

# North Dakota Fair Housing Council

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## **APRIL IS FAIR HOUSING MONTH**

On April 11, 1968, the Federal Fair Housing Act was passed by Congress. From 1966-1967, Congress regularly considered the fair housing bill, but failed to garner a strong enough majority for its passage. However, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson utilized this national tragedy to urge for the bill's speedy Congressional approval. Since the 1966 open housing marches in Chicago, Dr. King's name had been closely associated with the fair housing legislation. President Johnson viewed the Act as a fitting memorial to the man's life work, and wished to have the Act passed prior to Dr. King's funeral in Atlanta. Since the Act's passage, April has been the chosen month to celebrate its passage.

The Federal Fair Housing Act states it is illegal to

discriminate in the rental, sale or financing of housing based upon race, color, national origin, religion, gender, familial status and disability.

## **RACIALLY INCLUSIVE CONFERENCE**

The Upper Midwest Regional Network of Race Relations and Racial Justice Organizations will be hosting its third Building Racially Inclusive Communities Conference at the Fargo Holiday Inn May 6-8. The Conference seeks to educate attendees on regional efforts to combat racism and to share resources and information on effective anti-racism strategies. For more information, contact Char Voight at 612-626-9496 or [cvoight@umn.edu](mailto:cvoight@umn.edu)

## **BISMARCK TOWN HALL MEETING SCHEDULED**

The first in a series of Town Hall Meetings to advance diversity will be held in Bismarck on April 6, 2004 at the Radisson Hotel, 605 E. Broadway Ave. The Mayor's Committee on Human Relations and the North Dakota Fair Housing Council will be hosting the meeting entitled, "Within Our Grasp: Building a Better Bismarck through Diversity." The meeting will focus on race, national origin and religious discrimination.

"This event will raise awareness and educate people in Bismarck about discrimination," said Rose Stoller, chair of the Mayor's Committee on Human

Relations. "Bismarck is changing, and all of us need to learn how to make it change for the better," Stoller said.

The event begins at 6 p.m. with a social. Bismarck Mayor John Warford will welcome participants to the meeting which includes speakers and discussions on overcoming discrimination, people who work to make Bismarck more diverse, common misconceptions of the Muslim and Jewish faiths, and post 9/11 discrimination. The audience will have an opportunity to participate. The evening will close with an event sponsored by the United Tribes Technical College.

Bismarck Mayor John Warford said the Town Hall Meeting is a chance for Bismarck residents to learn about other cultures. "Diversity is a sign of a healthy city," Warford said. "This Town Hall Meeting gives Bismarck the opportunity to welcome other cultures that help our city grow stronger."

The mission of the Mayor's Committee on Human Relations is to protect and promote the personal dignity of all Bismarck citizens and eliminate any discriminatory barriers that prevent them from reaching their full human potential. The Committee seeks to make education and compliance a meaningful and visible strategy as it works to recognize the value of a diverse community.

Endorsers of the event are still being sought. No financial commitment is necessary; endorsers need only acknowledge their support of the event and commitment to advancing

diversity. Current endorsers include: AARP North Dakota; American Association of University Women-North Dakota; American Red Cross: Burleigh & Morton County Chapters; Bismarck Police Department; Bismarck Public Schools; Bismarck State College; Bismarck Veterans Memorial Public Library; Bismarck-Mandan Board of Realtors; Bismarck-Mandan Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and Church; The Church of the Helping Hand, Inc.; The Coffee Break; Commission on the Status of Women; Dakota Center for Independent Living; Embracing Diversity Learning First Committee of Bismarck State College; Gandhi Peace Network; International Club; League of Women Voters of Bismarck-Mandan; Mental Health Association in North Dakota; North Dakota AFL-CIO; North Dakota Association of School Psychologists; North Dakota Department of Labor-Division of Human Rights; North Dakota Disability Advocacy Consortium; North Dakota Human Rights Coalition; North Dakota Progressive Coalition; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG); Protection & Advocacy Project; Ruth Meiers Hospitality House; St. Mary's Central High School; and United Tribes Technical College.

