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Consumer Action housing discrimination survey

70% of CBOs see a serious problem for our most underserved consumers

- ***New face of problem: Immigrants, disabled, families with children most vulnerable to abuses when renting and buying***
- ***Consumer Action outlines what consumers should look out for.***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – May 3, 2012 – Community-based organizations (CBOs) dealing with the disabled, immigrants, families with children, and other underserved consumers are reporting that housing discrimination remains a widespread problem in the United States, with the most vulnerable consumers unsure of their rights and how to protect themselves.

A major new Consumer Action survey of 549 community-based organizations focusing on the needs of immigrants and other underserved consumers found that:

- Seven out of 10 CBOs say that housing discrimination is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem for the people they serve. Significantly, roughly half of CBOs (48 percent) agree that housing discrimination is a “very serious” problem today.
- Four times more CBOs have “seen housing discrimination go up ... in the last two years” than those that reported a drop in the same period, by a margin of 40 percent to 11 percent.
- About two thirds of CBOs (65 percent) say the level of awareness about housing discrimination rights among the individuals they serve is “somewhat low” or “very low.”
- Among the top problems seen by CBOs as discouraging “the people you serve from pursuing housing discrimination complaints” are factors that reflect immigrant concerns, including: “cultural issues, such as the fear of authorities” (59 percent); “language barriers” (54 percent); and “legal status in the U.S.” (56 percent).
- Disability (77 percent), race (62 percent) and family status (60 percent) are the top three distinguishing features of individuals seeking help from CBOs on housing discrimination problems.

Ken McEldowney, executive director, Consumer Action, said: “Housing discrimination is all too alive and well in the United States today. In fact, the changing face of housing discrimination now tends to zero in more on immigrants, the disabled and families with children than in the past. The ever-shifting focus of housing discrimination makes it doubly hard to root out, since CBOs and other agencies concerned with the problem must constantly educate different segments of the population. Nowhere is this task more challenging than when it comes to immigrant populations that may speak little or no English and also be steeped in cultural heritages that put a premium on distrusting the very authorities that can help them.”

Other key survey findings

- “Refused opportunity to rent or buy housing” (72 percent) and “subjected to different terms, conditions or privileges for sale or rental of a dwelling” (64 percent) are the top

two housing discrimination problems encountered by individuals seeking the help of CBOs.

- Most housing discrimination cases dealt with by CBOs involve low-tech abuses (face-to-face interactions at 53 percent) versus online advertising/postings (8 percent).
- Nearly three out of five CBOs (57 percent) surveyed handle housing discrimination complaints.

The full details of the Consumer Action survey on housing discrimination is available online at <http://www.consumer-action.org>.

Tips for consumers

The following are among the major prohibited practices in the rental housing market:

- Running discriminatory advertisements (for example, ads that state “No Kids,” or “Looking for White Tenants”);
- Falsely stating to minority applicants that an available unit has been rented;
- Setting higher or lower rents, security deposit requirements or credit criteria for prospective tenants based on their race or other protected status;
- Failing to respond to inquiries by prospective minority tenants;
- Failing to provide prospective minority tenants with rental applications; and
- Encouraging long-term tenants to leave their apartments by making false allegations regarding the effect of minority residents on property values, an increase in criminal or antisocial behavior, or a decline in the quality of schools or other services or facilities (called “blockbusting” -- done so that rents can be increased or so the units can be converted into condominiums or cooperatives and sold).

In home sales, the following practices are among those that are prohibited:

- Lying about or exaggerating sales terms in order to discourage certain homebuyers or to price them out of the market;
- Failing to inform prospective buyers about all available listings in their price range and desired locations;
- Using stall tactics to avoid showing a home to a buyer;
- Steering prospective buyers only to racially segregated neighborhoods; and
- Refusing to negotiate with interested buyers.

To learn more about how to spot and avoid the signs of housing discrimination, go to <http://www.consumer-action.org/downloads/english/KnowSigns.pdf>.

Survey methodology

The Consumer Action survey was conducted online from April 9-20, 2012. More than 5,000 community-based organizations nationwide were contacted to participate in the survey and in excess of 10 percent (549) responded. All regions of the United States were reflected in the survey responses, which ranged from some of the largest to some of the smallest CBOs in the nation. The full text of all questions and the complete topline findings are available online at <http://www.consumer-action.org>.

About Consumer Action

Consumer Action has been a champion of underrepresented consumers nationwide since 1971. A nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, Consumer Action focuses on financial education that empowers low to moderate income and limited-English-speaking consumers to prosper financially. It also advocates for consumers in the media and before lawmakers to advance consumer rights and promote industry-wide change.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A streaming audio replay of the news event will be available on the Web at <http://www.consumer-action.org> as of 5 p.m. EDT on May 3, 2012.