

Fair Housing Act fights discrimination

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became law, those who had been discriminated against had no form of defense, Henderson said.

The Fair Housing Act created an increase in discrimination complaints because more people became aware of their rights, he said.

In the 1960s, many minorities were forced to live in the same neighborhood because of a process called racial steering, Henderson said.

Racial steering happens when real estate agents that encourage minorities to buy property in a certain area while discouraging white people from living there, Henderson said.

The area affected by racial steering, known as the Malone neighborhood, is still heavily occupied by minorities, said Barb Morley, former president of the Malone Neighborhood Association.

The Malone neighborhood currently extends from O to Y streets and 19th to 27th streets, she said.

Morley feels minorities are still steered to the Malone neighborhood.

"I think there's a lot of prejudice still in Lincoln," Morley said.

In the past, many people were discouraged from living in the Malone area because of its proximity to the downtown and university areas and the possibility of expansion in those areas, Morley said.

But now, living near the areas is viewed as convenient, Morley said.

"What once was considered negative is now positive," she said.

Even though there's still discrimination, the Malone neighborhood continues to improve, she said.

"I think it's the best place in Lincoln to live," she said. "I love the people."

Currently, several businesses that rent out apartments use practices that enable them to decide whether to rent to individuals without even seeing them.

Vernon Anderson, leasing manager for Commercial Investment Properties, which has 11 complexes in Lincoln, said applications are processed at a credit department.

The application department processes the housing requests and looks at rental history, income and credit history.

The department investigates by calling previous landlords and places of employment as well as examining credit history, Anderson said.

"Most of the time they never see the tenants," Anderson said.

Tanya Tiater, a leasing consultant at Colonial Heights Apartments, said Colonial Heights processes rental applications in a similar fashion.

Applications are faxed to a company in South Dakota, which looks at the prospective tenant's employment status, income and credit history.

"The application doesn't ask what ethnicity you are," Tiater said.

However, not all feel they've been treated fairly, which could lead them to file a discrimination complaint.

Complaints can be investigated by the Commission on Human Rights and the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission, and individuals may also choose to contact a lawyer and go to court, said Larry Williams, executive director of the Commission on Human Rights.

In 1999, there were four complaints filed related to discrimination and housing because of race, Williams said.

Three cases were dismissed because there was no reasonable cause of discrimination, and one case was settled.

Williams said the number of cases filed in 1999 is not reflective of the discrimination that is occurring.

The number may seem low because many people are not aware of what they can do if they feel they've been discriminated against, he said.

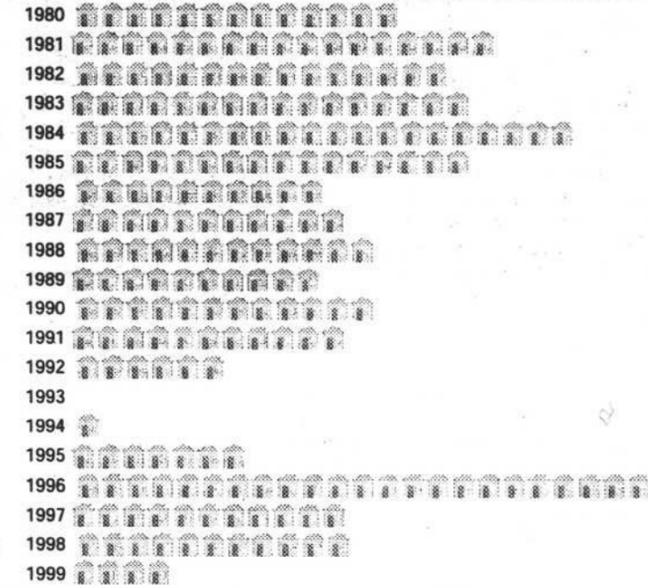
The Human Rights Commission has been working hard to let people know that there is a service available, and it's free of charge, he said.

Williams also said that in 1996, 23 cases were filed for discrimination in housing.

"We're not really sure why that

Housing Hassles

The Lincoln Commission on Human Rights has records of cases filed for housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, religion, disability, national origin, retaliation, marital status, familial status and ancestry between 1980 and 1999.



TOTAL: 226

Source: Lincoln Commission on Human Rights

Melanie Falk/DN

happened," he said. "It wasn't an unusual year."

The most common type of discrimination in housing occurs when an individual schedules an appointment to look at an available house or apartment, and when he or she arrives, the owner or landlord informs the person it has already been rented or sold, Williams said.

Sometimes individuals find an ad the next day in the newspaper for the house or apartment they went to look at, even though they were told face to face it was sold, he said.

"Minorities sometimes get the run-around when looking for housing," Williams said.

He said with the increase of the immigrant population in Nebraska, there is a possibility for more discrimination in housing.

"We need to let people know what's happening," he said.

To better understand fair housing, said Gretchen Eure, director of the investigative unit for the Equal

Opportunity Commission, the commission is sponsoring a fair housing poster and essay contest at Lincoln Northeast High School.

This year's theme is "One Neighborhood, One America," Eure said.

The contest asks students to look at barriers individuals face when looking for housing.

Last year was the first year for the contest, and Eure said it was a success.

"We thought it was a good way to help students understand housing issues and possibly pass the information on to their parents," Eure said.

Williams said though the Commission on Human Rights receives the most complaints of discrimination in employment, housing is still an important issue, Williams said.

"I don't want to lessen the importance of the severity of discrimination in housing," he said. "We know it's going on."

UNMC says ads' timing coincidence

By Kimberly Sweet

Staff writer

A University of Nebraska Medical Center official defended a radio commercial that promotes research done at the medical center, saying it was only coincidental that it is running amid controversy over the use of fetal tissue in research.

Advertisements promoting a variety of research at the medical center in Omaha were planned months ago to be in line with an ad campaign launched to promote the Nebraska Health System, Harold Maurer, UNMC chancellor, told the NU Board of Regents at its monthly meeting Saturday.

The system was created when the medical center merged with Clarkson Hospital.

"(The ad) has to do with all kinds of research," Maurer said. "It doesn't say a word about fetal cell research."

During a public comment period of the meeting, Metro Right to Life leader Bob Blank said the center used tax dollars to "hard-sell the use of aborted babies in research."

The ad that started last Monday uses statistics from a survey done by Research! America that states 85 percent of Nebraskans feel the research is critical to health care in Nebraska, Maurer said.

NU Regent Drew Miller was quick to defend the ads and the medical center, saying the money came from private donations from the University of Nebraska Foundation. He said Blank and other anti-abortion leaders need to get the facts straight.

"First you lied about the university trafficking baby parts," Miller said. "Now you come to us today and say we are using tax-payer dollars when we've been using foundation dollars."

Maurer said the public has been receptive to the ads, which will continue for the next three weeks.

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