There will be no charge for this event, but registration will be required. Registration materials are available at [www.ndfhc.org/HRC.htm](http://www.ndfhc.org/HRC.htm) More Town Hall Meetings are planned for the future.

## **N.D. SUPPORTS TENNESSEE IN CASE**

By DEENA WINTER,  
Bismarck Tribune-Saturday,  
January 17, 2004. North  
Dakota is one of seven states  
that have joined briefs in  
support of Tennessee, which is  
being sued by a paraplegic  
who had to crawl up two flights  
of courthouse steps to get to a  
hearing and then was arrested  
for refusing to show up for a  
second court date.

The Tennessee courthouse  
did not have an elevator and  
George Lane, who uses a  
wheelchair, had to attend a  
hearing where he was accused  
of driving with a suspended  
license. When he failed to do a  
repeat performance up the  
courthouse stairs for his  
second appearance, he was  
arrested.

Lane then sued Tennessee  
for not making public buildings  
accessible to disabled people.  
Tennessee says people should  
not be allowed to sue the state  
to enforce the Americans with  
Disabilities Act, and the U.S.  
Supreme Court heard the case  
Tuesday.

North Dakota's solicitor  
general Doug Bahr said North  
Dakota joined other states in  
support of Tennessee's  
position that states shouldn't  
be able to be sued in federal  
court, in accordance with the  
11th amendment, which grants  
states immunity except under  
limited circumstances. He said  
North Dakota is not saying  
Lane should have been  
arrested or that courthouses  
shouldn't be made accessible,  
but is weighing in on the  
narrow issue of whether  
Congress meant to allow  
people to override the 11th  
amendment and sue states to  
enforce the ADA.

"The ADA applies to North  
Dakotans no matter what," he

said. "The question is whether the  
state can be sued in federal  
court."

In a letter in response to  
concerned constituents, Attorney  
General Wayne Stenehjem said  
the issue is not whether a state  
must comply with the ADA, but  
whether the state can be sued in  
federal court to enforce the ADA.  
Stenehjem wrote that the judge in  
the case offered to have deputies  
assist Lane to the courtroom,  
conduct the hearing on the first  
floor or move the hearing to a  
handicapped-accessible  
courthouse nearby -- but Lane  
refused and sued for \$100,000 for  
humiliation and embarrassment.

"That request for the \$100,000  
payment is the only matter at  
issue in this case," Stenehjem  
said. The attorney general said  
nobody disputes that Lane was  
entitled to accessible facilities.

"Please know that because of  
my commitment to the rights of  
the disabled, I struggled with this  
decision long and hard,"  
Stenehjem said. "However, after  
fully considering all of the issues,  
and knowing that it may  
disappoint some, I believe this  
decision is the proper one. This in  
no way diminishes my belief in the  
cause of continually improving the  
lives for our disabled community  
in North Dakota."

The Supreme Court will rule on  
the case at a later date. (Reach  
Deena Winter at 250-8251 or  
[deena.winter@bismarcktribune.com](mailto:deena.winter@bismarcktribune.com).)

## **FAIR HOUSING WORKSHOPS SCHEDULED**

To celebrate Fair Housing  
Month, the North Dakota Fair  
Housing Council will sponsor a  
limited number of fair housing  
workshops in North Dakota and  
eastern South Dakota. These  
workshops are open to the public  
and free of charge; however,  
seating may be limited. *Please  
RSVP in advance to the NDFHC*

to ensure adequate seating and hand-outs. The following workshops have been scheduled to date:

April 14: Best Western Ramkota Hotel, Bismarck, ND 1-4:30 PM

April 20: Best Western Ramkota Hotel, Aberdeen, SD, 1-4:30 PM

April 21: Ramkota Inn, Pierre, SD, 1-4:30 PM

April 22: Ramada Inn & Suites, Sioux Falls, SD, 1-4:30 PM

Due to funding and grant limitations, a workshop in the community of Fargo, ND will be held in the fall. Workshops in Grand Forks, ND; Minot, ND and Devils Lake, ND will be held depending on grant awarding, so remain pending at this time.

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