



American Federation of Government Employees
National Council of HUD Locals 222

Affiliated with AFL-CIO

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May 5, 2022

Secretary Marcia L. Fudge
Deputy Secretary Adrienne Todman
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Re: We Can Do Better—Eliminate Discrimination at HUD

Dear Secretary Fudge and Deputy Secretary Todman:

AFGE Council 222 (the Union) is dismayed that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has either failed to recognize discrimination or tolerates discriminatory behavior by the HUD leaders charged with preventing, investigating, and issuing findings related to discrimination. We call on you to take action to demonstrate that all HUD offices and personnel must unequivocally oppose all forms of discrimination, whenever and wherever they find it.

HUD has multiple offices whose mission is to eliminate discrimination. The Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) works to eliminate housing and mortgage lending discrimination, while the Office of Departmental Equal Employment Opportunity (ODEEO) enforces federal laws relating to the elimination of all forms of discrimination in HUD's employment practices. Yet these two offices—without any recognition of the irony involved—are guilty of furthering discrimination among and by the HUD workforce. The Union calls upon you to implement wholesale changes in the management and administration of these offices as their current leaders are clearly incapable of supporting their missions and upholding the Department's stated values.

In April 2022, FHEO's Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations and Management, Carlos Osegueda, conducted team leader training for equal opportunity specialists (Attachment 1). Despite encouraging team leaders to be "fair-minded" and "respectful to others," the training material presented clear examples of hostile sexism by ridiculing and disparaging women. The only man in the case studies, Jason (no last name), has normal new-employee issues: "he's struggling to learn basic investigative techniques." In contrast, the women in the examples are all guilty of exaggerated stereotyped characteristics typically associated with female professionals: Shari (no last name) "refuses" to create an investigative plan. Anita Jones is "desperate" for help with the personnel challenges she faces. Suzy Whiner, the most egregious example, is "always complaining" and has a "negative attitude" that is "off-putting." The misery evoked by hypothetical supervisor Allison Payne's surname is unlikely a coincidence as she has "just rated

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you marginally successful” even though you “have never received less than Outstanding,” insinuating that the female supervisor is incompetent and irrational.

Rachel A. Connor and Susan T. Fiske, both professors of psychology at Princeton University, report that hostile sexism characterizes “women as whiny competitors who . . . ‘exaggerate the problems they have at work.’” Portraying “women as complainers unable to succeed in men’s work world without special help,” hostile sexism “justifies men’s authority and status in the workplace,” leading to “negative evaluations of . . . ambitious professional women,” and reinforcing “beliefs in women’s incompetence in the workplace.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Vol. 43(1) (2019), 22–36.

FHEO’s presentation of women as “refusing” to do their work and “desperate” for help are, as Connor and Fiske showed, sexist portrayals of women in the workplace. The use of the name “Payne” to create a negative image of a professional woman is another example of sexist stereotyping. The worst of the lot employs the childish diminutive “Suzy” and the degrading surname “Whiner.” FHEO used its leadership training to present women as incompetent, excruciatingly difficult, and unpleasant professionals. This overtly hostile sexism justifies men’s superior status and demeans professional women. It is appalling that FHEO perpetuates discriminatory sexism despite its mission to promote equal opportunity in housing.

Less flagrant yet also discriminatory is ODEEO’s exclusive recognition of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) Heritage Month in May 2022. ODEEO announced the observance in its April 29 newsletter and the cover email, as well as in a May 3 message announcing the theme of this year’s AAPI Heritage Month and associated events. While appreciation of the contributions of Asian American and Pacific Islanders is to be lauded, ODEEO neglected to note that May is also Jewish American Heritage Month.

Proclaimed by President George W. Bush in 2006, Jewish American Heritage Month was most recently recognized by President Joseph R. Biden Jr.’s April 29, 2022, Proclamation, which noted that this month honors 23 Jewish refugees who sailed into the port of present-day New York City in 1654 and “who — shaped by their own encounters with prejudice, persecution, and the promise of a better tomorrow — have emboldened our Nation to stand up for justice, equality, and freedom.” Just as the Library of Congress has sponsored numerous virtual events in honor of AAPI Heritage Month, as noted by ODEEO, it has also sponsored virtual events and exhibits in honor of Jewish American Heritage Month.

ODEEO, by acknowledging and honoring the contributions of one group of Americans but not another, exhibits a subtle form of discrimination. It is disappointing that ODEEO, the office responsible—in their own words—“for ensuring that HUD fosters a workplace culture that respects differences [and] empowers the full and fair participation of all employees in all aspects of HUD work life [and for] leading the Department’s efforts to proactively prevent unlawful discrimination,” fails to recognize that it has discriminated against a group of people by treating them unfavorably because of their national origin or religion.

AFGE Council 222 strongly condemns FHEO’s hostile sexism and, although we appreciate and support ODEEO’s recognition of the contributions of our Asian American and Pacific Islander

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colleagues, we are deeply disappointed that ODEEO does not equally honor all other heritage months.

The Union urges you to take the steps needed to ensure that HUD clearly and unequivocally opposes all forms of discrimination, within the Department as well as in connection with housing matters. The career managers who are sworn to uphold the anti-discrimination laws of this country have failed to do so, letting down the Department, its employees, and the public. In particular, managers who created instructional material that is so demeaning to women that it inherently creates a toxic work environment, or who allowed the use of those lessons, should not be in a position of authority in which they direct and evaluate subordinates. We are also troubled by the fact that not a single professional equal opportunity investigator complained about the presentation. If FHEO's equal opportunity specialists cannot recognize discrimination when confronted with it at HUD, we cannot rely on them to do their jobs effectively. This was a test, and FHEO managers and equal opportunity specialists failed.

Sincerely,



Jerry Gross
Midterm Bargaining Co-Chair, AFGE Council 222

Attachment
Team Lead EOS Training (PowerPoint)