



Commissioner Nick Fish
City of Portland

50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act
April 11, 2018

The 1960's produced three great civil rights laws: the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

The Fair Housing Act addressed a legacy of discrimination in housing. It focused on explicit discrimination – like racial redlining in federal mortgage insurance and restrictive covenants in real estate contracts. But it also addressed more subtle forms of discrimination – like real estate agents steering minorities to particular neighborhoods, biased lending and underwriting, and concentrating poverty in certain ZIP codes.

The Fair Housing Act was blocked and filibustered for many years. Dr. King's assassination on April 4, 1968 proved decisive, and forced action.

The Fair Housing Act had champions from both parties. Its main goal: integrating neighborhoods and ending bias.

But the original Act proved to be a “toothless tiger.” It took the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 to strengthen the law and expand its reach.

The amendments prohibited discrimination based on familial status and disability, established new administrative enforcement mechanisms, and expanded the jurisdiction of the Justice Department to sue on behalf of victims in federal court.

My father played a key role in brokering the compromise that allowed the amendments to become law. When President Reagan signed the bill into law at a White House ceremony on September 13, 1988, he gave my dad one of the pens he used.

I brought the pen with me today.

Despite the laudable intentions of the Fair Housing Act, enforcement has been uneven and progress has been slow. Recently, the Trump Administration put the brakes on a 2015 HUD rule that requires recipients of federal housing dollars to “affirmatively further” fair housing. HUD Secretary Dr. Ben Carson dismissed the rule as “social engineering.”

I am proud that we are taking the time to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act today. While we have made progress as a country, there is more work to be done to reach our shared goal of a fairer, more integrated nation.