



WORKING FOR JUSTICE IN HOUSING
SERVING ALL OF MARYLAND

Our History

In the years that followed World War II, housing segregation was a fact of American life. It was firmly supported by mortgage lending and real estate practices, restrictive neighborhood covenants, and widespread acceptance. In many large cities, unscrupulous real estate speculators engaged in the practice known as "blockbusting". Playing on the fears of White homeowners, they were able to turn over whole neighborhoods, buying the houses at bargain prices and re-selling them to black newcomers at a large profit.

In the 1950's a group of enlightened Baltimore homeowners sought to enlist like-minded civic and neighborhood organizations and the business community to encourage stable, integrated neighborhood housing "white flight" from the City. Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc. (BNI), incorporated in March of 1959 by James Rouse, Ellsworth Rosen, and Sidney Hollander, Jr.

Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which prohibited housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin. Blockbusting was specifically outlawed. Fair Housing was now the law of the land. During the years that followed, BNI focused on enforcement of the fair housing laws. BNI's first efforts at testing for housing discrimination were hampered until 1982, when a case known as Havens Realty Corp. v. Coleman gave legal standing to fair housing organizations and testers. BNI also devoted itself to the education of both black and white communities about open housing and to building bridges of cooperation with the real estate industry and government agencies. Over the years, it has handled many thousands of housing discrimination complaints, many of which were successfully resolved through negotiation and some of which have been referred to federal, state and local organizations for resolution. In recent years justice in housing has come to include fair treatment for other groups, most notably persons with disabilities and families with children.

Since 1979, BNI has counseled tenants and landlords, expanding statewide in 1991 thanks to a grant from Maryland Legal Services Corporation. As a result, our Tenant/Landlord hotline counsels 18,000-20,000 callers annually. Counselors assist callers with information regarding evictions, maintenance issues, security deposits, proper notice to vacate, and many other areas.

In addition, BNI publishes highly regarded tenant-landlord manuals and guides. BNI fights housing discrimination, supports integrated communities, works to improve tenant-landlord relations, provides community education and outreach, and advocates for persons with disabilities on accessible housing issues. Support for BNI comes from individual memberships, The United Way of Central Maryland, local and federal government grants, corporate and foundation gifts, the religious community and other organizations. Membership and volunteer support is essential, strengthening the BNI voice in the courts and in the community. BNI, one of the oldest and largest fair housing organizations in the nation, continues to work for justice in housing, and remains committed to the belief that "good neighbors come in all colors and abilities."