

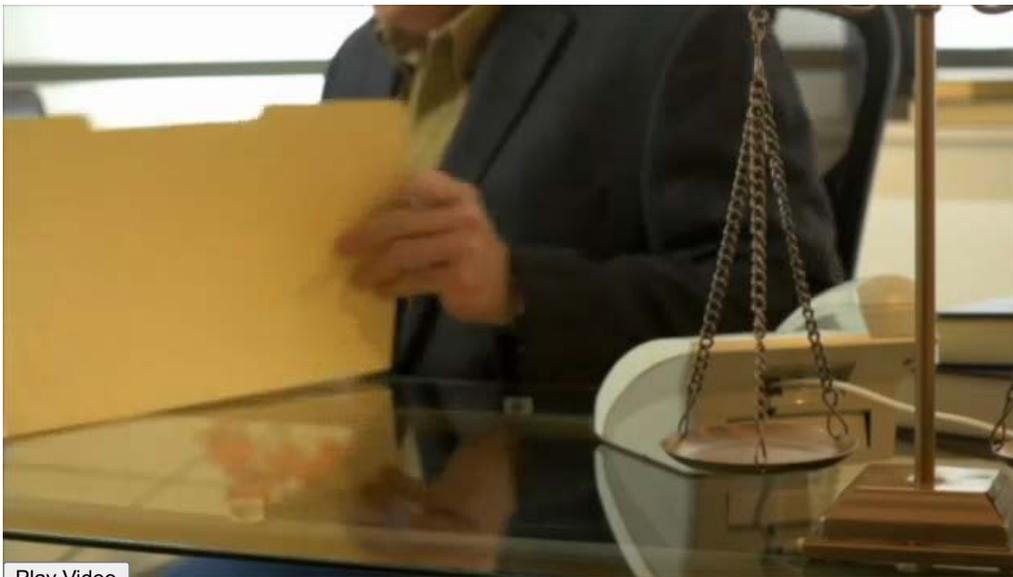
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Michigan receives \$2.2 million from HUD to combat housing discrimination



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LANSING, Mich. — The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development today awarded the state of Michigan \$2.2 million to fight housing discrimination.

One organization receiving the money is the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid-Michigan, which covers 10 counties, including Ingham County.

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“We get between 150 and 180 complaints a year,” said Executive Director Pam Kisch. “The most common complaint we get is discrimination based on physical disability. The second most common is race. And the third most common is disability and based on mental or emotional disability. And then a number four is familial status which is just a fancy word for families that have children under the age of 18.”

Fiscal Year 2021 FHIP Grants

State	Recipient	Grant Type	Amount
Michigan	Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan	EOI	\$125,000
	Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan	PEI	\$374,998
	Legal Services of Eastern Michigan	EOI	\$125,000
	Legal Services of Eastern Michigan	PEI	\$347,233
	Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit	PEI	\$375,000
	Fair Housing Center of West Michigan	EOI	\$125,000
	Fair Housing Center of West Michigan	PEI	\$375,000
	Fair Housing Center of Southwest Michigan	PEI	\$349,330

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In Ingham County, the organization received 33 complaints from 2018 to 2020, almost all of them from the city of Lansing.

From Lansing alone, it has received 18 complaints so far in 2021.

Kisch said the money will be spent on education.

“With the education funding, we're going to be doing training of people who work in social service agencies to make sure they are housing literate,” Kisch said.

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It will also go toward enforcement.

“With that grant, we're going to take about 165 complaints a year,” Kisch said. “We're going to investigate those complaints through testing... And so we're going to make a lot of referrals to legal services.”

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organization would send a black tester and a white tester, who would present themselves as very similar candidates.

"They would probably both be women, they'd both be married, they both have one or two children, I mean, everything would be equal," she said.

However, the black tester would be more highly qualified to own or rent the property. For example, he or she may have a higher income, or more job experience.

"So on paper, everything about the black tester would be preferable," Kisch said. "And then we see how the landlord responds."

While there are laws against housing discrimination, it still persists.

Jim Schaafsma a housing attorney with the Michigan Poverty Law Program, said there are two primary sources of fair housing law: federal and state.

"They aim to do prohibit discrimination in housing based on various characteristics. And so those characteristics are race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, which means the presence of kids under the age of 18, and against persons with disabilities, and then that's under the federal and state laws," Schaafsma said. "And then the state law adds two additional categories, which are age and marital status."

The money comes at a time when the nationwide moratorium on evictions is about to expire. Ann Routt, an attorney for the Michigan Advocacy Program, said the issue with evictions directly intersects with the issue of housing discrimination.

"What we've seen is there's this huge rush of eviction cases going on right now," Routt said. "And it's really hard to kind of sort through that to understand: Are there underlying issues going on there? Are people not getting the services that they should have as a person with disabilities, so they should be reasonable accommodations in place? We want to make sure certain communities aren't more impacted than others."

Housing can dictate job opportunities, where children go to school, and even health outcomes. Kisch said this is a primary reason why housing discrimination is a vital issue for communities.

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