

City of Santa Barbara Presents Fair Housing Award to RHMP

Introducing the Rental Housing Mediation Program
CITY OF SANTA BARBARA, Community Development

The City of Santa Barbara operates the **Rental Housing Mediation Program (RHMP)**. It was established in 1976 and serves residents of the cities of Santa Barbara, Goleta, and Carpinteria. RHMP has 3 full-time staff members and a Board of 15 community volunteers appointed by the Santa Barbara City Council, who are all trained in mediation. The Program addresses residential rental housing issues, including termination of tenancies, habitability & repair, right to entry/right to privacy, rent increases, discrimination, and security deposits.

On Tuesday, April 19, 2022, Santa Barbara Mayor Randy Rowse presented a Fair Housing Month Proclamation to Andrea Bifano, Senior Rental Housing Mediation Specialist. Ms. Bifano, City of Santa employee for nearly 35 years, accepted the Proclamation on behalf



of Santa Barbara's Fair Housing Office, the Rental Housing Mediation Board and Program, and gave a speech regarding Fair Housing Month. See below for an excerpt of her speech:

"During this unprecedented time of the world Pandemic, Fair Housing Laws, practices, enforcement, and the Rental Housing Mediation services, including educating, preventing, and settling disputes out of court, have been needed now more than ever. The theme this year for National Fair Housing Month from the White House Administration is, *"Fair Housing: More Than Just Words."*

It is important to reflect on the history of The Fair Housing Act of 1968, and to realize that its significance has to be "more than just words" for impact and change to occur at every level within our society, beginning with local communities.

The passage of this Act was preceded by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, and the following day on April 5th President Lyndon B. Johnson wrote a letter imploring Congress to guarantee a basic American right to secure a home regardless of the color of skin. On April 11, 1968, the Fair Housing Act was enacted by Congress and signed by President Johnson.

Its purpose was created to eliminate discriminatory practices in all aspects of housing concerning landlords, tenants, lending institutions, sellers and buyers, and the real estate industry.

Over 50 years later, racial disparities in housing are still very prevalent and continue to be reported, which substantiates the continued need for the Fair Housing Act, and the promotion of equal opportunity in housing for all."

Public comment followed Ms. Bifano's speech led by Laura Bode, Executive Director of the Santa Barbara Rental Property Association, Petra Lowen, Community Living Advocate for Independent Living Resource, Inc. and Alex Entrekin, Attorney for the Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County.



The RHMP provides Dispute Resolution Services, including information on Rights and Responsibilities to Landlords and Tenants as a method of resolving disputes out of Court. There is no cost for their service. The Phone number is (805) 564-5420

The California DRE (Department of Real Estate published a document for National Fair Housing Month, outlining some of the important California housing and discrimination laws. An excerpt follows with the full document available on our website (www.sbrpa.org) along with a copy of the Proclamation given to the RHMP.

California Real Estate Law describes several prohibited practices:

- Refusing to negotiate the sale, rental, or financing of a property.
- Refusing to show, rent, sell, or finance a property, provide information about a property, or steering a person away from a property.
- Discriminating in soliciting or negotiating the sale or purchase of property, in loan servicing, or in soliciting or negotiating mortgage loans.
- Discriminating in the terms, conditions, or privileges of sale, rental, or financing the purchase of property.
- Representing to any person that property is not available for inspection, sale, or rental when such property is in fact available.
- Processing an application more slowly or otherwise acting to delay or avoid the sale, rental, or financing of the purchase of property.
- Refusing or failing to cooperate with or assist another real estate licensee in negotiating the sale, rental, or financing the purchase of property.
- Soliciting sales, rentals, or listings of real estate from any person, but not from another person within the same area because of differences in a protected characteristic.
- Providing information or advice to any person concerning the desirability of particular property or area that is different from information or advice given to any other person.
- Making or publishing any notice or advertisement concerning the sale, rental, or financing of the purchase of property that indicates any preference, limitation, or discrimination.
- Quoting or charging someone a price, rent, or cleaning or security deposit for a particular property that is different from the price, rent or security deposit quoted or charged to any other person because of a difference in a protected characteristic.
- Making any effort to instruct or encourage licensees to engage in any discriminatory act in violation of a federal or state fair housing law.

RENTAL HOUSING MEDIATION PROGRAM (805) 564-5420

