



**For Immediate Release**

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## Equal Rights Center releases report showing 15 percent discrimination rate against Housing Choice Voucher Holders in Montgomery County, Maryland

WASHINGTON, D.C., October 27, 2008 – A new report released today by the Equal Rights Center (ERC), a non-profit civil rights organization, shows a 15 percent discrimination rate against Housing Choice (Section 8) Voucher holders in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Montgomery County is the most populous jurisdiction in Maryland, yet it is also one of the least affordable in terms of housing. Housing costs in Montgomery County have increased at a much faster rate than has household income in the County, leading to a lack of affordable housing in the area.

“Often times a voucher is all that stands between a family and homelessness,” said Don Kahl, Executive Director of the ERC. “Too many families are finding the doors to private housing closed to them because of discriminatory practices by landlords all across the country.”

The ERC study included phone tests at 99 privately owned rental properties between March and April 2008. The study was designed to determine the existence and scope of discrimination against voucher holders in Montgomery County, where it is illegal to deny a person housing based on the source of his or her income to pay for the housing.

“It is discouraging that more than 15 years after source of income was added as a protected class from housing discrimination, that we are finding such high percentages of intolerance,” said John Baker, the Fair Housing Program Manager at the Equal Rights Center.

The housing choice voucher program is the country’s largest, federal, low-income housing assistance program. The voucher program subsidizes rent for low-income families with children,

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the elderly and people with disabilities so they can afford safe and sanitary housing in the private market where prices have skyrocketed in recent years.

The ERC report showed:

- In 11 percent of the tests, landlords or property managers refused outright to accept vouchers,
- In 3 percent of the tests, landlords or property managers improperly restricted the use of vouchers, and
- In 1 percent of the tests, landlords and property managers sought to impose differing terms and conditions on a voucher applicant by stating that, although vouchers were accepted, voucher applicants did not qualify for advertised incentives.

“The Equal Rights Center hopes this study will serve as an initial platform to educate voucher holders, landlords, property managers and the general public in Montgomery County about this important aspect of civil rights law,” Kahl said.

*To view the full report, A Step Away from Homelessness, go to the ERC’s Web site at [www.equalrightscenter.org](http://www.equalrightscenter.org).*

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