



U.S. CONGRESSWOMAN MAXINE WATERS

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Maxine Waters

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CONGRESSWOMAN WATERS HAILS LEGISLATION TO CRACK DOWN ON DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING

Washington, May 27, 2010 | Michael Levin ((202) 225-2201) | [0 comments](#)

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The Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, chaired by Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA), today approved legislation to enhance efforts to combat housing discrimination, passing the Housing Fairness Act of 2009 (H.R. 476) on a voice vote.

Congresswoman Waters is an original cosponsor and strong supporter of H.R. 476, which – along with a manager’s amendment that also passed the subcommittee today – reauthorizes the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) for five years, authorizes \$15 million annually for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer a nationwide testing program to measure housing discrimination, and requires HUD to implement a competitive matching grant program for nonprofits to study the causes and effects of housing discrimination.

“This legislation will help prevent millions of fair housing violations from taking place in America’s neediest communities,” said Congresswoman Waters. “FHIP was established to provide grants to fair housing centers to enforce fair housing laws and educate consumers, but the program has never been fully funded, and as a result many fair housing violations are occurring each year.”

Congresswoman Waters emphasized that H.R. 476 has strong bipartisan support, and she praised Congressman Al Green (D-TX) for working closely with Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), the subcommittee’s ranking member, to put together a manager’s amendment that includes changes requested by both Democrats and Republicans to improve the legislation.

The manager’s amendment provides greater oversight of FHIP and authorizes the Secretary of HUD to establish minimum quality standards for testing enforcement programs while strengthening the qualification requirements of testers. It will also expand the scope of the research provision to include veterans and military personnel who have also been targeted for housing discrimination. In addition, it increases the local matching grant portion of the testing program from 25 percent to 50 percent.

Housing Discrimination

Housing discrimination in America remains a widespread and serious problem. In January, Congresswoman Waters presided over a hearing at which witnesses testified about discrimination faced by minorities, person with disabilities, families with children and others when searching for housing and called for more testing to better prevent housing discrimination. According to a 2009 HUD report, more Americans are reporting incidents of housing discrimination than ever before, with disability and race cited as the leading factors.

The National Fair Housing Alliance estimates that approximately four million fair housing violations occur each year. Although the vast majority of violations go unreported, more than 30,000 fair housing complaints were filed in 2008, the highest number in history.

Government agencies responsible for overseeing and enforcing housing policies actually process only a fraction of discrimination complaints. Private nonprofit fair housing groups processed approximately 20,000 complaints, which was 66 percent of the total complaint load in 2008. HUD processed 2,100 complaints, and state and local agencies processed 8,429. The U.S. Department of Justice filed 33 fair housing cases that year.

“It is clear that federal agencies have either been unable or unwilling to effectively identify and address the issue of housing discrimination,” Congresswoman Waters said. “We know that racial steering occurs frequently and continues to adversely affect minorities. Too little is being done to ensure fair and equal access to housing among minority populations, but passing H.R. 476 will make a difference.”

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Los Angeles Office:
10124 South Broadway, Suite 1
Los Angeles, CA 90003
Phone: (323) 757-8900
Fax: (323) 757-9506

Washington, DC Office:
2221 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0535
Phone: (202) 225-2201
Fax: (202) 225-7854



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