



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INVESTIGATING ILLEGAL HOUSING DISCRIMINATION: LOCAL FAIR HOUSING COUNCIL AWARDED FUNDS FOR NATIONAL TRAINING PROJECT

Milwaukee, WI – The Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council (MMFHC) has received federal funding to continue a special project designed to ensure high-quality investigations into illegal housing discrimination across the U.S. The \$250,000 grant comes through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fair Housing Initiatives Program. This is the fifth consecutive grant for this project awarded to MMFHC through a competitive HUD process.

The project, called *Investigative Support for Testing and Enforcement Programs (ISTEP)*, provides intensive training and technical assistance to non-profit organizations that operate fair housing testing programs throughout the nation. Testing is an investigative tool used to gather evidence. A test is a covert investigation involving one or more persons called testers, who initiate contact with a housing provider to gather information about the provider's policies and practices. This enables fair housing enforcement programs to compare the information gathered by testers with the requirements of fair housing laws or other civil rights laws.

“Testing is the most important tool we have to enforce fair housing laws, because it can yield powerful evidence on behalf of victims,” said Fair Housing Council President and CEO William R. Tisdale. “In order to help victims of illegal discrimination achieve legal remedies through federal agencies like HUD, it's critical that organizations across the country are using the most up-to-date, effective investigative practices.”

Since *ISTEP's* inception in 2012, MMFHC and its team of experienced fair housing practitioners and attorneys, including partners at the Fair Housing Justice Center in New York City, have provided training and technical support to 191 test coordinators from 87

non-profit organizations. As a result, *ISTEP* participants have made changes in their enforcement work that resulted in greater consistency in the quality of testing investigations, increased the number of complaints referred to attorneys and administrative agencies such as HUD, and increased the number of lawsuits filed. This, in turn, has resulted in the improved ability of victims to seek legal remedy and strengthened overall enforcement of fair housing laws. “*ISTEP* is clearly fortifying the national fair housing movement,” said Tisdale. “It’s building and expanding our nationwide capacity to fight back against illegal discrimination. We’re honored that MMFHC, one of the oldest and most experienced private fair housing organizations in the country, has been selected to carry out this work.”

Wisconsin legislators Senator Tammy Baldwin and Congresswoman Gwen Moore have both worked to ensure that HUD funding for fair housing activities continues, in Wisconsin and across the nation.

“I’m pleased HUD will continue its support of MMFHC’s *ISTEP* work. It’s the right thing to do. I was pleased to work with House and Senate colleagues last year to ensure that HUD continue this funding that provides training and technical assistance to ensure that renters or home purchasers are not being discriminated against in violation of the Fair Housing Act. Since 2012, Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council has facilitated this crucial training in support of the Fair Housing Act and ensuring nondiscrimination. Housing remains a serious problem across the country, not just in Milwaukee. From a lack of adequate access to affordable housing that many underserved Milwaukeeans face, to the discrimination that still occurs 50 years since enactment of the Fair Housing Act. These funds will help communities across the country realize the vision laid out in that groundbreaking law,” Congresswoman Moore said.

Senator Baldwin agreed: “Barriers to fair housing still exist as Wisconsin families continue to confront housing discrimination – keeping them from the opportunities that everyone deserves. I’ve been proud to partner with the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council to help secure this funding. These resources will continue the Council’s important work of fighting housing discrimination and promoting equal housing opportunities for families and residents throughout Wisconsin.”

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MMFHC is a private, non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote fair housing throughout the State of Wisconsin by combating illegal housing discrimination and by creating and maintaining racially and economically integrated housing patterns. It operates satellite offices in Dane County (the Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison) and in Northeast Wisconsin (the Fair Housing Center of Northeast Wisconsin).

Persons who feel they may have experienced illegal housing discrimination should call 1-877-647-FAIR, a toll-free number. Callers within the 414 area code may call 414-278-1240. All services to victims of illegal housing discrimination are free of charge.