

HOPE FORUM

A publication of Housing Opportunities Project for Excellence (HOPE), Inc.

100th Edition of HOPE Forum!

Winter 2024-25

Housing Opportunities Project for Excellence (HOPE), Inc. fights housing discrimination to ensure your civil rights.

We have a three-tiered strategy of (1) Education & Outreach, (2) Intake & Counseling, and (3) Private Enforcement. Thanks to federal, state and local funding, all of our services are **free to the public**. We are here to honor the legacy of the civil rights movement by striving for a truly just and equal society.

To become a tester or volunteer, please call (305) 651-4673 in Miami-Dade or (954) 567-0545 in Broward.

Thank you!

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HOPE Welcomes New President & CEO



Left to right: the incoming and outgoing HOPE CEOs, Daniel Howe and Keenya Robertson, Esq. (whose farewell message appears on page 2 of this newsletter), respectively.

HOPE is proud to announce that long-time employee Daniel Howe became the President and CEO of the agency shortly after the start of the new year. Daniel's association with HOPE began when he became a volunteer tester with HOPE in 1989. HOPE hired Daniel as a test coordinator in 1993. Daniel's investigations have yielded evidence in fair housing cases that resulted in millions of dollars in damage recoveries.

Beginning in 2000, Mr. Howe also worked for the Miami-Dade Public Housing Agency (now called Public Housing and Community Development) and the County Office of ADA Coordination. Daniel returned to HOPE in 2012 and became its Vice President in 2014.

Daniel commented on his promotion by saying, "I am grateful to my predecessors and mentors, Bill Thompson, and Keenya Robertson, for creating, building and sustaining our organization so that it could become the preeminent fair housing center that it is today. The staff of HOPE, our board members, testers, community partners and funding organizations also have my sincere gratitude. Most of all, I am thankful for, and indebted to, those people who have endured housing discrimination yet took the time and effort to stand with HOPE against perpetrators of housing discrimination. I resolutely commit myself to continue this noble battle in my new role as the President and CEO of HOPE."



We're on Facebook!
Please search for:

HOPE Inc Fair Housing



We're on X (formerly called Twitter)!
Please find us and follow us at: @hope_fhc



We're on Instagram!
Please find us and follow us at: @hope_fhc

· Please e-mail us at hopefhc@comcast.net or visit us at www.hopefhc.com! ·



We fight housing discrimination

HOPE's mission is to fight housing discrimination in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties and to ensure equal housing opportunities throughout Florida.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

11501 NW 2nd Avenue Miami, FL 33168 • (305) 651-4673

BROWARD COUNTY

6491 Sunset Strip, Suite 8, Sunrise, FL 33313 • (954) 567-0545

2024-2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Bill Thompson • *HOPE Founder/President Emeritus*

Daniel Howe • *HOPE President & CEO*

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Message of Farewell from Keenya Robertson as She Steps Down as President & CEO

After twenty-six years with HOPE, Inc., eighteen as President & CEO, my time with the organization has ended as I relocate with my family and transition into a new role within the country's fair housing infrastructure. Working for such an impactful organization in a community with incredible partners has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I am grateful for the experience, but even more so for working alongside the talented and dedicated members of the HOPE, Inc. family. They truly are the best of the best. I have been inspired by our community, partners, board members, staff, testers, and courageous clients (my heroes). I have grown tremendously as a professional and a human being.

The accomplishments we've made together fill me with great pride; from groundbreaking investigations to landmark settlements. The results of our work have allowed us to invest in inclusive communities by supporting homeownership, home accessibility, and community development. We purchased real estate for our offices in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, planting ourselves firmly in the ground of our service area. We survived an unprecedented pandemic. We produced a spoken word video about the power of fair housing testing, now used nationwide to train investigators, testers, and more. We even formed a band, "Let Freedom Sing!" made up of HOPE, Inc. team members, joined by Florida Memorial University students, professional musicians, and a few fair housing friends to perform songs from the Civil Rights Movement.

I will always be thankful and honored for having been trusted to lead HOPE, Inc. over the years. HOPE, Inc.'s Board of Directors and staff have worked hard to ensure a smooth transition, and I do not doubt that the organization will continue to grow and thrive. As Daniel Howe assumes the position of President & CEO, I know that HOPE, Inc. is in committed and capable hands. I am excited to see its work continue and cheer it on.

In gratitude,

Keenya Robertson

HOPE Welcomes Two Great New Board Members

HOPE is thrilled to announce the addition of two exceptional individuals to our Board of Directors: Michele Collie and Craig Emmanuel. Their extensive experience and unwavering commitment to community betterment will be invaluable assets.

