

National Fair Housing Alliance Applauds ABC's Decision to Cancel *Welcome to the Neighborhood* from Television Lineup

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ABC sent the following statement to NFHA:

"Our intention with Welcome to the Neighborhood was to show the transformative process that takes place when people are forced to confront preconceived notions of what makes a good neighbor, and we believe the series delivers exactly that. However, the fact that true change only happens over time made the episodic nature of this series challenging, and given the sensitivity of the subject matter in early episodes we have decided not to air the series at this time."

Shanna Smith, President and CEO of the National Fair Housing (NFHA), applauds ABC's decision to pull the show *Welcome to the Neighborhood*. "When Mr. Alex Wallau, President of ABC Television, decided to cancel the show, he demonstrated ABC's support for civil rights and sensitivity to race and ethnic relations in the United States."

"Alex Wallau maintained a regular dialogue with us throughout the entire process. It is clear that ABC had no malicious intent or purpose by promoting the show, but the National Fair Housing Alliance stands by its position that the show violates the federal Fair Housing Act as well as state and local fair housing laws. If in the future ABC decides to air the show, we will interpret this action as malicious and purposeful causing serious harm to the work of the National Fair Housing Alliance, its members and others."

The National Fair Housing Alliance remains supportive of television programming that addresses racism and bigotry in an effective way. However, there is concern that *Welcome to the Neighborhood* would mislead the public into believing that they can choose their neighbor without violating the Fair Housing Act. If race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability or family status is even a part of the decision in choosing the neighbor, it violates the federal law. Sexual orientation, source of income and marital status are protections afforded by many state and local fair housing laws.

NFHA's hope is that this program will not be sold to another network or cable station for airing. However, if ABC releases its rights and someone else decides to air the series, NFHA will be prepared to challenge the show in court.

Housing discrimination is a serious problem in the United States—in fact, an estimated 3.7 million instances of housing discrimination still occur each year and go unreported because people of color think no one will help them. Studies have shown that Blacks are becoming less likely to seek housing in suburban communities because of discrimination. This show would only reinforce that belief. Residential segregation between whites and people of color fosters the kind of bigotry reflected in the show. Why should people of color have to be humiliated and degraded in order for whites to learn not to be bigoted and intolerant? Surely there are better ways to teach white America the benefits of multicultural and multiracial living.

Promoting integration and eliminating housing discrimination is the Congressional intent of the federal Fair Housing Act. Violating someone's fair housing rights on national television is not the way to foster good race relations and promote neighborhood integration.

It is great when television wants to air a show with provocative views, but it is important to do so in a responsible way and within the law. ABC did the right thing by pulling *Welcome to the Neighborhood* off the air.

According to promotional materials, ABC's website, and NFHA's viewing of the first two episodes, *Welcome to the Neighborhood* asked seven families of diverse racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds to compete against each other to secure the approval of three neighbors to win a four-bedroom house in Austin, Texas. The judges are three white families who say the neighborhood "supports the President, traditional Christian values and wants people like themselves" to live in the neighborhood.

In the show, the competing families are African American, Hispanic, Asian American, gay, and from different religious backgrounds – all groups protected by federal and state fair housing laws. The show's premise is not only offensive, it represents an illegal and discriminatory mindset: that the white inhabitants of this "picture perfect" community have the right to select their new neighbors.

In America, people do not get to choose their new neighbor based on their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability or the fact that they have children. Period.