

As a civil rights organization dedicated to promoting the value of diversity, HOME stands with the Black Lives Matter movement and all who strive to break down structures of oppression and inequality to create a more just and inclusive society.

The appalling murders of George Floyd and countless other men and women of color demand comprehensive reforms to policing and the criminal justice system. However, these tragic killings are just one aspect of the systemic racial inequality that permeates all aspects of American society. If we ever hope to remedy systemic injustice, our nation must redouble its efforts to enforce antidiscrimination polices and foster integration. In short, it must finally deliver on the promise of the Fair Housing Act.

Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, commonly known as the Fair Housing Act, was the last major piece of legislation passed during the civil rights era and was intended to prevent housing discrimination and reverse decades of government actions that created and reinforced housing segregation throughout our nation.

Segregated communities are not created by accident. They are not the result of personal preference or private prejudice alone. Rather, housing segregation was engineered through official government policies and procedures over the course of decades. Starting in the 1930s under the New Deal, federal agencies “redlined” areas by refusing to insure mortgages in neighborhoods with minority residents, regardless of the wealth of those residents. Public housing, built with federal funds, was explicitly segregated by race. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) endorsed the use of racially restrictive covenants, which prohibited the sale of private homes to buyers of color, and the court system provided the mechanism for enforcement of these covenants. The FHA underwriting manual explicitly exhorted housing segregation, and even recommended preventing “the infiltration of lower class occupancy, and inharmonious racial groups” by separating communities with highways and other barriers.

However, efforts to end de jure segregation faced formidable opposition, and passage of federal legislation that would outlaw housing discrimination seemed hopeless. Congress had rejected two earlier fair housing bills, and by all indications, it appeared that lawmakers would fail to pass the Fair Housing Act as well.

Then, on April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. The country convulsed in an outpouring of grief and rage, with protests and riots in over 100 cities. In response, President Johnson pressured Congress to pass the bill as a tribute to Dr. King and his legacy. On April 11, the Fair Housing Act became the law of the land.

Most Americans know that Dr. King was a leader of the Civil Rights Movement, but they may be less familiar with his advocacy for fair housing. During the Chicago Freedom Movement campaign, Dr. King fought for equal housing opportunity in one of the most segregated cities in the country. The

“HOME stands with the Black Lives Matter movement and all who strive to break down structures of oppression and inequality to create a more just and inclusive society.”

campaign even used testers—people who posed as homebuyers while documenting their treatment by realtors—to expose the discriminatory practices and policies that systematically deprived Black Americans access to housing in White, middle-class suburbs. While the Fair Housing Act outlawed these discriminatory practices, much work remains to be done. Failure to fully enforce the law’s mandate to foster residential integration has ensured that our nation has remained segregated and unequal.

Over fifty years since passage of the Fair Housing Act, discrimination continues to deny housing opportunities and racial integration remains elusive. A recent investigation by Newsday uncovered widespread evidence of discriminatory treatment by real estate agents who steered residents away from neighborhoods due to their racial composition. Studies of lending data have revealed that Black and Latino borrowers are significantly more likely than Whites to be denied home loans, and pay more for the loans that they do receive than White borrowers with the same credit scores and income. Exclusionary zoning maintains segregated housing patterns and concentrates poverty in disadvantaged neighborhoods by preventing the construction of affordable housing in predominately White suburbs, which were initially developed under the explicitly racist policies of the FHA and other federal agencies.

Where you live matters. It determines whether you have access to good jobs, high-performing schools, quality health care, reliable transportation, fresh food, and other community assets that are essential to a person’s success and wellbeing. As a result of institutionalized racism, people of color are much more likely to live in isolated, highly segregated neighborhoods with less access to these assets. Disparities in housing greatly contribute to systemic racial disparities in wealth, income, homeownership, access to financial services, health outcomes, and the

criminal justice system.

