



Highlights of GAO-06-79, a report to congressional requesters

# FAIR HOUSING

## HUD Needs Better Assurance That Intake and Investigation Processes Are Consistently Thorough

### Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) and related state and local Fair Housing Assistance Program (FHAP) agencies receive and investigate several thousand complaints of housing discrimination. These activities, including required conciliation attempts, are directed by HUD's standards, which are based on law, regulation, and best practices. GAO's 2004 report examining trends in case outcomes raised questions about the quality and consistency of the intake (the receipt of initial inquiries) and investigation processes. This follow-up report assesses the thoroughness of fair housing intake and investigation (including conciliation) processes, and complainant satisfaction with the process.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO makes recommendations to the HUD Secretary for improving the thoroughness and timeliness of the fair housing complaint process, including establishing standards and benchmarks for initial intake activities, improving data needed to monitor timeliness of intake, and improving planning and documentation of investigations.

HUD generally agreed with the report's conclusions and stated that it would work to incorporate the recommendations into its policies and procedures.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-79](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-79).

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.

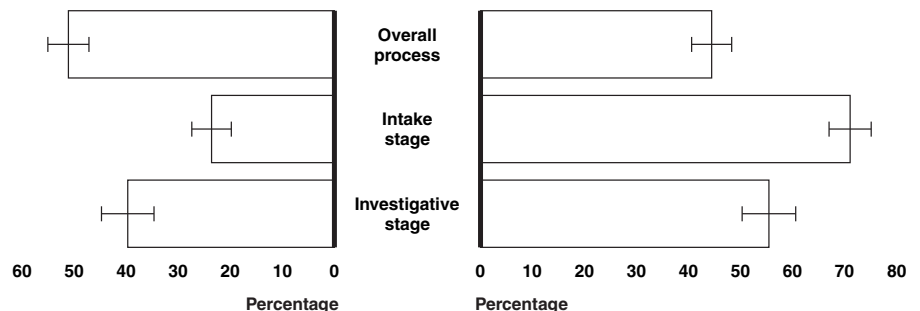
### What GAO Found

Evidence from several sources raises questions about the timeliness and thoroughness of the intake process. Thirty percent of complainants GAO surveyed noted that it was either somewhat or very difficult to reach a live person the first time they contacted a fair housing agency. GAO experienced similar difficulty in test calls it made to each of the 10 FHEO and 36 state FHAP agency intake centers. For example, 5 locations did not respond to the test calls. Further, FHEO and FHAP agencies do not consistently record in their automated information system contacts they receive that they consider potential fair housing inquiries and timeliness data are unreliable, limiting the system's effectiveness as a management control.

GAO's review of a national random sample of 197 investigative case files for investigations completed within the last 6 months of 2004 found varying levels of documentation that FHEO and FHAP investigators met investigative standards and followed recommended procedures. Further, though the Fair Housing Act requires that agencies always attempt conciliation to the extent feasible, only about a third of the files showed evidence of such attempts. FHEO officials stated that the required investigation and conciliation actions may have been taken but not documented as required in case files.

According to GAO's survey of a national random sample of 575 complainants whose complaint investigations were recently completed, about half were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with the outcome of the fair housing complaint process, and almost 40 percent would be unlikely to file a complaint in the future. Although GAO and survey respondents found that FHEO and FHAP agency staff were generally courteous and helpful, important lapses remain in the complaint process that may affect not only how complainants feel about the process but also how thoroughly and promptly their cases are handled.

**Survey Respondents' Overall Satisfaction with the Fair Housing Complaint Process**  
Very/somewhat dissatisfied      Very/somewhat satisfied



Source: GAO survey of complainants.

Note: Totals do not equal 100 percent because figure does not include "don't know" or "neither" responses. Brackets on each bar represent the sampling error (confidence interval) for that estimate.