Realogy throws support behind LGBT housing protection bill

John Peyton, president and CEO of Realogy's Franchise Group, announced his parent company's support of the Fair and Equal Housing Act, a bill up for consideration by Congress that is designed to prevent anti-LGBT housing discrimination nationwide.

Peyton announced Realogy's support for the bill during his session about diversity in the housing market at the National Association of Gay & Lesbian Real Estate Professionals 2018 National Conference on Wednesday.

The Fair and Equal Housing Act, a bipartisan bill introduced last year in the House by Republican Congressman Scott Taylor of Virginia and Democratic Congressman Brad Schneider of Illinois, and in the Senate by Democratic Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, would make sexual orientation and gender identity a protected class under the Fair Housing Act (FHA). Presently, the landmark 1968 law FHA prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability — but does not expressly call out sexual orientation or gender.

Realogy Franchise Group president and CEO John Peyton

"Realogy has always supported the principles of the FHA — fair housing for all — which in its current form prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability," Peyton said. "Amending the FHA would bring the law in line with the REALTORS Code of Ethics of the National Association of Realtors and preclude discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity."

Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia offer protections for LGBT residents, but a lack of federal guidance makes it difficult for renters and homeowners to seek justice after discrimination has taken place.

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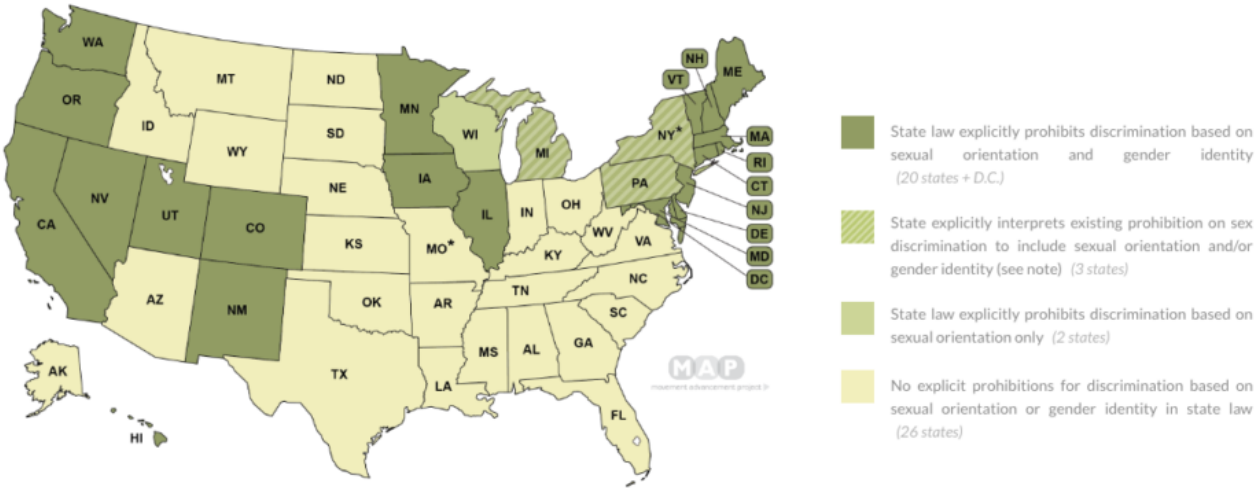

States that prohibit housing discrimination based on sexual orientation (Credit: Movement Advancement Project)

In 2015, Tonya and Rachel Smith filed a suit against landlord Deepika Avanti for refusing to rent a townhouse to the couple because of their “unique relationship” (Rachel is a transwoman). The Smiths’ lawsuit claimed that Avanti violated the Fair Housing Act’s rules on sex and familial status, and the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act’s rules on sexual orientation.

After two years of proceedings, U.S. District Judge Raymond P. Moore made a landmark ruling in their favor, saying that denying housing for failure to conform to sex stereotypes constitutes sex discrimination under the FHA, and therefore offers protection to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. But, Moore did not offer any comment as to whether discrimination based solely on sexual orientation or gender identity would be covered.

This April, Illinois woman Marsha Wetzel’s year-old Fair Housing Act lawsuit was reinstated after being dismissed by a previous judge. In the suit, Wetzel said she faced discrimination from fellow tenants because of her sexual orientation and that the management did nothing about it, even accusing her of lying about the incidences of physical and verbal abuse.

Seventh U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Diane Wood ruled in Wetzel’s favor, but just like in the case of the Smiths, the judge had to do some broad reinterpretations of the law, and hinge her ruling on another section of the Fair Housing Act.

Advocates hope that by amending the FHA with the new Fair and Equal Housing Act bill, LGBT homebuyers and renters will face less discrimination from the industry and that they will have more recourse to seek remedies for any discrimination suffered. The bill has currently been introduced in both the House and the Senate, but has not been voted out of committees and moved to consideration by the wider membership of both governing bodies, which is a necessary step before a vote to pass or not pass it.

Peyton said the push to pass the Fair and Equal Housing Act aligns with Realogy’s commitment to “opening doors” for all homebuyers.

“Consistent with our vision as a global real estate and relocation services leader, we believe all prospective homeowners should have access to housing without discrimination,” he said. “This aligns with Realogy’s guiding principle of “opening doors” to homes for buyers regardless of where they come from, what they look like, how they worship or who they love.”

“Realogy fully supports the expansion of FHA legal protections as a matter of basic human dignity and as a good business practice.”

NAGLREP welcomed Realogy’s support, with founder Jeff Berger providing Inman the following statement:

“We are obviously thrilled that Realogy has joined the fight to eradicate housing discrimination

towards the LGBT community. Our members continuously report that such discrimination remains a major concern for LGBTs and many choose to stay on the sidelines rather than become home buyers because of fear that they will endure discrimination. This just shouldn't be. [The National Association of Realtors] NAR previously joined NAGLREP in publicly supporting HR 1447 and now we have Realogy and their powerful consumer brands helping raise awareness levels even higher. The announcement at our NAGLREP Conference this week was a definite highlight."

Email Marian McPherson.

Source: click here