

Congresswoman Barbara Lee
Statement on Fair Housing subcommittee hearing
June 25, 2002

Good afternoon. I want to thank Chairwoman Roukema and Ranking Member Frank for holding this important hearing on fair housing. Housing should be a basic right of every human being, and therefore it is imperative that we have an honest and fair system that works to improve the lives of everyone, regardless of their race, nationality, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, or religion, or familial status.

Just this past weekend, in my district, Oakland, CA, we had a town hall meeting on homeownership and predatory lending. We had hundreds of people there, wanting to know where they fit into the homeownership initiatives proposed by the President and the Congressional Black Caucus. Questions about fair, affordable rental units, transitional housing assistance, and protecting the elderly from predatory lending practices were at the top of many constituent's concerns. I have committed myself to providing housing opportunities for people. We have authorized essential housing programs, and committed millions of dollars for their success. Now, it is time to see that same commitment from HUD. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has a responsibility to my constituents, and every person in this country-it must address the concerns of fair housing, civil rights, and the disabled all while regaining public confidence in the enforcement of civil rights laws protecting minorities and people with disabilities.

It has come to this committee's attention that there have been too many cases of unfair or discriminatory treatment to some individuals. Currently, discrimination complaints against the disabled now surpass complaints based on race. A HUD report found that some owners of private, federally subsidized housing discouraged disabled people from applying for housing through discriminatory practices. In Assistant Secretary Marcus' written testimony, he stated-and I quote "I am honored to testify before you today on HUD's efforts to enforce those laws that protect the right of every American, including minorities and persons with disabilities, to freely choose where they will live. No one should be precluded from seeking the housing of their choice or purchasing the home of their dreams because of their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status or disability. Secretary Mel Martinez has repeatedly emphasized that aggressive enforcement of the Fair Housing Act as a high priority of the Department of Housing and Urban Development." While this is an admirable goal and priority to both this committee and to HUD, we all have concerns with the Administration's slow action in filling the position of Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO). I need to see the actions of the Secretary and the Administration, as opposed to promises, and I believe that people living in public housing are ready to see the enforcement of laws that are supposed to protect them.

Therefore, I look forward to discussing the need to fill the current vacancy of the Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO), and other issues relating to minorities and the disabled in public housing. For many of these people, public housing is their last chance at housing...we have to make sure that this housing is fair, quality, and accessible to all.