

“You might be quoted one rent and the person behind you might be quoted a different rent or a vacancy or told about specials. Generally, what we’re looking at is much more subtle differential treatment than would have been in the long ago past,” he says.

Lazo says FHCO does this type of testing constantly, for various entities — local, state and federal jurisdictions.

FHCO also provides education and outreach.

“We do trainings of housing consumers, advocates, social service agency folks, jurisdictions, housing providers, all up and down the line in the housing transaction and throughout the state,” Lazo says. “And then we also do outreach to make sure that folks in all those communities understand what their rights and or responsibilities are around fair housing.”

Lazo says FHCO also advocates for public policy, like House Bills 4134 and 4010 that passed in the Oregon Legislature a few months ago. Both bills help deal specifically with racial housing discrimination.

HB 4134 establishes an easier procedure to petition to remove racially discriminatory language from home deeds. HB 4010 establishes a task force to address racial housing discrimination — to figure out ways to level the playing field for people of color who have been historically discriminated against.

Rep. Julie Fahey and Sen. James Manning Jr. sponsored both bills.

Fahey says a big motivator behind these bills is the history of racial housing discrimination still affecting us today.

“When you look at the data behind levels of homeownership in Oregon, there are significant differences based on race,” she says. “So communities of color own homes at lower levels and when we look at the history of housing discrimination not just in Oregon, but around the country, we systematically blocked out millions of families from the most common way to accumulate wealth in this country in the 20th century,” Fahey adds.

“The past discrimination with redlining and restrictive

covenants that blocked people from buying homes in particular neighborhoods, that still reverberates today. The impact of that past discrimination is still felt today.”

Such history is felt today in the discriminatory language still present in some Oregon home deeds.

“There were a couple things that came up,” Manning says about motivation for passing these bills. “One was the exclusionary rule that’s been on the books for years. It started back during the Hoover administration to exclude African-Americans and people of color from purchasing homes, which started redlining to move people to the urban centers.”

He continues: “So Oregon fully embraced that early on and in order for a lot of these developers to get loans and in order to build this new housing they had to, by law, dealing with the federal housing administration, they had to include the exclusionary rule, which prohibited African-Americans and people of color from purchasing homes. Oregon has never taken that language out.”

Though this language is obviously no longer legally binding thanks to the Fair Housing Act, it’s still present in some older house deeds. HB 4134 streamlines the process to get that language removed.

“It used to be very expensive to take that language out of the documentation,” Manning says. “Now we’ve reversed it so there is no expense, or a very limited expense to do that. So that’s one step forward.”

Fahey says the other bill, HB 4010, not only addresses the history of discrimination but will try to uncover current issues. “It’s also to try and identify whether there are currently either intentionally or unintentionally discriminatory practices that are currently existing as well, particularly in the mortgage industry,” she says.

The task force for HB 4010 formed officially June 12 of this year. It consists of Reps. Mark Meek and Richard Vial, and Sens. Manning and Cliff Bentz. Fahey says it also includes people in the real estate industry, organizations that serve communities of color and members of the public.

“The task force has until September 2019 to submit

its specific recommendations, so they’ll be a fairly long process of discussing data and collecting data and coming up with recommended solutions,” Fahey says.

Those on the property-owner side of things are also striving to stop housing discrimination.

Tia Politi is president of the Lane County Rental Owners Association (ROA). She’s also a property manager with Homes for Good, “the largest provider of low-income housing in Lane County,” she says. She says that, in her role with ROA, she works with the association’s board of directors to “educate rental owners on how to run an ethical and profitable business.”

Politi says that, from her viewpoint, she doesn’t know the full scope of housing discrimination, but acknowledges that it can happen anywhere.

“In my experience, discrimination is present everywhere and Lane County is no exception, but more often results from a lack of education as opposed to a legitimate attempt to discriminate against a member of a protected class,” she says.

Politi says the ROA offers classes and instruction to landlords and property managers, and membership includes access to a “telephone helpline that allows rental owners to call for guidance if they’re unsure about some area of law or procedure.”

“Our classes, programs, helpline and educational materials have made us the largest association of private landlords in the state under the umbrella of the Oregon Rental Housing Association,” Politi says.

Regardless of all the parties attempting to quell the impact of housing discrimination in Eugene and throughout the state, as these complaints and court cases come trickling in every year, it’s clearly difficult to stop something that might be as difficult to prove as a feeling — the slight inkling that you may be getting treated differently due to your skin color, mental illness, income level or sexual orientation — rather than as rock-hard evidence.

And rarely can something invisible to the naked eye be proven in a courtroom.

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