When examining the criminal justice system in particular, disparities exist at every stage, from arrests to prosecutions to convictions to sentencing. The problem begins with disproportionate levels of police contact with people of color. This is primarily a function of criminal justice polices that target areas of concentrated urban poverty, where people of color are more likely to reside. The War on Drugs, along with policies like “Stop and Frisk,” and “Broken Windows,” encourage higher levels of police contact with people of color. For example, an ABC News analysis of police arrests throughout the country revealed that Black Americans were arrested at a rate five times higher than White Americans in 2018. The problem of racial disparities in the justice system extends to the use of deadly force by police, especially police shootings. Between 2013 and 2018, of the 5,700 fatal police shootings in the U.S. in which the race of the victim was known, 27.5% involved Black victims, representing more than twice the proportion of Blacks in the overall population (13%). When considering anti-Black violence and police brutality in this context, it is becoming increasingly clear that structural racism in the form of residential segregation has a major impact on racial disparities in the use of deadly force by police.

Recent research by Michael Siegel has found growing evidence to suggest that racial segregation is the principal factor in explaining racial disparities in fatal police shootings when controlling for variables such as a city’s crime rate, median income, and racial composition of its police force. The research points to the key role that segregation plays in the way that police officers and others interact with Black and Brown communities. Specifically, police officers tend to view highly segregated neighborhoods of color as inherently threatening. When officers feel threatened, they are more likely to use lethal force. In other words, the use of excessive violence by police is influenced not just by the race of the victim, but also the racial composition of the area where the encounter occurs.

Therefore, if we ever hope to remedy the problem of police brutality, we must work to racially integrate communities and invest resources into neighborhoods disadvantaged by structural racism. In short, we must make the promise of fair housing a reality for all.

“Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God’s children.”

Dr. King, 1966, Chicago Soldier Field Stadium during the Chicago Freedom Movement



1542 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14209
716.854.1400
www.homeny.org

Published through the generous support of contributors to HOME

THE POLITICS OF FAIR HOUSING

It should come as no surprise that in these ultra-partisan times that fair housing has become a politicized issue. In this country, housing as always been a political issue, but it does not often find itself at the forefront of the American political consciousness. Historic polices that have segregated our neighborhoods and lead to concentrations of poverty and wealth were guided, in part, by the priorities of political leaders. Today, we find a new battle in the political arena that focuses on housing, race, and the legacy of discriminatory housing policies in the United States.

On July 23rd, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson announced the elimination of the 2015 regulation known as Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH). This rule, which was implemented under the Obama administration, was meant to be a tool to fight racial discrimination in housing and compel entities that receive funding from HUD to work toward the ultimate goal of fair housing in their regions. According to a statement released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the AFFH regulation mandates that “localities receiving federal assistance must take meaningful actions to undo decades of federal, state, and local discriminatory policies and practices that resulted in creating racially segregated, under-resourced communities that persist to this day. They must also address local policies that illegally discriminate against residents.” The AFFH regulation is meant to desegregate under-served communities by compelling local governments to address persistent challenges to fair housing within their community and develop plans to redress barriers to fair housing. This regulation prompts these regional governments to act because they historically have been the entities that have reinforced segregation—through restrictive zoning, and selective placement of public housing. In this way, the AFFH regulation redresses

past discrimination by having local governments analyze impediments to fair housing in their jurisdictions and develop plans to address segregation in their communities. In total, this regulation has the noble and necessary goal of addressing segregation head-on, while providing a framework and funding for local governments to study the issue and work toward more inclusive, less segregated communities.

This rule, however, has become wrapped into the divisive politics of 2020 and transformed into a partisan political issue. On the same day at Secretary Carson’s announcement, the White House released a statement on the termination of AFFH regulation, proclaiming that “President Donald J. Trump is Protecting Our Suburbs and Preserving the American Dream for All Americans.” This statement goes on to claim that with the elimination of the AFFH rule “the suburban destruction will end” and that “this action ends the Federal encroachment on local communities that threatened our nation’s suburbs.” The evocation of the fear of the destruction of the suburbs appears to be a racially coded throwback to an earlier era in housing, in which the fear of racially mixed neighborhoods was used as a tool of segregation. Today, the assertion that the AFFH rule would destroy the suburbs is simply meant to stoke doubt and fear, conflating diversity with destruction. Politicizing the AFFH mandate has taken the non-controversial issues of desegregating our communities and imbued it with some of the darkest prejudices that exist in the United States. To achieve a more equitable and diverse future for our country and in our communities, it is essential to work together toward goals that benefit everyone and not backslide into the bigotry of the past. This partisan attack on the AFFH rule represents a step back on the progress our country has made toward fair housing and illustrates that housing policy is still a deeply contested political issue in the United States.

