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COVID-19 and Fair Housing in Fayette County
RACF launches educational webpage for residents

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UNIONTOWN, PA (Fayette County) – The Fair Housing Act became law on April 11, 1968. Over 50 years later, April continues to be celebrated as Fair Housing month, a time of year when the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and its grantees collectively celebrate the passage of the Act and the progress of civil rights by increasing awareness of protections for all people against housing discrimination. This April, however, housing organizations and grant administrators charged with enforcement and promotion of fair housing faced a new challenge: COVID-19.

On April 10th, Secretary Ben Carson released HUD's *Statement on Fair Housing and COVID-19*. The statement opened by urging that despite the nation's focus on the pandemic, that the "principle and promise of Fair Housing for All must still guide us." Secretary Carson continued by reminding all housing providers of the importance of the law and its protections against discrimination, harassment, and intimidation in all housing related services on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, and disability - especially during this time when the nation is urged to stay home in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus. He further reiterated the findings of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) which indicate that the virus does not target any specific racial or ethnic group and that no one should be evicted, turned away or face harassment in housing related matters through association with the virus based on their individual or family demographics. In addition, understanding that persons with disabilities are often among the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, and thus a group shown to be more vulnerable to COVID-19, HUD reminds housing providers that they must continue to make reasonable accommodations to those who require special needs.

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Despite widespread closures to help stop the spread of the virus, Secretary Carson has assured that HUD will continue to enforce federal fair housing laws. In response to the pandemic, HUD announced on April 20th its award of \$1.5 million in funding to support COVID-19 related fair housing activities. Secretary Carson closes his April statement by asserting, “The Fair Housing Act embodies the spirit of this great nation where everyone is entitled to equal opportunity and respect,” and that communities must resist “irrational blame that fuels discrimination and harassment...”

Locally, Fayette County leaders are also ensuring that housing discrimination concerns remain a priority throughout the current health crisis. In response to the ongoing need for housing equality, the County has designated The Fayette County Housing Consortium as the local Fair Housing Officer agency. The agency, in partnership with other local public, private and non-profit organizations, promotes and facilitates fair housing opportunities for all County residents.

As a partner in the Fayette County Housing Consortium and working in cooperation with the Redevelopment Authorities of the Cities of Connellsville and Uniontown, the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette has developed a new page on the RACF website dedicated to Fair Housing. The Fair Housing link can be found on the Programs & Initiatives tab at www.racfpa.org. The new Fair Housing page provides information to help educate our community on the history and importance of the Fair Housing Act, links to other fair housing organizations and resources, tools to help assess if you have been a victim of housing discrimination, and instructions on how to prevent and report discrimination.

The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority reminds residents that its offices remain operational during this difficult time, and that persons who feel they have experienced housing discrimination may continue to contact the County’s Fair Housing Officer to file a complaint at: 724-437-1547 or TTD 1-800-427-4636.

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About the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, PA – The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, PA was established in 1949, and has spent the last 70 years implementing numerous redevelopment projects, rehabilitation activities, and infrastructure improvements in municipalities throughout Fayette County. It is the principle agency responsible for implementing community development and single-family affordable housing initiatives. The Redevelopment Authority’s goal is to work in partnership with our communities on impactful projects and creative ventures, helping to continue to make Fayette County a wonderful place to call home.