# Discrimination fears keep LGBT homebuyers on sidelines: Poll

Fear of discrimination by new neighbors, agents and sellers is keeping LGBT renters from making their first home purchase, according to the National Association of Gay and Lesbian Real Estate Professionals third annual LGBT Real Estate Report released on Tuesday.

Seventy-two percent of all LGBT renters polled by Freddie Mac in a survey of 85,000 gay men and women want to become homeowners. However, 46 percent fear potential discrimination at the hands of agents, new neighbors and sellers, according to the report. As many as 13 percent of LGBT homebuyers claimed to be victims of discrimination, according to the Freddie Mac report cited by NAGLREP.

“NAGLREP members believe removing housing discrimination as a barrier of entry would pave the way for substantial LGBT homeownership increases,” said the group’s founder, Jeff Berger, in a prepared statement, referring to The Equality Act, a bill that would make discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal. If it’s passed in Congress, a quarter of all NAGLREP members believe LGBT homeownership rates will rise.

The national LGBT homeownership rate is 49 percent — 16 percent below the overall national homeownership rate of 65 percent.

In a poll of NAGLREP members conducted in February, 44 percent said they believe fear of discrimination causes LGBT renters to be anxious about acceptance from potential neighbors. Additionally, 40 percent said renters remained concerned over how neighbors would react if they started a family, 36 percent said renters were cautious about hiring the correct real estate professionals.

Lastly, 31 percent of members predicted LGBT renters will ditch their homebuying plans altogether.

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“This year’s commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, which launched the modern LGBT movement, showcases the strides the community has made and the challenges we still face, including housing discrimination,” Berger said in a statement. “The Equality Act was recently re-introduced in Congress, and if passed would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, federal funding, credit and the jury system.”

In addition to passing legislation that would offer federal housing protections to LGBT buyers and sellers, Berger says it’s important that real estate professionals learn how to properly address the fears their LGBT clients may have.

If you’re working with a couple, Berger suggests listening to if the couple uses the terms “husband,” “wife,” or “partner” for cues on how you should address them. The same advice goes for single buyers and sellers and understanding which pronoun they identify with.

Furthermore, Berger says agents have to be careful not to steer clients toward “gayborhoods,” which are areas widely known to be LGBT friendly and have a high LGBT population. Although LGBT clients may directly ask about these neighborhoods, Berger said it’s important to show them every neighborhood that meets their needs and direct them to local LGBT centers and organizations for guidance.

He also suggests that agents build a team of vendors that also value being LGBT friendly, so clients don’t have to worry about the mortgage, title, and home inspection process either.

Lastly, he urges agents to simply be themselves when working with LGBT clients — trying too hard to relate can have a negative impact.

“Talking about a gay cousin, lesbian friend or someone who knows someone who is transgender will not go as far as you just being yourself,” he said. “LGBTs appreciate allies more than you will know. By being supportive, helpful and caring, your clients will open up and share a lot of valuable information that will help you be a great resource to them.”

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