



Spring 2018

Winston-Salem City Council

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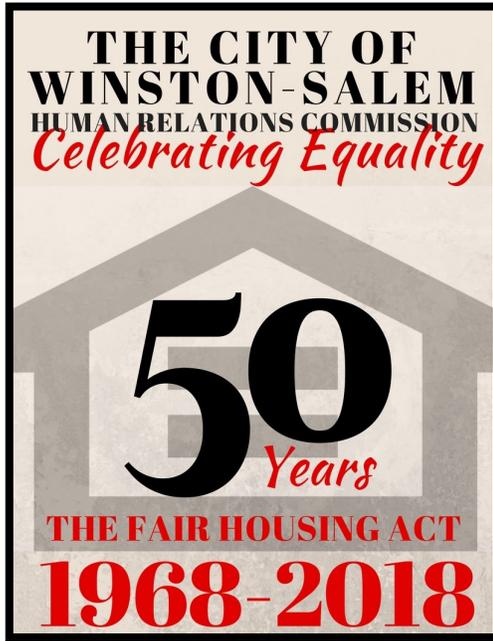
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Adolfo Briceño

If you have any suggestions for a featured service or program, please contact Adolfo Briceño, Human Relations Specialist, at 336.734.1225.



50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act

By: Adolfo Briceño

April 11, 2018 will mark the 50th Anniversary of the passing of the Fair Housing Act. This document came into law during the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson. According to a HUD document called “The History of Fair Housing,” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on the 4th of April, 1968 and President Johnson used this national tragedy to urge the Fair Housing bill’s speedy Congressional approval.

Difficult times were those with the Vietnam War gaining increasing unpopularity and claiming the lives of young men. Disenfranchised citizens, African-Americans in particular, rioted for days in many cities after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which added to the sense of urgency in passing the act into law.

The nation has taken encouraging steps forward when it comes to housing discrimi-

nation, but there is still work to be done. According to HUD’s Annual Report on Fair Housing in 2016 a total of 8,342 complaints were investigated nationwide; 58% of those were based on disability, overtaking race as the single most important category driving enforcement.

Even though race will probably lose its status as the category under which the most numerous complaints are filed, it will probably continue to be of notable importance in years to come. Disability will probably also retain its dominance in the near future, due to the advocacy work by groups and agencies that promote equal rights for disabled individuals. Complaints and awareness are also likely to continue trending as disabled individuals learn that the Fair Housing Act is there to protect them.

Another rising category that will probably gain notoriety in the future is sex. Lesbians, homosexuals and all other non-binary, non-conforming individuals to traditional perceptions of sex, gender, and love expression will continue to learn their rights and use the protection provided by the Fair Housing Act to secure a fair chance at accessing a home. The Human Relations Department will make the landmark half-century anniversary of the passing of the Fair Housing Act as its main theme for the annual Fair and Affordable Housing Summit in April. This event is for housing professionals, realtors, developers and specialized academics who take a day to discuss and learn the latest developments and trends coming from this field.

Seniors and Evictions

By: Adolfo Briceño

Seniors, the segment of the population ages 60 and older, represent about 20% of the Forsyth County residents, according to a 2016 report, entitled “Age Friendly by Forsyth Futures,” a non-profit educational organization. According to the report, 20% of

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this demographic group makes \$20,000 a year or less, placing them in a high-risk category when it comes to economic opportunity or lack thereof.

The Human Relations Department does not track age in its database

and it does not deal exclusively with seniors, but the investigators from this department have dealt with them in the past and know that many of them are being evicted from their homes for a variety of reasons, but non-payment of rent is the most common.

First, age is not a protected category under fair housing law. Being low income, poor, or having gone recently through tragedy/personal upheaval will not grant a senior any protection or special rent consideration. Accumulated years of tenancy with the same landlord or address does not provide protection either. If there is a death in the family, a health emergency, or expensive medications, these unexpected events will also not waive your obligation to pay the rent.

Everyone should be aware of the possible need to provide temporary or permanent housing to friends and relatives, including your own children and grandchildren. The fact that you have blood relatives in the unit will not matter to landlords who might consider this as a breach of your lease if the tenant did not ask previous permission to have them in the house or apartment. Remember that the landlord might want to add your guests to the lease and screen them previous to giving his or her permission. The landlord can do this even if the tenant says that their guests will only temporarily stay.

Having a disability, in itself, is not a valid excuse to skip the rent. A disability can potentially be a basis for not observing certain rules and policies from the complex. Disability is a potential basis as long as the concession is not too expensive or financially damaging for the landlord. In contrast, disability could potentially allow a live-in aide to reside in the unit. A relative or friend can be a live-in aide and this individual can either be permanently living with the tenant or just spending a few hours per day, per week, or per month, as needed. This option requires a doctor's note to document that the tenant has a disability and the need for the live-in aide. Ideally, the live in-aide could start his or her responsibility only after the doctor's note and the tenant's written request have been presented to the landlord and he or she has granted the request.

HUD Self Sufficiency Program

By Kathryn Mobley

As of March 2018, almost 6,000 Winston-Salem residents either live in HUD housing or use vouchers to pay rent. However, the economic shockwaves of global turbulence are creating a growing need for more public housing nationwide. "We have a huge affordable housing crisis. Only 1 in 4

people actually receive our assistance and get into affordable housing. So that's a huge gap nationwide," says Christopher D. Taylor Deputy Regional Administrator, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

HUD offers several free, federally initiatives designed to help its clients become economically independent in their communities. One is the Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS) for Section 8 residents. Participants sign a 5-year contract, they work with a local housing authority coordinator to set economic goals and this coordinator links them to external community resources equipped to help participants achieve their specific economic goals. "It's a lot of hard work," explains Tami Wright, FSS Coordinator for Housing Authority of Winston-Salem (HAWS). "People have to change their spending habits and start budgeting. That trickles down to your family. Everyone has to do their part to living on the budget." HUD also sets up an escrow account, money participants get once they reach their goals. Only 75 people are accepted per class and Wright says as of March 2018, there is a waiting list of more than 100.

A similar program is Resident Opportunities in Self Sufficiency, available only for public housing residents and it does not have the escrow component. There is also the Jobs Plus Program, specific jobs local HUD agencies make available to their actual residents on the property. All of these programs are federally funded and participants must qualify as a HUD client. HAWS does not have the Jobs Plus Program.

Secretary of Housing Dr. Ben Carson has also launched a new initiative to recognize local housing authorities as Envision Centers. This means they have extensive community partnerships that nurture four key areas of self-sufficiency; character and leadership, educational advancement, economic empowerment and health and wellness. Thus, the local housing agency either hosts workshops, classes or seminars on site or their HUD clients can attend the support services elsewhere. Some events are free, others are offered at a reduced charge.

Wright believes as more adults become self-sufficient and buy a home, they lay down a healthy economic foundation for future generations. "It makes a huge impact on the children, for them to understand this is their home," explains Wright. "A lot of children say, eventually this will be my place, where I will raise my kids."

For more information about self-sufficiency programs offered by the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, contact Tami Wright at 336-917-6112. If you have questions about your housing rights, call Adolfo Briceno at 336-734-1225.



Christopher D. Taylor
Deputy Regional Administrator, HUD