

March 17, 2025



**The recent attacks on Fair Housing are an un-American betrayal of our values. The Fair Housing Center asks that you please join the Fair Housing movement and take action.**

## **Background**

In his January 20 inaugural address, the current President acknowledged the coincidence of the date:

“Today is Martin Luther King Day. And his honor — this will be a great honor. But in his honor, we will strive together to make his dream a reality. We will make his dream come true.”

Fifty-seven years earlier, our nation advanced a civil rights movement, culminating in advocacy to enact a “Fair Housing Act.” The law would open the doors of opportunity for all Americans by making it illegal to discriminate in housing. Prior to its passing, the law was stalled in Congress. It was not until after Dr. King’s assassination, as the nation erupted in riots and protests, that Congress mustered the courage to enact the Fair Housing Act in April 1968. Arguably, Dr. King sacrificed his life for its passage. Our current President was 21-years-old at the time.

Today, the Fair Housing Act protects all Americans from discrimination — families with children, persons with disabilities, all racial categories, colors, and religions. Everyone is a member of a protected class under the law. The Act prohibits sexual harassment in housing and ensures basic accommodations and accessibility for persons with disabilities. From zoning to evictions, the law safeguards basic civil rights protections for every American.

Arguably, the Act is the most personal of all civil rights laws. Your home — *where you live* — powerfully impacts every aspect of your life, from your access to job opportunities, education, and transportation, to your health and safety.

Since its passage, the Fair Housing Act has routinely enjoyed bipartisan support. Ronald Reagan signed a 1988 amendment to the law to extend its protections to families with children and persons with disabilities. In his signing statement, Reagan noted its importance as part of a larger strategy to ensure access to housing for all Americans:

“Today we address, at last, the other important obstacle to homeownership and rental: discrimination. Discrimination is particularly tragic when it means a family is refused housing near good schools, a good job, or simply in a better neighborhood to raise children.”

The importance of the law is just as significant today as it was when the current President was in his twenties and learning to become a real estate developer. Although our nation has made progress on many fronts, housing discrimination and segregation persists. In 2012, HUD conducted a nationwide study, testing housing applications 8,000 times across 28 metro areas. It found that although “the most blatant forms of housing discrimination ... have declined since the first national paired-testing study in 1977,” minority home seekers still are often “told about and shown fewer homes and apartments than [comparable] whites.”

These trends are not getting better. The most recent Census data shows the Toledo area, for example, remains highly segregated. The National Fair Housing Alliance reports that nationwide complaints of discrimination have increased. There were 34,150 fair housing complaints received in 2023, compared to 33,007 complaints received in 2022. The nation saw a noticeably steep increase in the number of harassment complaints, particularly harassment based on color or race, which skyrocketed by 470.59 percent and 114.97 percent respectively. A separate 2022 study on bias in the appraisal of home values found that appraisers devalued homes in Black neighborhoods in 113 metro areas by \$162 billion.

Persons with disabilities, too, often face barriers to housing, and today disability discrimination is the most frequent fair housing complaint. Most Americans will, at some point in their life, develop disabilities. One in four Americans currently has a disability, and access to a home can be a life and death question. Fair housing agencies often assist families facing potential homelessness due to intentional discrimination or because a housing provider refuses to accommodate disabilities.

At the same time, our nation is in a housing crisis, with prices skyrocketing, and more and more families pushed out of a tight market. These trends most powerfully impact marginalized communities who more frequently face discrimination. These developments also increase homelessness, which in turn creates a vicious cycle of poverty and strains federal and local resources.

The Fair Housing Act is a powerful and critical tool to help address the housing crisis and make Dr. King’s dream a reality. But as with any law, the Act is meaningless

without enforcement. This is why the law requires HUD to provide nonprofit fair housing agencies with funding to investigate and help victims of housing discrimination.

The Fair Housing Center here in Toledo is one such agency. As with all fair housing agencies, we operate on a very tight budget, funding a small, dedicated team. We complete more than 2,000 intakes every year, investigate discrimination, and file cases to enforce these rights for Ohioans. There is no doubt that housing discrimination would regain more prevalence without enforcement of the law, as well as education and outreach to residents and housing providers.

## **The cancellation letters from DOGE and HUD**

In the middle of a hectic week of this work as The Center's CEO, I received a letter by email from HUD and DOGE.<sup>1</sup> As a small nonprofit in Toledo, Ohio, I was surprised to receive a letter addressed to me from DOGE. With no prior notice, and no explanation whatsoever, the letter curtly said two of our grants were cancelled. These contracts have already been signed, and we have already started to produce the requested work to further fair housing in our community.

