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# Washtenaw County advocates hope to see fair housing policies improve under Biden administration

MARIA PATTON | WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2021



Fair housing advocates in Washtenaw County are cautiously optimistic about the implications of a new presidential executive order that commits to remedying housing discrimination in America.

According to President Biden's new order, the federal government commits to acknowledging America's history of housing discrimination and "applying and enforcing Federal civil rights and fair housing laws" to protect communities from housing discrimination. Local advocates hope the order will put Washtenaw County on a positive path towards eliminating this form of inequality.

"People think Ann Arbor is liberal and we don't have these issues, but we have these issues everywhere," says Pamela Kisch, the executive director of the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan (FHC). "Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County are no different from the rest of the country."

Housing discrimination has affected American cities since the early 20th century. Laws that discriminated on the basis of race, disability, religion, and gender in the housing process were deemed illegal in 1968 with the passing of the federal Fair Housing Act, but discriminatory housing practices still continue in Washtenaw County and across the country.

The FHC works to address present housing disparities and discrimination in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and neighboring cities. Though the laws that legalized housing discrimination are no longer present, their consequences are still very much a part of our society. While appearing neutral, the choices that banks and landlords make in granting loans and housing disproportionately impact marginalized communities.

"Lenders [will say they] don't do any mortgages for houses under \$50,000. Those houses are more likely to be in Black neighborhoods," Kisch says.

The Obama administration's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule addressed barriers for marginalized communities by helping them become homeowners and renters through disparate impact tools. The administration also created policies that provided federal tools to American cities to eliminate barriers to fair housing. But the Trump administration implemented policies that overturned Obama's.

"We want those things back," Kisch says. "We want cities and counties who get federal dollars to be accountable for the policies and practices that stop people from having full access to housing."

FHC is optimistic that Obama's policies will be reinstated under the Biden administration.

"We know who the secretary of HUD is going to be," Kisch says. "That looks promising. But we just don't know."

More information on FHC's work can be found on its [website](#).

**Maria Patton is a lifelong Ypsilanti resident. She is currently a student at the University of Michigan, working towards a bachelor's degree in communications and media. You can find more of her work in [The Michigan Daily](#), where she is a columnist for the [Michigan in Color](#) section. She can be reached at [pattonma@umich.edu](mailto:pattonma@umich.edu).**

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