

Tucson conference aimed at ending housing discrimination against LGBTQ senior citizens



TUCSON, AZ (Tucson News Now) - It's discrimination where you might not expect it.

LGBT senior citizens are being denied housing or being forced out of housing because of harassment and discrimination.

Tucson area LGBT seniors attended a "Town Hall on Housing Discrimination Against LGBTQ Older Adults" in Tucson Monday.

Arizona is one of 33 states that do not have housing discrimination laws to protect the LGBTQ community. However, Tucson, Phoenix, and other Arizona cities do have such ordinances.

Local and national figures spoke at the conference, including Gustavo Velazquez, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.

"No one should be denied housing opportunities because of who they love," Velasquez said.

Tucson Police Chief Chris Magnus told the gathering, the police department wants to be responsive to issues. He said, if anyone is being bullied, harassed, discriminated against, make a 911 call.

Magnus said there's "no tolerance for that in our city."

The Pima Council on Aging presented the town hall.

"One of the things we're hoping today to get is actually to have more people come forward to tell their stories because stories really are what changes people's minds and change their attitudes," said PCOA President & CEO W. Mark Clark. "Another part of our goal is to help maybe begin to build a grassroots movement to talk with the Arizona legislature and city councils in other parts of the county about changing their fair housing ordinances or adopting a fair housing ordinance if they don't have one."

Harassment and intimidation led one couple to leave their active adult community in Marana and move to Tucson where they felt better protected. It stemmed from an incident where their HOA blamed them for an incident that happened at the community pool.

Jim Brooks says his partner had suffered a serious stroke and needed therapy in the pool.

"There were a group of people there that didn't like the fact that I was touching him. I was having to support him in the water. And they surrounded us and they started yelling at us. And he became very uncomfortable and disoriented and he tried to get out of the pool and nearly fell," Brooks said.

"It's better to be in a situation where you're safe and comfortable than in one where you're constantly having to look over your shoulder. And you can't call a place like that home when you're afraid for your safety," Brooks said.

He said he and his partner could afford to move, but he has concerns about others.

Brooks wants focus on LGBTQ-friendly retirement communities, assisted living, and nursing homes.

"I'm talking about being out, just being a normal person. They run the risk of inflaming people like happened to us and then if it's not the right facility, they run the risk of also making the facility turn against them and they might not get the care they need," Brooks said.

A representative of Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE) came from Chicago to speak to the group.

SAGE is working on a national LGBT Elder Housing Initiative.

The organization has a housing resource website. Click [HERE](#) for the SAGE website.

To report housing discrimination in the City of Tucson, Click [HERE](#).

The [Pima Council on Aging](#) also has resources to help LGBTQ elders.

Copyright 2016 Tucson News Now. All rights reserved.