Michele Collie, SVP & Director of CRA Officer at City National Bank, brings over 30 years of banking expertise to HOPE, Inc. She specializes in providing down payment assistance and homebuyer education for first-time homebuyers in South Florida. Michele's deep understanding of the financial landscape and her proven track record of supporting aspiring homeowners will bring significant strength & knowledge to our board & organization. We are incredibly excited to benefit from her considerable knowledge and experience.

Craig Emmanuel, Principal and CEO of

Commercial Realty Advisors & Investment Group, joins us with a distinguished real estate career going back to 1997. A prominent industry figure, Craig's commitment to civic engagement and experience on multiple boards demonstrates his dedication to community development. His insights into the real estate market and his proven leadership will be instrumental in guiding HOPE towards achieving our ambitious goals. We are honored to welcome such a dedicated and experienced leader to our team.

The entire HOPE, Inc. team extends a warm welcome to both Michele and Craig. We are confident that their contributions will be transformative, enabling us to further our mission of affirmatively furthering fair housing and bringing awareness and education to those in need. We eagerly anticipate the valuable contributions they will bring to our organization.

HOPE Settles Source of Income Complaint

In November 2022, HOPE, Inc. received a complaint alleging that a realtor conveyed the lease application denial of the condo owner she represented based on the applicant having a Section 8 voucher. The complainant also alleged that the realtor said the owner had experienced payment delays with a past Section 8 applicant as a justification for the denial.

Owners may legally deny prospective renters for a variety of reasons. Direct threat to persons or property that are unmitigated by reasonable accommodations, incomplete applications and insufficient income are examples of allowable, non-discriminatory reasons for denial. But under a Miami-Dade County anti-discrimination ordinance, denial because an applicant receives Section 8 is illegal. The ordinance contains no exception regarding the owner's

alleged late payment justification.

Within weeks of the complaint, HOPE testers, on two different occasions, posed as voucher holders and contacted the realtor and asked if the owner would rent to voucher holders. The testers' reports, including text messages, supported the original allegation.

HOPE filed a source of income housing discrimination complaint with the Miami-Dade County Commission on Human Relations in May of 2023 and the case settled in October 2024 for \$4,000 in monetary damages and with a stipulation that the realtor attend a fair housing training session. HOPE was particularly pleased that the respondent offered to bring other realtors to the training session so that they could be brought up to speed on their fair housing rights and responsibilities.

Assistance Animal Case Settled Between HOPE and Multiple Parties

In November 2023, HOPE filed a housing discrimination complaint with HUD against a condo owner (Maria Del Pilar Rubio), a property manager (Vitali Sorokin), a real estate company employee (Jorge Martinez), a property management company (Grand State Realty, Inc.) and a real estate company (Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate, LLC).

HOPE alleged that on October 10, 2022 and October 20, 2022, two different testers (one on each date) called condo property manager Sorokin and asked about renting a condo owned by Del Pilar Rubio. Both testers reported that during their respective tests, they

told Sorokin that they each had assistance animals (dogs) and that Sorokin informed them by text that the owner did not want dogs in the units because the unit had wooden floors. HOPE and the respondents entered into a conciliation agreement on September 5, 2024.

The conciliation terms include compensation to HOPE in the amount of \$7,000, an agreement that the respondents attend a three-hour fair housing training (with an emphasis on assistance animals) at respondents' expense and respondents' agreement to provide full cooperation to HUD with the compliance monitoring review of the conciliation agreement.

Appeals Court Gives Florida Cities Protection from Being Sued for Housing Discrimination

On December 4, 2024, a panel of judges for Florida's Fourth District Court of Appeal handed down a major decision concerning fair housing cases against cities. The judges decided that Florida cities must be assumed to be immune from liability when they've been sued for housing discrimination under Florida's Fair Housing Act, unless a law clearly says otherwise. In other words, people who want to use Florida's Fair Housing Act to sue local governments for housing discrimination can only do so if a law directly allows for local governments to be sued in such a way.

The court is requiring that lawmakers take the step to expressly give people this ability. Taking that step will take time and energy - if it ever even happens. So all in all, the main takeaway is that this court decision and this requirement serve to limit fair housing lawsuits that can be brought against cities.

As a foundation to explaining all of this, the case deals with two major concepts: who can be sued under fair housing laws, and whether or not governments can be sued at all, for anything.

In terms of that first concept, who can be sued, fair housing laws apply when a person or people face illegal housing discrimination (when they are treated differently because of their race, gender, disability, religion, etc). Generally, those victims can sue whichever individuals or entities are doing the discrimination. This can certainly include suing people who deal fairly directly with residents and home-seekers, such as property management companies, realtors, condo associations, mortgage loan officers, and landlords.

