

# EDITORIALS

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## Give Housing Agency A Hand

**T**he Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status and national origin.

But if there is no one around to see that the law is enforced and to advocate for victims of discrimination, the Fair Housing Act might as well not exist.

In what could be characterized as a cynical move to neutralize the law, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development cut off funds last September to the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, the only agency in the state that investigates housing discrimination complaints and provides free legal assistance.

HUD also discontinued funds to 40 other organizations that perform the same function around the country.

It would be wrong for the state to deny the center a two-year grant of \$350,000 a year that it

has requested to replace the federal funding loss and remain in operation beyond Jan. 1.

Since it was founded in 1994, the center's six-person staff has investigated more than 2,500 complaints and kept many victims of predatory

lending from losing their homes to foreclosure. The center also does a considerable amount of preventive work, educating landlords, real estate agents, developers and residents about anti-discrimination laws. Without the

center, housing discrimination complaints would probably shift to the state Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

The commission, however, primarily investigates employment discrimination and would not perform the preventive and advocacy work that the fair housing center does.

The legislature should fund the center. A grant of \$350,000 a year for two years is a fair price to pay for the center's services.

**FAIR HOUSING ACT**  
With no watchdog,  
the law might as  
well not exist

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Support Fair Housing Center

We thank The Courant for the March 18 article "Housing Center Trouble."

The Fair Housing Center is a critical resource for the state of Connecticut. During the last year, the center opened up more than 500 units of housing to low-income residents; ensured that elderly and disabled tenants were able to remain in their homes; and taught fair housing laws to more than 1,800 housing providers, residents of homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters and those searching for housing with rental-assistance vouchers.

One of us is a former executive director of the state Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, so there's firsthand knowledge of the high-quality work of the Fair Housing Center and the critical role it plays in assisting

victims of housing discrimination. We also understand the ways that housing segregation affects where a person works, where our children go to school and how we access essential services such as medical care.

It is imperative that the General Assembly recognize Connecticut's need for the center's fair housing services. The center's request for \$350,000 per year in the coming biennial budget is a bargain for the state.

**CYNTHIA WATTS ELDER  
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Co-Presidents  
Board of Directors  
Connecticut Fair Housing Center  
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*Cynthia Watts Elder is a former executive director of the state Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. Philip Tegeler was a plaintiff's attorney in Sheff vs. O'Neill.*

MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2007