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
Buffalo, NY
Permit No. 427

INSIGHT



Dear Members, during these unprecedented times, we thank you for your continued support. Please enjoy our fall newsletter.

CONFRONTING THE VIRUSES

By DeAnna Eason

As Thomas Paine penned in 1776, “These are the times that try men’s souls”. The last several months have been a test for us all—women, men and children—acting as an uncontrollable inner force, pushing our true selves to the surface. The way we react when faced with hardship and threatened with conflict speaks to the truest part of our beings—our souls. Were you surprised at your initial reactions to the events of the recent past? Were you embarrassed at how you truly felt about what you witnessed? Were you angry or numb? Did you try to come up with a way to be part of a solution, or did you realize you are part of the problem?

All of us have been impacted by COVID-19, whether we have lost a loved one, lost a job, are in the process of losing a home, or are just suffering through the irritation of a mask and unreasonably dry hands. But COVID-19 is not the only virus we have been dealing with. What effect has the seemingly unrelenting scourge of racism and discrimination had on you? Were you impacted by the impression of George Floyd’s killing? Does 8 minutes and 46 seconds mean anything to you? Have you taken the time to learn the names of any of the other Black people senselessly killed by law enforcement? Has your soul been sufficiently tested these past few months, and most importantly, did you pass?

In case I haven’t been clear, this is your call to action. It is not too late; there is still time to be a part of the solution. Not sure where to start? 1) You can make a donation or volunteer at an organization that is dedicated to eradicating discrimination

and racism, and that provides critical services to those most in need; 2) You can educate yourself and your family on the systemic discrimination that pervades our communities; 3) You can make a conscious effort to correct with compassion the next person you hear speak out of ignorance; 4) You can acknowledge, in word and deed, the tremendous disparities in health care, housing, and wealth faced by people of color; and 5) You can speak truth to power and impress upon your government leaders the importance of enforcing fair housing laws and of treating constituents fairly—with equity and equality. This list is far from exclusive, but it is a start. Make up your mind, and join HOME in confronting the virus of racism.

During this turbulent time, we have also seen a lot of changes in staffing here at HOME.

Best wishes to Social Media Intern Jessica Tiburcio who has completed her tenure here at HOME and Mobility Counselor Zuleyka Serrano who is moving to Florida with her family. We will truly miss you both!

Welcome Program Manager Adrienne Kosis, Intake Specialist Mary Norma Diaz, and Investigations Coordinators Matthew Chavez and Mary Lord to the HOME team! We are so thrilled to be working with you all! Please read on to meet the newest members of the HOME team. ▲▲▲▲

Returning HOME

By Mary Norma Diaz

I feel privileged to say that I am returning HOME. In the 1990's, I worked for Housing Opportunities Made Equal as a housing counselor. The experiences earned counseling tenants with HOME laid the strong foundation of my social work career. In my eighth month of pregnancy in 1993, my husband and I relocated to Florida to raise our beautiful family. This ended my time with HOME, but fortunately, not for good!

My experience as a mother galvanized my return to work with HOME. Two out of my three children fall on the autism spectrum. A lifetime of love and dedication turned them into well-rounded, accomplished and enthusiastic adults who are all continuing their higher-level education at the University at Buffalo. While challenge befalls us all, my success as a mother raising children with developmental disability uniquely qualified me for a career in professional community advocacy. I understand what it means to need safe domicile to raise a family, free from harassment and unjust treatment. Years spent as a Palm Beach County healthcare specialist molded my sensitivities toward individuals who need guidance navigating bureaucracy.

