Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 2, 2009

Hon. John Olver
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development & Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Tom Latham
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development & Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Olver and Ranking Member Latham:

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2010 T-HUD Appropriations Act, we urge you to provide at least $52 million for the federal Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) in keeping with the President's budget blueprint and recommendations of the National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.

Despite the passage of the Fair Housing Act 40 years ago, more than 4 million fair housing violations still occur each year on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, gender, religion and familial status. Fair housing centers funded by HUD are the frontline in the effort to resolve housing discrimination. We were pleased that the Administration's FY10 budget summary increases funding for fair housing enforcement in order to combat mortgage fraud and predatory lending practices. Now more than ever, as we see the devastating effects of predatory lending in our communities, fair housing organizations are in high demand to provide education and enforcement of fair housing and fair lending laws.

Private fair housing organizations process about 70% of our nation's fair housing complaints, and FHIP is the primary source of funding for fair housing education and enforcement activities at the local level. These organizations provide vital services to protect tenants and homeowners by conducting testing and research activities on fair housing and fair lending violations. The role of private non-profit fair housing organizations is threefold: to educate the housing industry regarding its responsibilities under the Fair Housing Act; to educate consumers regarding their rights under the Fair Housing Act; and to ensure enforcement.

There is significant demand for additional federal resources for this competitive grant program. Each year twice the number of qualified fair housing organizations applies for FHIP than can receive a grant due to funding constraints. As a result, more than 26 fair housing groups – a quarter of all fair housing organizations in the country – have had to scale back or close completely leaving towns, cities, and even entire states without a fair housing entity. At this time of market uncertainty and high rates of foreclosure we cannot shortchange programs that help our local residents maintain a roof over their heads.

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Funding this critical program at $52 million in FY 2010 will allow fair housing organizations across the country to better address and tackle the problem of housing discrimination and predatory lending. We ask for your support of this annual appropriation when you markup the FY10 T-HUD Appropriations bill in the coming months. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Yvette D. Clarke

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