

## Center says it found housing discrimination at Dallas-Fort Worth area apartment complexes

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Several large North Texas apartment complexes tried to charge higher rents and security deposits to black and Hispanic prospective tenants than their white counterparts, according to an investigation released Thursday.

The North Texas Fair Housing Center, a federally funded nonprofit that opened last year, sent 40 pairs of "testers" to inquire about apartments at about 40 complexes in predominantly white areas in several area cities in Dallas, Collin and Tarrant counties. The center would not disclose the exact locations of the complexes.

In most of the tests, a black or Hispanic person asked about an apartment. Then, within an hour, a white person did the same. Each minority tester reported better income, credit scores or some other favorable attribute than the white tester. Some tests also involved discrimination against families with children.

Nearly 40 percent of the time, the black testers were given higher rents or higher security deposits or were denied move-in specials. One in three of the Hispanic testers experienced violations of fair housing laws, as did one in five families with children.

"We found some major differences in the treatment," said Frances Espinoza, executive director of the Dallas-based center, at a news conference and open house event on Thursday. The center receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and private sources.

In one case, a black and a white tester were shown the same 807-square-foot unit. The leasing agent told the white tester that the rent was \$908 per month and the black tester that it was \$990 a month, the report states.

In another case, a leasing agent told a black tester, "Unfortunately I don't have anything for you to see right now," according to the report. But a white tester who came in an hour later was shown a unit.

Espinoza said the center may submit documentation about the complexes to HUD, which could take action against the property owners for violating the 1968 Fair Housing Act.

Shanna Smith, president and chief executive officer of the National Fair Housing Alliance in Washington, D.C., said the agency did not do more extensive testing at each complex because it only needs to find one violation to file a complaint.

Gerry Henigsmann, executive vice president of the Apartment Association of Greater Dallas, said he was surprised by the group's findings. He said the association provides extensive training on fair housing laws through its website and at seminars, with one scheduled on May 12.

"I would hope that you don't have people out there saying, 'OK, I'm still going to make my own decisions as to who I want to live here and who I don't.' That's archaic," Henigsmann said. "That's not good business."

Espinoza said that housing discrimination often goes unreported. She said she hopes that her agency's report encourages more people to report violations or voice concerns about segregated neighborhoods.

Before the North Texas Fair Housing Center opened, the region was the largest metropolitan area in the nation without a private fair housing organization to investigate complaints using testers, Smith said.

The testers, who received a small stipend, were not told what the study was about. Smith said the results of the local agency's first study will be used to monitor the community's progress in the future.

"This kind of behavior is intolerable," Smith said.

The North Texas Fair Housing Center investigates housing discrimination complaints, provides education about fair housing laws and works with governmental agencies on enforcement. For more information or to file a complaint, call 1-877-471-1022 or go to [www.northtexasfairhousing.org](http://www.northtexasfairhousing.org).