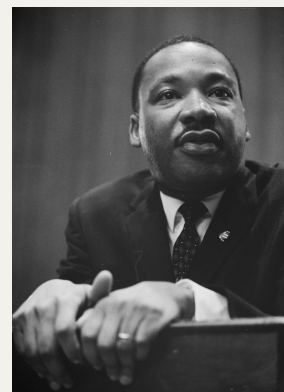




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## Commemorating National Fair Housing Month

Each April, we commemorate National Fair Housing Month and the anniversary of the passage of the Fair Housing Act, which made it illegal to discriminate against someone based on race, color, religion, or national origin in housing transactions. We also honor the work of civil rights activists like Martin Luther King, Jr., who fought to make this law a reality. At the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center, we are honored to continue the fight against systemic discrimination and for inclusive communities.



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## Victory for Deaf Applicants: Large Property Management Company Settles Disability Discrimination Case for \$25,000

Peabody Properties has agreed to pay a settlement of \$25,000 after MFHC uncovered evidence that Peabody was discriminating against Deaf and hard of hearing applicants for housing. MFHC conducted many tests from 2018-2020 that showed Peabody Properties refused to provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to assist Deaf and hard of hearing applicants in completing the application process. Because of the refusal to provide interpreters, Deaf and hard of hearing individuals lacked equal access to Peabody Properties' housing. Peabody Properties owns and manages over 10,000 units across New England, New Jersey, and Florida, including Pyncheon and Edgewater Apartments in Springfield.

MFHC first filed the discrimination case against Peabody Properties at the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, which found probable cause of discrimination. The case was referred to the Massachusetts Attorney General's office, who assisted in negotiating the settlement. As a part of the settlement, the staff at Peabody will receive training by the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH). It will also update its reasonable accommodation policy to ensure that the rights of all individuals with disabilities are protected.

According to the MCDHH, an estimated 1,378,501 Massachusetts residents are Deaf or hard of hearing. MFHC supports MCDHH's vision that "universal access is the standard for ensuring that Deaf and hard of hearing people fully participate in all areas of life," and we hope this settlement promotes awareness among federally-assisted housing providers that they must provide ASL interpreters, when requested by Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, throughout their tenancy, beginning with the application process. If you have been discriminated against or denied a reasonable accommodation by a housing provider,

please do not hesitate to contact MFHC to file a complaint.

You can find news coverage of this case in [Mass Live](#), [the Framingham Source](#), and [WWLP](#).

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## SUN Program Helps Provides Mobility Counselling to Section 8 Voucher Holders



MFHC provides housing counseling to voucher holders who are interested in moving through our SUN Housing Mobility Program. We can assist by providing information about your fair housing rights and how to assert them during your housing search. We can also provide legal support if you face discrimination because of your Section 8 voucher, or for any other reason. We believe that everyone should be able to access safe and accessible housing in a neighborhood of their choice! If you are interested in learning more about this program, please call us at (413) 539-9796 or email [sun@massfairhousing.org](mailto:sun@massfairhousing.org).

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## 2021 Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference was a Success!

Our 15th Annual Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference was held virtually from April 13-15th and included many speakers and attendees from across the country. The opening session of the conference was a fireside chat between Pops Peterson (whose piece *I'm With Her | Freedom Of Assembly* is featured to the right) and Jamie Williamson (one of the founders of the conference) about art and social protests. Dr. Tiffany Manuel (or DrT) spoke about how we can build the public will to create stronger and more equitable communities. On Wednesday, we heard from Professor Deborah Archer. She is a law professor at the NYU School of Law and is the first Black woman to serve as president of the American Civil Liberties Union. Finally, on Thursday, Acting Assistant Secretary of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity, Jeanine Worden spoke about the new administration's strong commitment to advancing equity and civil rights in the coming years.



If you weren't able to attend this conference, you will be able to find recordings of the workshops and keynote speakers online at [fhcrconference.com](http://fhcrconference.com). You can also sign up for updates about our next conference in 2022! We hope to see you there.



From left, keynote speakers Dr. Tiffany Manuel, Professor Deborah N. Archer, and Acting Assistant Secretary of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity Jeanine Worden.

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## MFHC Executive Director Honored by CHAPA

During this fair housing month, the Citizens' Planning & Housing Association (CHAPA) recognized our Executive Director, Meris Bergquist, as one of five Open Door Champions during its Fair Housing Symposium on April 29, 2021. The other awardees included Councilor Lydia Edwards, for her trailblazing work to reform Boston's zoning regulations by embedding fair housing requirements; Symone Crawford, Director of Homeownership and STASH at the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance, for her innovative work to increase Black homeownership and reduce the racial wealth gap; the Suffolk University Housing Discrimination Testing Program, for their definitive fair housing testing investigation of race and Section 8 discrimination in the Boston rental market; and Colin Killick, the Director of the Disability Policy Consortium, for his work to decrease homelessness and increase accessibility for people with disabilities. Congratulations to all! Thank you, CHAPA, for sponsoring a great event and keeping the spotlight on fair housing issues.

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