This can also cover governments making policy decisions, like zoning, if those decisions have a discriminatory effect. For example, maybe residents are complaining at a city council meeting about too many families with children moving into an area, and the city responds by passing restrictive occupancy standards to keep such families out. That city can be sued for discriminating against families with children.

The second concept, whether or not governments can be sued, is more broad, both in that it doesn't just apply to housing, and because it doesn't just cover discrimination. The idea that governments cannot be sued in their own court system is called "sovereign immunity", literally meaning "ruler (as in a government power) exemption". This practice in the United States has its origins in Medieval England, under a tenet that the monarch or ruler could not be held accountable in court.

The idea of sovereign immunity has critics,

people who find it fundamentally unfair that a government can enforce rules without having to play by those same rules. Even Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying "It is as much the duty of Government to render prompt justice against itself in favor of citizens as it is to administer the same between private individuals." Also, sovereign immunity can be waived by a law saying so, as the panel from Florida's Fourth District Court of Appeal says they would need to see here.

So this is the legal background that existed when the court heard the arguments and made its December 4 decision. In the case that was before the court, starting back in early 2020, real estate developers called Coral Rock Development Group, LLC and Coral Rock Pompano, LLC ("the developers") sought to build what they described as "a 138-unit affordable housing townhouse project called Highland Oaks that would provide much needed housing for working families." The project was to be, as the developers said, "located on a nearly 11-acre site at 921 NW 3rd Avenue in Pompano Beach [Florida]," and that the residents "would consist of working families with up to \$50,000 per year of income such as firefighters, police, teachers, and nurses." The developers say that they secured millions of dollars in housing financing.

The developers allege that the government of the City of Pompano Beach engaged in actions that hindered the development of the project. One such alleged action was City officials appearing at a public hearing and "complaining that the City of Pompano Beach already had enough affordable housing." Another was the City "summarily and arbitrarily" denying the developers' requests to make "minor" changes in the housing project plans during the planning process. The developers claim that the City imposed a series of "calculated delays [that were] intended to prevent the development of the Highland Oaks project."

Then the case really turned on a major legislative action by the City of Pompano Beach. On January 26, 2021, the City passed an ordinance saying that "No application for permit, request for a funding match, authorization or any other official action of the City having the effect of permitting or allowing the construction of Subsidized Housing within the city limits, may be accepted or processed or approved by the City." This legislation, the developers say, was targeted at the subsidized Highland Oaks housing project that they had been working on for nearly a year, by that point. For their part, the attorneys representing

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the City responded that, among other things, the ordinance was unrelated to the project, and was aimed at avoiding having concentrated neighborhoods of low-income households.

The developers sued the City under the Florida Fair Housing Act, saying that the City's ordinance made their project impossible and thus wasted the work and money that they'd put into it. The Act says that "It is unlawful to discriminate in land use decisions or in the permitting of development based on...the source of financing of a development or proposed development." The developers argue that the ordinance and the City's other actions regarding Highland Oaks fit squarely into this illegal discrimination. They sought to hold the City accountable for the discrimination, just like a prospective tenant or current resident suing a landlord for discriminatory actions.

The City's response included a claim of sovereign immunity, which was ultimately an unsuccessful claim in the trial proceedings. The City attempted to have the trial court dismiss the case, and that court decided against the City. The City appealed the decision, asking a higher court, the Fourth District Court of Appeal, to review the case.

The appeals court noted that a law could be passed with the power to explicitly take away sovereign immunity here, but that right now, no such law does so. In the absence of such a law, the appeals court erred on the side of assuming sovereign immunity protection. So the appeals court agreed with the City, and instructed the trial court to dismiss the case, as the City wanted.

This decision was only handed down in December of 2024, so it remains to be seen what will happen next. It also remains to be seen what impact it will have on other similar situations.

Notably, this case and decision were under state law, in state court. This is not about federal law (national law, covering the whole United States). The Fair Housing Act passed by US Congress and signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968 is federal law. Lawsuits under the federal Fair Housing Act are argued in federal court (which is a separate court system than state court) and are unaffected by this decision.

Welcome to the Newest Addition of HOPE's Team!



HOPE is happy to announce the arrival of our newest staff member, Richard Cibran! He will be conducting investigations out of our Miami-Dade office.

Richard is a first-generation Cuban-American, born and raised in Miami, FL. Richard has a bachelor's degree in Sociology from Barry University and a master's degree in Ethics and Society from Fordham University.