One of the canceled grants was aimed at updating our materials and education and outreach trainings to ensure the local community understands their rights after the Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock vs. Clayton County*. After *Bostock*, discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity became illegal. But many Americans do not know or understand these new protections against housing discrimination. The grant would have helped us educate our community on this development.

The other grant addressed racial segregation and opposition to affordable housing, which are still prevalent in our area. We just recently saw the distribution of KKK flyers in Wood County. Not long before that, someone spray-painted KKK on a house in Wood County that a Black family was considering for purchase. This grant would have allowed us to increase outreach and educational information to this area to help create a more welcoming community while ensuring residents understand how to report housing discrimination.

Both grants would have helped open opportunities for housing for marginalized communities, especially now, amid a housing crisis. Many other fair housing agencies across the country received the same letters on the same day. The impacts on other agencies were far worse than we saw in Toledo. Some lost their primary grant that allows them to handle fair housing cases. In effect, it ends fair housing and encourages

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<sup>1</sup> <http://toledofhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Fair-Housing-Opportunities-of-Northwest-Ohio-FEOI230062-1.pdf>; <http://toledofhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Fair-Housing-Opportunities-of-Northwest-Ohio-FEOI230067-1.pdf>.

discrimination in those areas. The cancelation letters ended with the sentence: “HUD appreciates the efforts your organization has made in promoting fair housing.”

Perhaps the strangest aspect of all of this is that the letter comes from an agency called “Department of Government Efficiency.” I have never met anyone from DOGE, but I have read news reports that its purpose is to somehow reduce the national debt and make government more efficient. Based on our experience, its true purpose appears to be the opposite. The contracts we were working on for HUD were nearly complete. We have already received funding for some of the work. Now, we have effectively been told to throw the remainder of the work away. It’s the same as someone hiring a contractor to put a roof on a house, paying them along the way, and then halfway through, someone else comes and says, “We want to save money, so just stop now that part of the house is covered.” Of course, that’s actually a foolish waste of money.

There’s no “efficiency” gained here. To the contrary, it’s created a mess of confusion and inefficiency. It also strips our local community of funding for a service that would have helped people.

Perhaps, one might argue that the national debt is so bad that the U.S. must simply stop payments even if doing so recklessly causes mistakes and waste. That notion is ridiculous. The U.S. is the wealthiest nation in the history of the Earth. The total wealth of all families in the U.S. adjusted for inflation nearly quadrupled from \$52 trillion in 1989 to \$199 trillion in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the vast majority of these gains in wealth benefited a small number of super-wealthy families.<sup>3</sup> In 2021, ProPublica released the actual tax returns of the wealthiest Americans showing that they pay an effective rate of taxes far below that of most Americans. The wealthiest leader of DOGE, for example, paid an effective rate of only 3.27%.<sup>4</sup> Most Americans fall into the 15% tax bracket, meaning 15% of every dollar earned as income is paid to the government.

The solution to the national debt is obvious: reduce costs and increase revenue over time. Imagine you have a 30-year mortgage on a home. You could race to pay it off faster by kicking some family members out to reduce costs. But that defeats the whole purpose of having the home in the first place. The same is true for haphazardly canceling grants that help marginalized communities in a housing crisis. It’s absurd and accomplishes nothing.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/60343>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-secret-irs-files-trove-of-never-before-seen-records-reveal-how-the-wealthiest-avoid-income-tax>.

## **A call to action**

More importantly, the attempt to cancel fair housing civil rights is a betrayal of who we are as Americans. The fundamental premise of America is civil rights. Unlike most countries, we are not a nation founded on a region, culture, or language. We are founded on a Constitution, a nation of laws. The primary purpose of these laws — the primary purpose of America itself — is to guarantee its citizens certain rights — to vote, practice their religion, and pursue happiness, employment, and housing — all without discrimination.

Dr. King's vision was an American vision, one that includes every citizen, for a system of laws and norms that opens the doors to wherever you wish to live. The ultimate betrayal of this vision is to end those basic civil rights protections. With the recent cancellation letters from DOGE, some areas may indeed lose all fair housing services. This has not happened in Toledo yet, but we are under attack, and "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

I hope Americans will see that in this stunning betrayal, all of us—and America's values as a nation of civil rights—are under attack. Please join us in the Fair Housing movement.

Several fair housing organizations have filed a class action suit to block the cancellations, and The Fair Housing Center is part of this class.<sup>5</sup>

You can help The Fair Housing Center and the Fair Housing movement by contacting your elected representatives and asking them to please end the attack on fair housing. You can find your elected representatives here:

<https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>.

Thank you for your support,



George Thomas, CEO & General Counsel  
The Fair Housing Center

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<sup>5</sup> <https://nationalfairhousing.org/reلمان-colfax-and-fair-housing-advocates-ask-court-to-halt-huds-and-doges-termination-of-grants-to-fight-housing-discrimination/>.