

STATEMENT TO SKOKIE BOARD OF TRUSTEES BY SKOKIE
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION - NOV. 28, 1966

On October 31, a statement was presented to this Board by the Skokie Fair Housing Committee and the North Shore Suburban Organization for Fair Housing, relative to the so-called "Skokie Plan" for fair housing. This statement declares that our Commission's implementation of the Skokie Plan "contradicts and subverts" the Board Resolution of July, 1965 on equal housing opportunity; and requests the Board to "make public the failure of the 'Skokie Plan'" and replace it by fair housing "legislation similar to that of the Village of Maywood, which would make it illegal for realtors to accept discriminatory listings." The Maywood ordinance is now under court test, with a hearing scheduled for January 30, 1967.

This statement was referred to our Commission for study and reply. The statement is such a confused mass of misinformation, half-truths and distortions that we welcome this opportunity publicly to set the record straight and to put our experience with the Skokie Plan in proper perspective.

The Board Resolution of July, 1965, which declared the immorality of housing discrimination, was the cornerstone on which the Skokie Plan was developed. Recognizing that there is no legal bar to discriminatory sale by home-owners, the Commission devised a program of education and persuasion designed to induce both home-owners and real estate brokers voluntarily to participate in non-discriminatory listings and sales. The need for such a program at this stage is clearly developed in our booklet, "Your Home and Skokie's Future":

"Where the requirements of law lag behind the requirements of the moral standards of the community, the individual citizen must voluntarily comply with prevailing moral standards if community harmony is to prevail. In the present situation, such compliance requires the extension of the right to buy to provide equal housing opportunity for all."

We sought, and obtained from this Board, approval to test our voluntary program for a trial period of one year. During this period, we undertook to assess the likelihood of success of such a program, and to determine, if it failed of its objectives, the reasons for such failure, so that any further measures required to attain fair housing might be soundly based.

Our educational program was initiated with village-wide distribution of the pamphlet to which I have already referred, late in April, 1966, and the trial year was accordingly set to end April 30, 1967. It was mid-June before we could reach a working agreement with enough real estate brokers to provide a fair test of the program, and the beginning of July before the forms and procedures were developed to obtain the data required to evaluate the operation.

On July 13, barely two weeks after broker participation had begun, Gov. Kerner issued his Executive Order forbidding brokers to accept restricted listings. Our program with respect to brokers was therefore suspended, and was not resumed until the end of August, when a blanket injunction, in effect, wiped out the Governor's order. On September 8 we held a meeting with participating brokers to lay down guidelines for their handling of sales to minority-group homeseekers and to clarify our procedures for data gathering and checking.

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I have gone into this chronological detail to make it clear that our program of public education has been in operation only seven months, and our program of broker participation barely three months. During these months, members of the Commission have addressed many groups of citizens -- church groups, home-owner groups, PTA's, civic and business organizations -- to explain the doctrines of our pamphlet, and we have distributed over 800 copies to local teachers for use in institutes and in social studies classes. And although the few months during which our program has been operative are hardly enough to expect any major impact on community attitudes, since the Fair Housing groups have declared our program a failure, let us take stock of where we stand today.

In assessing our progress, I think we should look at three points:

- (1) Does a Negro seeking a home in Skokie today receive treatment equal to that given a white homeseeker?
- (2) Are significant numbers of home-sellers listing their homes under open occupancy?
- (3) Are real estate brokers carrying out, in good faith, the wishes of home-sellers with respect to open or restricted sales?

To the first question, whether Negroes seeking homes in Skokie receive equal treatment to whites, we must regretfully answer an unequivocal "No." Some brokers will still not handle a Negro inquiry, and although many will, the choice of homes for a Negro is far more restricted than for a white. But I cannot regard this situation as proof of the failure of the Skokie Plan; rather it indicates a pervasive failure of our whole society. The same situation exists in every community that is predominantly white -- including the six Illinois cities which have fair housing ordinances, some in operation for years with little effect. If, therefore, by this standard the Skokie Plan is a failure, then we must judge local legislation to be a failure also.

But it is obviously absurd to judge success or failure in this complex area by whether we have attained our ultimate goal in a few months. We must instead attempt to judge whether we have made progress, and are likely to continue to make progress, toward that goal. And progress must be measured not only by how far we are from our goal, as the Fair Housing group has done, but, equally importantly, by how far we have come from where we started.

The answers to the second and third questions give us some measure of our progress. In late September and early October, the Fair Housing group carried out an intensive program of broker testing, and submitted to the Commission twelve complaints alleging discrimination by Skokie brokers, involving some 70 listings which the brokers had allegedly not made available to Negro homeseekers. This list was reduced to 47 by elimination of duplications and addresses not in Skokie. We undertook to check individually a random sampling of approximately half this number -- 24. Of these, six could not be reached or refused to talk to us or were not correctly listed, so the results for these are indeterminate. The remaining 18 showed the following breakdown:

- 2 were open listings, and were shown or offered to be shown to Negroes by the brokers involved.
- 4 had been withdrawn from the market by the owners, for reasons which appear legitimate -- they had decided to stay in

Skokie, had decided to build an addition rather than buy a larger house, etc.

5 had already been sold at the time of the Negro inquiry.
7 were restricted by the owners.

In each of the 18 cases, the information was obtained by our investigator independently of any statement by the brokers involved. I wish this point to be clearly understood, because the Fair Housing statement charges that eight of the findings were "checked...with the realtors themselves," implying that we accepted the real estate brokers' word on these listings. This is simply untrue. Because of this charge, we invited Mayor Smith and Village Manager Thorn to review with our investigators the methods used and the results obtained for each listing -- and they will verify the validity of our data and of our conclusion that in every case checked the broker carried out the wishes of the seller.

To come back to our second and third questions, then, we find that about one home in five is listed open, and that at least the brokers investigated are in fact carrying out the wishes of the home-owners.

If we assess whether we have made progress since our program started, we can say that today a Negro seeking a home in Skokie will be courteously received by many, but not all, brokers; that he will be shown the multiple listings by some, but not all, brokers; that he will be shown some homes, but only one-fifth as many as the white buyer; and that if he likes a home he is shown, he can buy it. A year ago, when the North Shore Summer Project ended, probably none of these statements could have been made. We can therefore say that while we are still far short of the goal of equal treatment, there is in these short months some evidence of progress toward that goal. We cannot yet say that our voluntary program is successful; but neither are we prepared to call it a failure.

We need more time to establish firm trends before we can determine the probability of success or failure. We need to know whether the percentage of open listings improves as our educational program spreads; whether further checking reveals continuing and increasing broker participation, in good faith, or discloses extensive evasion which we have not yet uncovered. And if the trends show that our voluntary approach is likely to fail, we need to know whether the failure is caused by a lack of good faith by brokers, or the reluctance of home-owners to sell on an open basis. Only then will we know what must be done next.

We do not know how to perform miracles overnight, either by education or by local legislation; we know only the slow, patient, painful way of hard work and persistence. We believe that if this village is to attain widespread acceptance of open housing, such acceptance must rest on community understanding solidly based on fact and experience -- facts about property values in Skokie, experience with Negroes as neighbors in Skokie. We reject the premature pessimism of the Fair Housing group, and invite them to use their energies constructively in the tremendous educational job which we face.

Gentlemen, at a special meeting held Nov. 10, the Commission reviewed its program in the light of the Fair Housing group's statement, and voted 9 to 1, with one abstention, to ask this Board to reaffirm its approval for continuance of our voluntary plan to the end of the period originally scheduled -- April 30, 1967. On behalf of the Commission, I address this request to you.

Herman S. Bloch, Chairman Skokie HRC