His experience lies in education, prevention and intervention, case management, and community outreach. Throughout his career, he has worked with the LGBTQ+ community, the children of migrant farmworkers, unaccompanied migrant children, at-risk middle and high school students, and communities of color.

**Do you suspect housing
discrimination,
harassment, or
predatory lending?**

**Call HOPE TODAY!
Miami-Dade: (305) 651-4673
Broward: (954) 567-0545**

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing

The concept of “affirmatively furthering fair housing” is based on Section 808 (e) (5) of the federal Fair Housing Act which states that the Secretary of HUD shall administer housing and community development programs in a manner that affirmatively furthers the purpose of the Fair Housing Act. We dedicate this space to Miami-Dade and Broward jurisdictions that receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and partner with HOPE to implement the following outreach.

Broward Area Outreach

The following jurisdictions were impacted by Broward area outreach activities during the quarter: Broward County, Davie, Fort Lauderdale, Tamarac, and other Broward locations.

Fair Housing and Predatory Lending Presentations: These presentations consist of PowerPoint visuals, formal lectures, question and answer periods, and informational packages. All presentations are modified to meet the individual needs of the sponsor. The following presentations were conducted (in English, unless otherwise noted):

- Amazing Community Partners, Lauderhill: 10/5/24, 11/9/24
- ARRK1 Realty Group, Fort Lauderdale: 10/26/24
- Broward County Housing Authority, Lauderdale Lakes: 10/12/24, 11/9/24
- Consolidated Credit Solutions, Fort Lauderdale: 10/26/24, 10/29/24
- Hispanic Unity, Hollywood: 10/19/24

- Oasis of Hope, Pompano Beach: 10/19/24, 10/16/24
- Urban League of Broward County, Fort Lauderdale: 10/12/24, 10/18/24, 10/23/24, 11/8/24, 11/20/24

Housing Provider Rights and Responsibilities Presentations: Presentations designed for the specific needs of local housing providers.

- Broward Affordable Housing Task Force Summit & Gala, Fort Lauderdale: 11/2/24
- Families in Need, resource fair, Hollywood: 12/19/24
- Feeding South Florida, resource fair & food distribution, Fort Lauderdale: 11/19/24, 12/10/24

Community, Cultural, Health, and Job Fairs: Local community events to diversify outreach efforts, counseling members of the general public on their rights and responsibilities.

- Housing Authority of the City of Fort Lauderdale, Fort Lauderdale: 11/13/24



Join the fight against discrimination! Become a tester!

Please join us in this movement (and make some extra cash as well!) - become a civil rights investigator! Interested people should contact HOPE's Testing Coordinators. Training consists of a paid training session, and after training, available testers are contacted as needed. Each assignment pays \$65-\$100.

Call today! Miami-Dade: (305) 651-4673, Broward: (954) 742-3778.

Applicant must:

- Be 18 years of age or older
- Have no convictions of a misdemeanor involving truth, veracity or honesty or of any felony
- Have good observational and writing skills
- Be able to donate approximately 4 hours for each test
- Be punctual with reliable transportation



Miami-Dade Area Outreach

The following jurisdictions were impacted by Miami-Dade area outreach activities during the quarter: the Cities of Hialeah, Miami, Miami Beach, and North Miami, as well as other Miami-Dade locations.

Fair Housing and Predatory Lending Presentations (conducted in English, unless otherwise noted):

- Centro Campesino (English & Spanish), Florida City: 12/14/24
- Cuban American National Council (English & Spanish), Little Havana: 10/11/24, 10/16/24, 10/25/24, 11/15/24, 11/20/24, 12/6/24, 12/20/24
- Experts Resource Community Center (English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole), Miami Gardens, West Little River, & North Miami: 10/12/24, 10/26/24, 12/21/24
- Haitian American CDC (English & Haitian Creole), Little Haiti: 11/21/24, 12/14/24
- Housing Foundation of America (English & Spanish), Miami Gardens & Palmetto Bay: 10/12/24, 10/19/24, 10/26/24, 11/2/24, 11/9/24, 11/16/24, 11/23/24, 12/7/24
- Jackson High School, Allapattah: 10/23/24
- (City of) Miami Beach, South Beach & North Beach: 12/10/24, 12/19/24
- Miami Dade College - Wolfson Campus, Downtown Miami: 10/7/24
- Neighborhood Housing Services (English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole), Little Havana: 10/19/24, 10/24/24, 11/7/24, 11/9/24, 12/12/24, 12/14/24
- Ten North Group, Opa-locka: 10/19/24, 11/16/24

