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OPINION: Fair Housing Month more important than ever

Written by Wendy Harris

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In North Carolina, fair housing is more important than ever. We have been blessed by economic growth. Good jobs and the natural beauty of our state continue to draw new residents from across the country. But we are seeing that housing supply is not keeping up with demand. It is during these challenging market conditions that people particularly need the protections of the Fair Housing Act.

In the past, North Carolina has often fallen short when it comes to protecting fair housing. Therefore, realtors have recognized the need to do more within their own profession. The National Association of Realtors' Fair Housing Action Plan emphasizes accountability, culture change, and enhanced training in order to ensure America's 1.5 million realtors are doing everything possible to protect housing rights in America.

We have continued to strengthen our Code of Ethics in regards to discrimination during real estate transactions. In fact, our Code of Ethics covers more protected classes than the Federal legislation. The Realtors Code prohibits discrimination by race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and national origin. And recently, the Code of Ethics has been expanded to conduct outside of real estate practices.

But fair housing is more than a list of dos and don'ts, rights, and penalties. As stewards of the right to own, use and transfer private property, fair housing protects realtors' livelihoods. Our business depends on a free, open market that embraces equal opportunity. So does our economy.

N.C. realtors recognize the significance of the Fair Housing Act and reconfirm their commitment to upholding fair housing law as well as offering equal professional service to all in their search for real property. We now offer special training on Fair Housing to all our realtor members and, this month, are funding a multi-media campaign to increase awareness of Fair Housing statewide in radio, newspaper, and social media.

Thankfully, our elected officials at both the state and national levels are joining us in this commitment. Congress and the president recently agreed to a 2022 fiscal year spending bill that includes important provisions for fair housing. The bill includes $85 million directly to the agencies that do the most to protect fair housing. In addition, the bill provides billions of additional dollars for affordable housing loans and grants. Finally, the legislation had nearly $100 million for housing counseling and legal aid. In North Carolina, the most recent state budget bill included $180 million for a workforce housing loan program. We need more, diverse housing available so we can keep housing affordable for all North Carolinians.

Fair Housing Month is a time to remember that we all have a part to play in ensuring equal access to housing for all. More than 50 years after the passage of the landmark Fair Housing Act, there is still work to do, and N.C. realtors are committed to leading the way. As we like to say, "We open doors to everyone."

Wendy Harris is the 2022 President of NC Realtors.

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Wendy Harris

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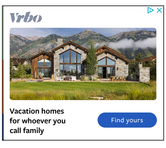

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