

# HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IS ILLEGAL

The **Fair Housing Act** prohibits discrimination in any housing-related transaction, including rentals, sales, mortgage lending, homeowners insurance, home appraisals, and zoning decisions relating to residential uses. Covered housing includes apartments, private housing, public housing, condominiums, homeless shelters, mobile home parks, nursing homes, addiction recovery homes, group homes for people with disabilities, and nonprofit housing programs.

## SPOT THE SIGNS OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION!

Housing discrimination can be subtle. The following activities may indicate discrimination:

- The information told to you in person does not match the information told to you on the phone.
- The landlord, lender or insurer takes your application and promises to call but never does.
- The sign says “vacancy,” but the landlord says it was just rented.
- The landlord imposes burdensome conditions for rental occupancy or refuses to allow reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities.
- The rental or sales agent claims the property is unsafe for children.
- Advertisements stating, “mature adults preferred,” “adult/family sections,” or “no children.”
- “Steering,” which is when an agent refuses to show you a property in a particular neighborhood or discourages you from considering a neighborhood because of its racial makeup.
- The mortgage or insurance company states a rule that disqualifies you from a loan or policy, e.g. “We don’t insure properties with flat roofs.”
- Threats, coercion, or intimidation directed toward anyone exercising a fair housing right or assisting others in exercising those rights.



The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates that 2.5 million people are victims of housing discrimination every year.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Under the Fair Housing Act, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person in any housing-related transaction based on:**

- **Race**
- **Color**
- **Disability** (under the Fair Housing Act, housing providers must allow reasonable accommodations and modifications for individuals with disabilities)
- **Sex** (includes sexual orientation and gender identity)
- **Religion**
- **National Origin**
- **Familial Status** (the presence of children under 18 in a household or because a member of the household is pregnant, or they will be adopting or securing legal custody of a child)

**In addition, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act adds two more protected classes:**

- **People over 40**
- **Users, Handlers, and Trainers of Assistance Animals for People with Disabilities**

*Local ordinances may offer more protection in some municipalities.*

(267) 419-8918  
equalhousing.org



## What Can I Do if I Have Experienced Housing Discrimination?

If you believe you have been the victim of housing discrimination, contact the Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania (HECP). HECP can provide a confidential assessment of your situation. We can also talk to you about your options for the enforcement of your rights. And, we may be able to conduct an investigation to see if housing discrimination is occurring. Additionally, HECP can help determine whether to file a formal complaint and let you know what to expect from the complaint process.

HECP can assist you in determining if your evidence is convincing enough to win your case. You will want to take into consideration how much harm you have suffered due to the discrimination and what your goals are in pursuing a complaint against the housing provider.

A victim of housing discrimination may file either an administrative complaint with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or a state or federal lawsuit. A prevailing complainant may be awarded actual damages, including both out-of-pocket costs and non-economic damages, such as humiliation and mental anguish. In addition, relief in the public interest may be imposed, and punitive damages may be awarded. In administrative cases, a civil penalty may be imposed. Finally, attorney's fees may be awarded to a prevailing complainant.

Know that filing a complaint may not stop an eviction or fix any other immediate housing problem. You will need to be patient during the complaint process. You will have to produce a statement along with any evidence that you have. Then you will be interviewed by attorneys or investigators. You may need to attend meetings to discuss the case and possible settlements. Seeking justice and stopping housing discrimination from reoccurring requires a commitment of your time and energy.

Contact HECP for help figuring out the best course of action for your situation. We are here to provide information on your rights and what types of housing issues may be illegal discrimination.

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The Housing Equality Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing fair and equal access to housing opportunities for all Pennsylvanians. We provide education on fair housing rights to consumers and organizations serving members of the protected classes and training and technical assistance to housing providers and local governments. The Housing Equality Center provides fair housing counseling and testing investigation services for victims of housing discrimination in the City of Philadelphia and in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lehigh, Montgomery, and Northampton Counties.



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