (without captions);

[http://portalapps.hud.gov/HUDMediaChannel/liveplayer\\_secondary.jsp](http://portalapps.hud.gov/HUDMediaChannel/liveplayer_secondary.jsp) (with captions).

Gender discrimination was added as a protected class in 1973. In February 2012, federal regulations adopted by HUD prohibited discrimination based upon sexual orientations and gender identity in HUD housing programs and FHA insured programs. <https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=12lgbtfinalrule.pdf> However, these protections have not been expanded to the federal Fair Housing Act, which would provide explicit protection and extend that protection to private housing covered by the Act. In addition, Pennsylvania has failed to amend the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act to protect persons on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Many cities, including Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton in the Lehigh Valley, have passed local ordinances against such discrimination. Localities may expand protections in their jurisdiction, but they cannot limit federal or state protections.

In 1988, the Fair Housing Act Amendments provided for equal enjoyment of housing for people with disabilities and families with children. Provisions in the FHHA providing accessible building standards for multi-family units became effective in 1991, twenty-four years ago. Despite this, lawsuits have been filed locally and around the country against developers whose properties allegedly are not designed as accessible. Some recent headlines include; "Bethlehem Township, Pa., condos illegal because they effectively forbid residents who use wheelchairs, lawsuit says."

[http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/index.ssf/2014/07/bethlehem\\_township\\_pa\\_condos\\_i.html](http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/index.ssf/2014/07/bethlehem_township_pa_condos_i.html); "Civil Rights Groups File Lawsuit against Rudeen Development for Fair Housing Act Violations."

<http://www.nationalfairhousing.org/>.

North Penn Legal Services and the Fair Housing Equality Center are co-hosting a Fair Housing Seminar in Bethlehem, PA on April 9, 2015, entitled "Promoting Accessibility in Housing". The training, presented by Accessibility First, will review the seven design requirements for accessible housing, along with training on reasonable accommodation and modification requests by persons with disabilities to allow equal enjoyment of housing opportunities. The training is geared toward housing professionals, including those involved in design, construction and management of local properties, and is now sold out. In addition, North Penn Legal Services offers Continuing Legal Education programs and training on fair housing, rental housing and mortgage foreclosure. On April 10, 2015, a one hour CLE Lunch and Learn will be offered at the Bar Association of Lehigh County, entitled "The Intersection of Housing and Consumer Law. Contact Nancy Devers at 610-433-6401, ext. 16 to register. If your agency would be interested in such training for staff or consumers, please contact Lori Molloy in our Bethlehem office at 610-317-8757, ext. 5306 to make arrangements.

NPLS offers a self-help page full of resources such as handbooks, links, and FAQ's. Please share the link with your colleagues and members of the community.

[Link to the Fair Housing Resource page on NPLS' website](#)