After 20 years advocating for patient rights in the public health field, I decided to move back to Western New York with my husband to reunite with our oldest son who is pursuing legal studies at UB and starting a family. I reconnected with Housing Opportunities Made Equal because I was greatly impacted by their mission and my professional time there. During my professional life in Florida, I adopted all that I learned at HOME to cause a positive effect on all the clients that I represented while working in the public health field. Being bilingual—and having insight into the delicate nuances of my Hispanic culture—allowed me to provide the help that was so desperately needed. I intend to do the same alongside HOME in this new chapter of my professional life.

I now rejoin HOME, and support their mission, with stronger personal and professional conviction; utilizing a background of years of informing, educating and helping others obtain the resources needed for a life that I would want for myself and my family. A life of equal access, fair treatment, and opportunity for all. I look forward to advancing HOME's mission in Western New York.

MEET ADRIENNE

What did you do before you came to HOME?

I have spent the last 15 years working in the human service field, with the majority of that time spent working at Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of WNY. I started off working with people who lived independently in their own apartments, teaching them independent living and parenting skills and helping them find a new apartment. After almost a year of doing that I became Associate Director of Children's Programs, where I helped oversee an after-school program that had a No Child Left Behind grant. When the grant was not renewed I was offered the position of Program Manager of Supported Apartments. These were certified apartments by OPWDD (Office for People with Developmental Disabilities), and was the next step before the individuals lived in their own apartment. About two years later I was asked to also manage the Independent Living Program. We eventually merged the two programs. While I managed this program, I enrolled about 50 individuals who either needed supports to remain independent or wanted to move out of their parent's home. In 2015 LDA created a brand-new position that they offered me due to the experience and knowledge I had gained over the years. In this role I became the housing specialist and certified benefits counselor, taking over managing the rental and housing stipends for our clients, and did trainings when new regulations from OPWDD came out.



Why are you interested in fair housing and social justice issues?.

When I was in 4th grade we had to read a biography and then write a book report on it, and I chose Martin Luther King Jr. Reading about his life and the things he was able to accomplish was very inspiring to me. I grew up knowing that

(continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

I wanted to do something that helped people too. I never understood why people discriminated or were racist—that was not how my mother raised me and my siblings, and it's not how I'm raising my son.

What excites you about working for HOME?

I started working for HOME in February 2017 as a tester. I've been waiting for a full-time position with HOME since then. I wanted to be able to do more for my community, and be a part of the amazing things that HOME does. I'm so excited that I

MEET HOME'S NEW INVESTIGATIONS COORDINATOR, MARY LORD

HOME welcomed our new Investigations Coordinator, Mary Lord, to our team on July 16th. Originally from eastern Pennsylvania, Mary has a History degree from Kutztown University where she focused her studies on religious history during the colonial era. Before coming to HOME, Mary worked as a Housing Specialist and Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator at Belmont Housing Resources for WNY. We are excited to see how Mary's expertise in housing will help bolster HOME's enforcement programs.

What interested you in HOME's mission or the work that HOME does throughout our community?

I first became interested in HOME when I work at Belmont Housing Resources for WNY. I started out there as a caseworker for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program. When my clients relocated, they often complained that they had a difficult time finding housing because landlords seemed to be discriminating against them. I referred a lot of people to HOME, and it was a relief to know that they would get some assistance with their situation.

What drew you to the role of Investigations Coordinator?

The investigations coordinator role interested me because I wanted to be a part of the important work that HOME does. I also like to work behind the scenes, so doing research for tests and coordinating with testers seemed like a good fit for me.

What have your previous experiences working in housing taught you about the importance of fair housing in our region?

My past experiences working in housing have taught me that access to quality, stable housing is an essential building block of every person's life. I have worked with folks who were homeless and watched as they rebuilt their lives once they moved into an apartment. Having a decent place to live allows people to focus their energy on bettering themselves, developing their relationships with loved ones, advancing their careers, etc. It creates space in people's lives that allows them to thrive.

You worked or volunteered at a number of non-profits throughout Western New York before joining HOME's staff--when did you become interested in non-profit work/helping others?