- Real Estate, Education and Community Housing (English & Spanish), Kendall: 10/19/24, 11/2/24

Provider Presentations:

- Coordinated Victims Assistance Center, Coral Gables: 10/31/24
- South Dade One Voice Community Coalition, Perrine: 12/13/24
- UPLIFT Service Partnership, Little Haiti: 11/21/24

Community Fairs:

- CareerSource South Florida, job fair, Liberty City: 12/11/24
- Coordinated Victims Assistance Center, resource fair, Downtown Miami: 10/2/24
- Miami Beach Police Athletic League, Thanksgiving event, South Beach: 11/20/24
- Miami Beach Regional Library, community tabling, South Beach: 10/1/24, 10/15/24, 10/29/24, 11/15/24, 11/25/24, 12/10/24
- Miami Dade College - Wolfson Campus, community resource fairs, Downtown Miami: 10/30/24, 12/4/24
- Miami-Dade County, job fairs, North Miami Beach & Brownsville: 11/13/24
- Morton Service Center, community tabling, Hialeah: 10/7/24, 10/21/24, 11/4/24, 11/18/24, 12/3/24, 12/17/24, 12/23/24
- South Shore Service Center, community tabling, South Beach: 10/4/24, 10/17/24, 10/29/24, 11/15/24, 11/25/24, 12/10/24



The advertisement features a photograph of a family of five (a man, a woman, and three children) smiling. Text on the image reads: "They told us to 'Live someplace else.'" and "We have rights. We called HUD." A QR code is located in the bottom right corner of the photo area.

We found a three-bedroom apartment we loved in a great neighborhood with good schools and a beautiful park. But the landlord told us to live someplace else that would be better for our family. We filed a complaint with HUD, and now we have a wonderful place to live.

Here are some telltale signs of housing discrimination against families with children:

- Allowing only one child per bedroom
- Charging a higher security deposit for families with kids
- Limiting families with children to the first floor or certain buildings
- Refusing to rent to families with children

Fair Housing Is Your Right. Use It.

Visit www.hud.gov/fairhousing or call the HUD Hotline
1-800-669-9777 (English/Español) **1-800-927-9275** (TTY)

Logos for HUD, NFHA (National Fair Housing Alliance), and a house icon are at the bottom.

A public service message from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in partnership with the National Fair Housing Alliance. The National Fair Housing Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. HUD prohibits discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status or disability. For more information, visit www.hud.gov/fairhousing.

HOPE FORUM

Housing Opportunities Project for Excellence (HOPE), Inc.

Bill Thompson Building
11501 NW 2nd Avenue
Miami, FL 33168
Phone: 305-651-HOPE [4673]
Fax: 305-759-2440
TDD: 800-955-8771

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This document is available in an accessible format for people with disabilities upon request.
Please call Daniel Howe at (305) 651-4673.

Yes, I want to invest in the future of my community by becoming a member of HOPE!

Please fill out this membership application and mail with your TAX-DEDUCTIBLE contribution to:

HOPE
Attn: Membership
11501 NW 2nd Ave
Miami, FL 33168

NAME: _____

COMPANY: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ ST: _____ ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____ FAX: _____

EMAIL: _____

_____ Individual (\$35.00)

_____ Family (\$75.00)

_____ Friend (\$100.00)

_____ Non-Profit (\$250.00)

_____ Corporate (\$500.00)

_____ Good Neighbor (\$1,000.00)

_____ Sustaining Partner (\$10,000.00)

_____ Juniors For Justice (\$5.00) (13-18 years old)

_____ Pennies from Heaven (children 12 and under)

_____ I am unable to contribute but please send me *HOPE Forum*

There are laws against discrimination in the rental or sale of housing on the basis of:

- ◇ Race or Color
- ◇ National Origin
- ◇ Religion
- ◇ Marital Status
- ◇ Pregnancy
- ◇ Familial Status (as in whether you have children)
- ◇ Disability
- ◇ Sex (Gender)
- ◇ Veteran Status
- ◇ Age
- ◇ HIV Status
- ◇ Sexual Orientation
- ◇ Gender Identity
- ◇ Gender Expression
- ◇ Political Affiliation
- ◇ Source of Income
- ◇ Ancestry
- ◇ Being a victim of domestic violence or human trafficking

Do you suspect that you have been a victim of housing discrimination? Help is available; don't delay!

Call the HOPE DISCRIMINATION HELPLINE!
Miami-Dade: 305-651-HOPE (4673) Broward: 954-567-0545
TDD: 800-955-8771
or file a complaint at www.hopefhc.com