

**For Immediate Release**

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South Suburban Housing Center

## **South Suburban Housing Center Joins National Federal Court Fair Housing Complaint Against Bank of America**

CHICAGO — Today, the Homewood based South Suburban Housing Center (SSHC), joined with the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA), HOPE Fair Housing Center of Wheaton, as well as 17 other fair housing organizations across the U.S., and two homeowners in Maryland to file a federal lawsuit, alleging Fair Housing Act violations against Bank of America, N.A., Bank of America Corp., and Safeguard Properties Management, LLC (“Bank of America/Safeguard”). The lawsuit alleges Defendants intentionally failed to provide routine exterior maintenance and marketing at Bank of America-owned homes in working- and middle-class African-American and Latino neighborhoods in 37 metropolitan areas, while they consistently maintained similar bank-owned homes in comparable white neighborhoods.

The data presented in the federal complaint, which is supported by substantial photographic evidence, shows a glaring pattern of discriminatory conduct by Bank of America/Safeguard. The investigation documented 37 objective aspects of routine exterior maintenance that are common factors used in the preservation maintenance industry. More than 35,000 photos document the relevant conditions of the homes. In neighborhoods of color, Plaintiffs found evidence of poor maintenance such as wildly overgrown grass and weeds, unsecured doors and windows, damaged steps and handrails, accumulated trash and debris, unsecured pools, graffiti, and even dead animals decaying in yards. Plaintiffs investigated more than 1,600 Bank of America-owned homes in working- and middle-class white, African-American, and Latino neighborhoods. The lawsuit alleges that Bank of America-owned homes in predominantly white working- and middle-class neighborhoods are far more likely to have the lawns mowed and edged regularly, invasive weeds and vines removed, windows and doors secured or repaired, debris and trash removed, leaves raked, and graffiti erased from the property.

In the Chicago area, SSHC and HOPE investigated 90 Bank of America properties. Examples of some of the disparities found include: 40.7% of the REO properties in predominantly white neighborhoods had fewer than 5 maintenance or marketing deficiencies, while only 7.9% properties in communities of color had fewer than 5 deficiencies; and 92.1% of REO properties in neighborhoods of color had 5 or more marketing or maintenance deficiencies, while only 59.3% of white neighborhood properties had 5 or more deficiencies. SSHC also investigated 22 Bank of America properties in the Gary area of northwest Indiana. Results from these investigations found 87.5% of properties in white neighborhoods had fewer than 5 maintenance or

marketing deficiencies, while none of the properties in neighborhoods of color had fewer than 5 deficiencies.

In response to today's filing, Lisa Rice, President/CEO of NFHA stated, "Bank of America and Safeguard's intentional failure to correct their discriminatory treatment in African American and Latino neighborhoods—the same communities hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis—is systemic racism. The purposeful neglect of bank-owned homes in communities of color devalues the properties and the lives of the families in the neighborhoods around them." SSHC Executive Director, John Petruszak, commented, "The south suburbs continue to be the slowest recovering, hardest hit area of the Chicago housing market. Bank of America's failure to properly market and maintain REO properties, they are responsible for in communities of color, is prolonging the revival."

Details and additional information about SSHC's investigation of Bank of America's REO properties, including NFHA's news release and the federal complaint filed today, can be found on our website, [www.southsuburbanhousingcenter.org](http://www.southsuburbanhousingcenter.org).

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### **South Suburban Housing Center**

SSHC is the private, non-profit, regional fair housing and housing counseling agency primarily serving over 100 communities in southern Cook, Will and Kankakee counties of Illinois since 1975. SSHC's Fair Housing Enforcement Services extend to Grundy and Iroquois Counties in Illinois, Lake County, Indiana, and several central Illinois cities. SSHC's current Fair Housing Enforcement and Housing Counseling programs assist individuals in all protected classes and ensure that housing providers recognize and comply with the fair housing laws.

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