MEET HOME'S NEW SYSTEMIC INVESTIGATIONS COORDINATOR, MATTHEW CHAVEZ

Matthew Chavez joined HOME's team in July in the newly created position of Systemic Investigations Coordinator. Matt has a BFA in Theater Performance from Niagara University and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree from the University at Buffalo. While at UB, Matt worked on projects ranging from increasing public engagement at Green Code meetings in the City of Buffalo to writing public safety plans for the Commodore Perry Choice Neighborhood Project. Matt is also involved in Western New York's theater and performing arts community.

Please tell us about your journey to HOME and your interest in HOME's work.

I graduated from UB in 2012 and my first experience with HOME was in 2011 as a graduate student taking a tour. Scott Gehl spoke to our group, and from that experience I knew it was a place I wanted to support. I have spent time working in various sectors, from non-profit, to banking and finance, and I have wanted, in my work, to contribute positively to making a difference in my community and it is that spirit which brought me to HOME.

What did you do before you joined HOME's staff?

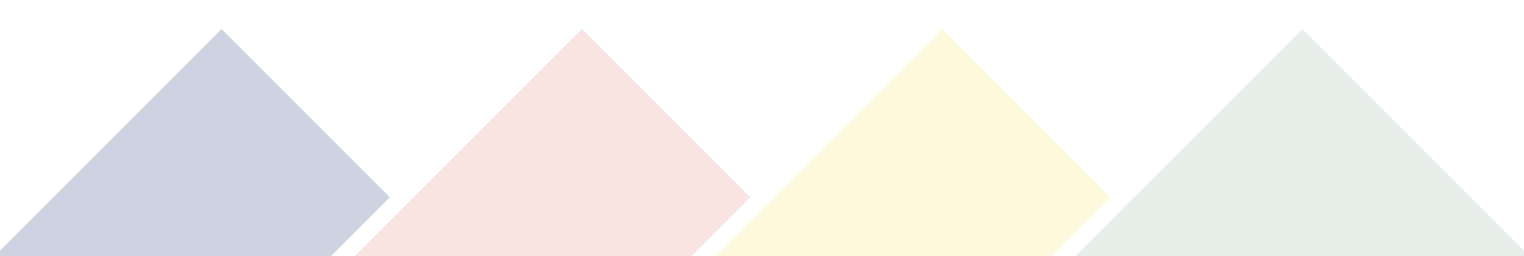
Before working at HOME, I worked for Solidifi Title and Closing as a Regional Manager. Prior to that, I worked for The Service Collaborative of Western New York, managing outreach and member development of an AmeriCorps VISTA program. My Bachelor's degree in Theatre led me to work with the Stagehands' union IATSE in Niagara Falls on major events, which I have done for a number of years.

From your prospective, what are the most critical issues facing Western New York?

Access to capital for those who are in the best place to effectuate the most change from a development standpoint. There is a huge latent pool of individuals who would be developing properties, and saving historic properties, if there was equitable and just access to capital. There is also the history of residential segregation baked into our landscape which furthers this gap in access to capital.

What do you hope to accomplish as HOME's Systemic Investigations Coordinator?

I hope to participate in and lead investigations that will address the roots of systemic discrimination. I hope to reveal those individuals who might be considered "enemies" of fair housing and expose their tactics. If I succeed, there will be more justice for our clients, and for all who engage with the housing market.



You completed a Masters of Urban Planning from UB before joining our staff—can you explain how that course of study made you interested in working social justice issues?

Fair Housing is a pillar that Urban Planners point to in the attempt to build the urban environment in a more just and sustainable way. It was important to many of my professors who wove it into their curriculum. Broadly, we were taught to look for the roots of planning problems. Housing "as a right" is one of those promises that was made by the federal government but never completed, and planners want to ensure fair housing access to every individual for reasons that go beyond laws, which speak to quality of life.

What are some of your hobbies, or things you enjoy doing in your free time?

I am the Treasurer for a local theatre company, Post-Industrial Productions, and I have helped them in their planning for a new space to perform in. I have performed in many shows over the course of the years, but now I mostly enjoy playing guitar with my children listening, and barbecuing.