



Oregon

Bureau of Labor and Industries

Brad Avakian
Commissioner

May 12, 2011

Republican State Senators
Senate Republican Office
900 Court St. NE, S-323
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senators:

Thank you for your letter dated yesterday, which I received attached to your release to the media today. I appreciate the focus you are bringing to this critical issue and the disturbing information reported recently in *The Oregonian*. The report for the City of Portland reminds us how critical strong civil rights enforcement is to advancing equal opportunity for all Oregonians.

The state Civil Rights Division, enforcer of both state and federal fair housing laws and part of the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), regularly investigates cases involving testing by the Fair Housing Council of Oregon (FHCO) to identify potential civil rights violations in housing. FHCO has been an active stakeholder with the Civil Rights Division since Oregon regained the authority to investigate allegations of discrimination in housing in 2008. Legislation in 2008 and 2009 was necessary to empowering BOLI to take on a contract with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, bringing the benefits of local, accessible investigations to Oregonians in more than 300 cases to-date. Many of these cases were filed by FHCO either on its own behalf or in the process of advocating for individuals

As BOLI, FHCO and others marked Fair Housing Month in April, FHCO Executive Director Moley Good said, "The cooperation between BOLI and the Fair Housing Council has been an invaluable asset to Oregonians facing discrimination. Helping Oregonians to know their rights and access justice is the heart of both our missions. *It is disappointing that BOLI is tackling this outrageous and pervasive problem in our society with only federal funds to support the work.*" Moley and his organization have been excellent advocates for fair housing and routinely cooperate with our civil rights investigators, and we value their role in our enforcement process providing for economic damages, non-economic damages, civil penalties and other remedies to housing complaints from around the state. BOLI's enforcement work has led directly to settlements including agreements to provide housing, modify policies, comply with ongoing reporting and monitoring requirements, and pay monetary sums totaling more than \$145,000; additional cases are now in contested case hearings.

The combined effort of FHCO and BOLI helps connect Oregonians with the agency that can

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investigate their complaints and provide appropriate remedies. As part of BOLI's ongoing efforts to educate all Oregonians about civil rights laws, we emphasize the importance of fair housing and public accommodations protections, in addition to the employment protections we more commonly enforce.

Because BOLI has the authority to investigate and then resolve complaints of housing discrimination, it is critical for specific cases to be brought to the Civil Rights Division. FHCO does so regularly, and in the strongest possible terms I encourage any Oregonian with a question or concern about housing discrimination to contact our offices. The Civil Rights Division is headquartered in Portland and can be reached directly at 971-673-0764 or crdemail.boli@state.or.us. Additional information about the complaint filing process is [available online](#) as well.

I appreciate your commitment as legislators to the same values that drive BOLI's work every day: to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination. Again, thank you for your focus on this important issue—I look forward to working with your caucus to provide even stronger protections for Oregonians' civil rights.

Sincerely,



Brad Avakian, Commissioner
Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries