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**April is Fair Housing Month: 43 years later, we still haven't gotten it right
*Discrimination, language barriers, anti-immigrant sentiments create fair housing challenges for Latinos, opportunities to educate community on Fair Housing Laws.***

CHICAGO—March 28, 2011—April is Fair Housing Month, with 2011 marking the 43rd anniversary of the milestone federal Fair Housing Act. The occasion offers opportunity to reflect on our progress or lack thereof in tackling housing discrimination. As Latinos, particularly Latino immigrants, continue to be scapegoats for a collective, recession-induced fiscal frustration, local, discriminatory housing ordinances and practices are increasingly limiting housing choices for Latino families.

In recognition of Fair Housing Month, the Latino Policy Forum is partnering with local, housing-focused organizations to raise awareness of rights under the fair housing laws and to help the public recognize discriminatory practices. As Latino and immigrant are often perceived as synonymous, the following points are particularly relevant:

- If a landlord inquires about prospective tenants' immigration status, those questions must be asked of all applicants, regardless of race or country of origin.
- Similarly, landlords can require social security numbers for rental applications, but that requirement must be made of all applicants.
- Landlords must require the same documentation and fees for all applicants, regardless of immigration status.
- If a prospective tenant brings along a translator, landlords or agents must work with that translator.

The 1968 federal Fair Housing Act declared it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability or familial status in rental housing, real estate sales, lending, insurance, and any financial or other services related to housing. More than four decades later, the National Fair Housing Alliance estimates that there are still up to 4 million violations of Fair Housing law each year, but that only a fraction of these violations get reported: Just 30,000 complaints were filed nationally in 2009.

We want to help the community recognize violations of fair housing law, and to feel empowered to file a complaint when necessary. The statistics show us that too many violations are currently going unchecked, said Sylvia Puente, executive director of the Latino Policy Forum. Anecdotally, we hear about selective enforcement of municipal codes about who can or can't live in certain units, about landlords steering applicants to housing options in select neighborhoods based on race or income, and about municipalities discouraging the development of new rental housing for minority, low-income or immigrant communities. Many of these instances violate fair housing laws, but too often, Latinos either don't know about their rights under the law, or are hesitant to complain because of fear of retaliation from immigration authorities.

Throughout April, Latino-serving housing organizations will be providing fair housing information at Chicago's Mexican Consulate. Participating organizations include the Latino Policy Forum, John Marshall Law School Fair Housing Legal Support Clinic, Illinois Department of Human Rights, Chicago Commission on Human Relations, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Illinois Migrant Legal Assistance Project and Access Living.

About the Latino Policy Forum

The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the Chicago area that facilitates the involvement of Latinos at all levels of public decision-making. The Forum conducts analysis to inform, influence and lead. Its goals are to improve education outcomes, advocate for affordable housing, promote just immigration policies, and engage diverse sectors of the community, with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future. For more information, visit www.latinopolicyforum.org.

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