

Opening Statement
Congresswoman Marge Roukema
Chairman
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity

June 25, 2002
*“Fighting Discrimination Against the Disabled and Minorities
Through Fair Housing Enforcement”*

I want to thank the witnesses for coming to testify today on the critical issue of housing discrimination. Today we are here to discuss our nation’s fair housing laws and to explore new ways to remove barriers to quality affordable housing.

As many of you know, as Chair of the Housing Subcommittee, I have been working on legislation to increase the availability of affordable housing and expand homeownership and rental opportunities across the country. It is my sincere hope that we will be successful in enacting HR 3995, the Housing Affordability for America Act this year. This country is facing a serious affordable housing problem for minority groups and for those with special needs. We must break down the barriers that prevent certain segments of the population from realizing the American dream of homeownership and our Fair Housing laws are a key component of any housing policy.

In 1968, Congress recognized that fact and enacted the Fair Housing Act. With the passage of that legislation, Congress confirmed its commitment to equal opportunity and equal justice for those needing housing.

In the years since the Fair Housing Act was enacted, we have made significant progress. More families own their homes today than ever before and the Fair Housing laws have played an important part in that success.

The Fair Housing Act covers most housing and promotes equal housing opportunities for all Americans by prohibiting discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, and familial status

I strongly believe that the key to continued success on fair housing centers on aggressive enforcement of the laws that exist. When the laws are enforced and the programs properly administered, there has been significant expansion of housing, lending, and insurance for those that need it. That is why I want to commend both Secretary Martinez and President Bush for making better enforcement and administration of our Fair Housing Laws a high priority.

Unfortunately, in previous years, HUD's commitment has been less than impressive. Reduction in the HUD staff that enforce and administer the Fair Housing laws has led to lack of enforcement and slow resolution to the more than 10,000 discrimination complaints that are filed each year. Our problems with fair housing are not because there are not enough laws on the books, but because they have not been adequately enforced or administered. We can do better and I know that the Secretary has made a commitment to make this a priority.

In his testimony today, Kenneth Marcus, General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at HUD lays out a variety of steps that HUD is already taking or intends to take in the near future. I am sure that they will go a long way to making sure that we are meeting the needs of persons with disabilities, increasing homeownership and enforcing the Fair Housing Act for all Americans. I look forward to working with the Secretary and the Department on these and other steps that will address the shortcomings that have hampered the programs in recent year.