

WHAT IS FAIR HOUSING?



People have the right to live where they choose, to raise a family, to rent or own a home, with dignity and without discrimination. Fair housing laws say that no one can deny you housing or treat you differently because of your “protected class” – race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family status, disability (and in some areas, age, sexual orientation, or having a section 8 voucher).

Who Enforces Fair Housing?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) enforces the federal Fair Housing Act. State and local civil rights offices enforce this Act, and also state and local fair housing laws. We want everyone to know about these protections and what to do if discrimination happens.



What Do Fair Housing Laws Say That Landlords and Managers Have To Do?



Rental: When an apartment or house is rented or sold, the owner or manager should only think about things like your rental history and whether you can pay. Fair housing means that they don't take your protected classes into account. For example, a landlord cannot refuse to rent to a family just because they are Asian.



Similar treatment: Fair housing laws help make sure that applicants, tenants and home buyers get treated fairly. For example, a manager cannot make all families with children live on the ground floor. Or a maintenance man can't refuse to make repairs for gay tenants.



Rules for tenants: Fair housing laws say that rules for tenants cannot single out any protected group. For example, the rules should say "do not leave personal property on the balcony" instead of "do not leave children's toys on the balcony."



No harassment: Fair housing laws forbid harassment. If someone treats a tenant badly because of his protected class, the manager must do something about it. For example, a landlord must stop a tenant from calling another tenant racial names. Or a manager should stop a gardener who whistles at female tenants.



Disability Access: People with disabilities sometimes need "accommodations" from landlords and managers so that they can live in their rentals. For example, a landlord should give a low-vision applicant a large print lease. Or a manager must allow a tenant to widen his apartment doors so his wheelchair will fit.

What To Do If Discrimination Happens

Civil rights offices investigate discrimination complaints for free. If a landlord or manager did something that you think might be discrimination, you can contact a civil rights agency about filing a complaint. If they investigate and the evidence shows discrimination, the landlord or manager must change the situation and often, pay back the tenant for the damage that was done by the discrimination.

Fair housing is not only the right thing to do – it's also good business.

Landlords and managers don't have to provide special treatment, just equal treatment.

Know your fair housing rights! If discrimination happened, do something about it!