

Press Release

HOPE Fair Housing Center

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Title: **Housing Discrimination: You Had Me At “Hello”**

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Housing Discrimination: You Had Me at “Hello”

Over the past month tests were conducted of rental housing on the East Side of Rockford. This most recent analysis showed that potential tenants are much more likely to obtain an apartment, and feel welcome if they are white than if they are African-American. This was shown through the feedback that the testers received when calling to inquire about advertised rental properties. Testing is one of the important tools that fair housing centers use to uncover discrimination. Fair housing testing is a controlled method for measuring and documenting variations in the quality, quantity and content of information and services offered or given to various home seekers by housing service providers. HOPE Fair Housing Center in partnership with the YWCA of Rockford conducted this survey of Rental housing on the East Side of Rockford.

The survey was the result of more than 30 tests of Rental housing advertisements on craigslist.com. Statistically, more housing providers are listing their properties on the internet than in print media which lead to the decision to use craigslist.com. The exponential growth of the internet and internet accessibility has made the World Wide Web ground zero for almost 70% of home and apartment seekers.

The tests were conducted by trained testers who, by their names and voices, would be identified as white or African-American. They were assigned similar backgrounds with similar income levels and family sizes. It is important in testing that the testers are generally matched on personal and home seeking characteristics so that the only significant difference between them is their race. Often the tester from a protected class may be slightly better qualified. This is to ensure that a housing provider cannot default to credit or income qualifications as reasons for their disparate treatment of a tester.

Each test was measured using ten different criteria. The first of these variables looked at whether a rental unit was available or not, and how that information was conveyed to the tester. The next statistic recorded was the stated amount for rent and security deposits. Properties on the East Side of Rockford have been recognized as significantly “whiter” than other parts of the

city. Taking into account the demographics of the area testers asked for the housing provider's opinion of the surrounding neighborhood; then recorded if the area was described as favorable or in a positive light, or not. To measure the housing provider's overall willingness to work with a tester we also tracked if rental properties other than the one listed in the craigslist.com advertisement were discussed, and how the information was presented i.e. welcoming with a positive attitude, or otherwise.

Some examples of the test results include the fact that the white tester experienced a welcoming attitude and detailed information about properties 18 times, while conversely the African American tester experienced cordial/friendly treatment only six times. In 16% of cases, when the white tester was told an apartment was available, the same housing provider told the African-American tester nothing was available just an hour later. African-American testers were never offered any "Special Incentives." African-American testers were also treated "poorly" on six occasions compared to zero for the white tester. In one specific case while describing the safety of neighborhoods one housing provider even referred to certain areas of Rockford as "The Jungle" while speaking with the white tester.

"This study is evidence that we have not reached the post-racial society that many felt had been obtained with the election of a black President. Unfortunately, many people of color are still facing discrimination in our community and that is simply unjust. These test results only strengthen the YWCA of Rockford's commitment to continuing to raise awareness and eliminate racism." Kris L. Kieper, CEO, YWCA of Rockford.

Someone once said that "I didn't know there were so many ways of saying 'no' without ever once using the word." The words "Housing Discrimination" often brings to mind the image of a door being slammed in a person's face, or the sound of a bigoted or racist remark to a person who is attempting to secure housing. While these blatant acts still do occur, they are often the exception rather than the rule. In general, discriminatory practices are more subversive, and our goal with this study was to determine how early in the rental process discrimination may occur. This study has shown that just based on a person's name and the sound of someone's voice, apartment seekers in Rockford are being pre-judged and discriminated against from the moment they pick up the telephone to begin their housing search.

If you feel you have been discriminated against based on your race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status (family size), or because of a disability, in your search for rental or sales housing, please contact HOPE Fair Housing Center on our toll free number at (630) 690-6500.

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