



Highlights of [GAO-04-463](#), a report to congressional requesters

FAIR HOUSING

Opportunities to Improve HUD's Oversight and Management of the Enforcement Process

Why GAO Did This Study

Discrimination in housing on the basis of race, sex, family status, and other grounds is illegal in the United States. Each year, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) and related agencies carry out enforcement activities for several thousand complaints of housing discrimination. The timeliness and effectiveness of the enforcement process have been continuing concerns. GAO describes the stages and practices of the fair housing enforcement process, looks at recent trends, and identifies factors that may influence the length and thoroughness of the process.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes six recommendations to the HUD Secretary for improving the management and oversight of the fair housing enforcement process. These recommendations include exploring ways to disseminate effective practices used at various enforcement locations, improving tracking and data-gathering procedures, and finding a way to meet human capital challenges in, among other things, staffing and skill levels.

HUD generally agreed with the report's conclusions and recommendations and stated an intent to look closely at incorporating them into planned efforts to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of enforcement.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-463

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David G. Wood at (202) 512-6878 or woodd@gao.gov.

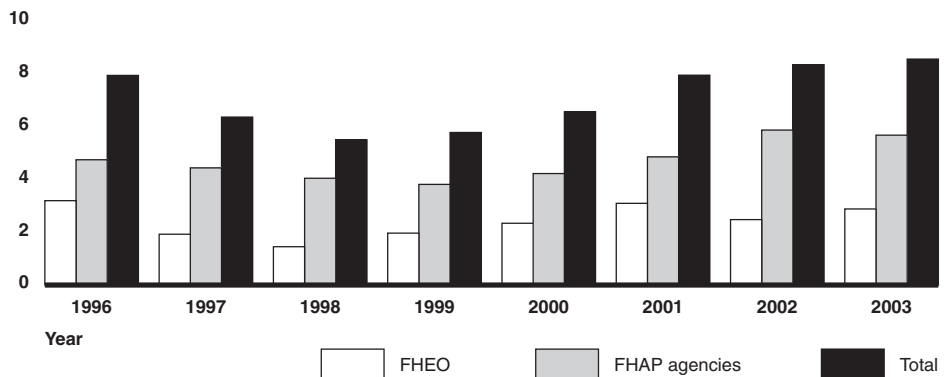
What GAO Found

The current fair housing enforcement process provides a framework for addressing housing discrimination complaints. Both FHEO and Fair Housing Assistance Program (FHAP) agencies located around the country take inquiries about potential incidences of discrimination and conduct investigations to determine whether discrimination did in fact occur. The practices used during intake and investigation differ among FHEO and the FHAP agencies, as the state and local agencies have some discretion in determining which practices work best for them. As a result, some agencies have developed procedures that they said improved the quality of intake and made investigations easier. For example, some FHAP agencies use experienced investigators during the intake process to help clients develop formal complaints. To date, FHEO has not looked at such practices to determine if they should be disseminated for potential use at other locales.

Further, individuals alleging discrimination in housing sometimes face a lengthy wait to have their complaints investigated and decided. Although the law sets a benchmark of 100 days to complete investigations into complaints of discrimination, FHEO and the FHAP agencies often do not meet that deadline. The typical time to complete an investigation in 1996 through 2003 was more than 200 days, with some investigations taking much longer. However, a lack of data makes it impossible to assess the full length and outcomes of fair housing enforcement activities. For example, because FHAP agencies are not required to report intake data to FHEO, complete information is not available on the number of initial contacts individuals alleging discrimination make with FHAP agencies. A lack of data on the ultimate outcomes of some investigations conducted by both FHEO and FHAP agencies may also prevent FHEO from fully measuring the time that complaints face before cases are ultimately decided. Human capital management challenges, such as ensuring adequate numbers of trained staff, further affect FHEO's ability to carry out its mission in a timely manner.

Number of Investigations Completed by FHEO and FHAP Agencies, FY 1996-2003

Number of completed investigations (In thousands)



Source: GAO analysis of HUD data.