

Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:07 Speaker 1

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 was meant to remove discrimination in the housing process, but one area that was not initially addressed was fair housing for people with disabilities.

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That was rectified approximately 20 years later, but there's still work to be done.

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Joining us today to talk about fair housing is Western New York Independent Living's Chief Policy Officer, Todd Vaarwerk.

00:00:29 Speaker 1

Welcome to the program, Todd.

00:00:31 Speaker 2

Always a pleasure.

00:00:33 Speaker 1

And we're glad to have you.

00:00:36 Speaker 1

Getting right into the topic, can you give us a brief overview of the original legislation on fair housing, the Fair Housing Act of 1968?

00:00:45 Speaker 2

Sure.

00:00:46 Speaker 2

As a follow-up in the Civil Rights Movement, and especially with the Civil Rights Act passed by the U.S.

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government, on April 11th, 1968,

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Congress passed the Fair Housing Act, meant to remove discrimination due to race, color, religion, or national origin in the sale, rental, or financing of housing.

00:01:07 Speaker 2

Really important necessary step in terms of civil rights because where you live is as important as where you do anything else.

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However, it didn't cover everybody, especially as it relates to the people that might listen to Independent Perspective, people with disabilities.

00:01:25 Speaker 1

All right, well, what changed in the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, and how does that impact the disability community?

00:01:34 Speaker 2

Well, it adds people with disabilities as a protected class to the Fair Housing Act.

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It also adds families with children to the Fair Housing Act.

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We wouldn't want to leave that out.

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And it actually sets a accessibility standard for multi-family housing dwellings, right?

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That's, think apartment buildings or houses with more than one apartment in them.

00:02:04 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:02:05 Speaker 2

So, in multifamily apartment dwellings, 5% of the units they build have to be wheelchair accessible.

00:02:12 Speaker 2

2% of the units they build have to be accessible to people with sensory disabilities.

00:02:20 Speaker 1

All righty.

00:02:22 Speaker 1

While the 1988 legislation addressed for housing for people with disabilities, there are still areas where advocacy work is being done.

00:02:30 Speaker 1

Can you tell us a little bit about what areas could still be addressed?

00:02:34 Speaker 2

Well, I can, because while we talk about multifamily housing having rights in construction, we really don't talk about single family housing having rights in construction.

00:02:46 Speaker 2

And that's something because people with disabilities,

00:02:50 Speaker 2

they grow through life, right?

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Where we live shouldn't necessarily be confined to like a box in a building somewhere.

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We have families, we grow older, we might take in a parent as they age.

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All the things that are the spectrum of life for everybody else are also the spectrum of life for people with disabilities,

00:03:13 Speaker 2

but the construction standard really only gives us protection in apartment buildings.

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So, we really need to kind of deal with single family housing.

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In addition, while the Fair Housing Act does a great deal to talk about reasonable accommodation, there's still a lot of things that make reasonable accommodation a difficult thing to do.

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Like, you can request a reasonable accommodation to make a physical change to your unit. The Fair Housing Amendments Act allows you to do that.

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But the landlord can require you to place money in escrow to put the unit back to the same condition it was when you originally rented it.

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And that's a barrier to some folks.

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Yeah, you can make your apartment accessible as long as you agree to change it back when you leave.

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Our history tells us that once you make an apartment accessible, it could be used by other disabled people.

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There's always a rental market for that, so we should be looking at how to make reasonable accommodation

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easier to use.

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Todd, we've got about half a minute left.

00:04:13 Speaker 1

If our listeners want more information or would like to get involved, what's the best path for them?

00:04:18 Speaker 2

Well, if they've got a problem with housing, they should always call us 716-836-0822,

00:04:25 Speaker 2

and talk to our intake department at extension 126.

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But if you want to work on systemic issues in relation to housing, you can call me, 716-836-0822, extension 101, or e-mail tvaarwerk@wnyil.org

00:04:44 Speaker 1

Thanks for being our guest, Todd.

00:04:45 Speaker 2

Always a pleasure.

00:04:46 Speaker 1

You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:04:52 Speaker 1

Our guest today was Todd Vaarwerk, Chief Policy Officer of Western New York Independent Living, and I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.