



## September 2019 Newsletter



### **SAVE THE DATE!**

We hope to see you at the 14th annual Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference to be held at the Western New England University School of Law on **Friday April 24, 2020.**

### **MFHC settles housing discrimination complaint against repeat offenders for \$16,000**

Unfortunately, families with children face multiple discriminatory barriers while looking for rental housing in Massachusetts. When a Springfield property management company published a rental ad to “students and young professionals only” in 2016, we conducted an investigation and found strong evidence of housing discrimination against families with minor children and people with disabilities. With this evidence, we filed a complaint and reached a settlement which required the property managers to cease their discriminatory practices, obtain fair housing training and pay MFHC \$5,000.



Two years later, the same managers formed a “new” property management company and continued to discriminate against families with children. MFHC filed a second discrimination complaint against them and settled the case in July. As a result, the property managers must attend another fair housing training, publish affirmative advertising of available rental properties and pay \$16,000 to MFHC. This case illustrates the persistence of discrimination in western Massachusetts and it highlights the ongoing need for private fair housing investigations and anti-discrimination enforcement work to guarantee

that everyone protected under the law, including all families with children, are able to enjoy equal access to rental housing, free from discrimination.

If you have experienced housing discrimination because of your race, national origin, color, religion, sex, minor children, disability, age, marital status, sexual orientation, veteran's status, or your gender identity or expression, please report it to us at 413-539-9796. We need your help to eliminate housing discrimination.

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## **Staff Interview: Erin Austin, AmeriCorps Legal Advocate**



*Erin Austin just completed her first term of service as an AmeriCorps Legal Advocate with the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center. Erin has a Master's Degree in Labor Studies from UMass Amherst, and worked as both a labor organizer for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union and a researcher for the Massachusetts AFL-CIO prior to joining MFHC. Erin's work included research, data analysis, and client advocacy. Erin is originally from Iowa and has returned to the Midwest to begin law school. Erin's impressive research skills and analytical abilities will have a lasting impact on our work. We are grateful for her hard work and*

*many contributions to MFHC and wish her the very best in the future.*

### **How did you become interested in serving with MFHC?**

I became interested in the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center after I took a labor law class taught by Harris Freeman, who is on the MFHC Board. He mentioned the organization to me when he found out I was looking for work that would both feel useful in terms of contributing to society and would also help me clarify my interest in going to law school.

### **What is one of your biggest accomplishments from this past year?**

I spent a lot of time this spring working on a project on racial discrimination in housing, which feels like a big accomplishment. I'm sure it will feel even better next week when I finish analyzing the data and writing the report about the project's findings.

### **What are your plans for the future? How has your time at MFHC impacted you?**

I will be in St. Louis in September to start law school at Washington University. I have a handful of ideas about what I want to do, all of which are public interest-focused: the big two are fair housing and union-side labor law! My time at the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center made me incredibly passionate about protecting people from discrimination based on receipt of public assistance such as Section 8. I'm moving to a place that doesn't have any laws protecting recipients of public assistance, and I hope to start a conversation there about the value of this legal protection.

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**We would like to talk to you if you have ever been denied housing because of lead paint, or if you are a service provider who has worked with families who have been denied housing because of lead paint. You can contact us at 413-539-9796 x 105.**



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