

Fair Housing: How Much do You Know?

Every day, throughout our community, people seek one of our most basic needs: housing. While many people go through a housing transaction with few obstacles, others are illegally denied housing.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates that over two million acts of housing discrimination occur annually, yet few incidents are reported. The reasons for this discrepancy are simple: discrimination is often subtle, and few people know or understand the fair housing laws that protect them.

How well do you understand fair housing laws? Take this quiz and find out.

Q: Is it okay for a landlord to place all families with children on one floor of the building and all other occupants on a separate floor?

A: No. The Federal Fair Housing Act prohibits the discrimination on the basis of familial status. That means that no one can be denied access to housing opportunities based on their household composition, including the presence of children. Segregating a housing complex by floor or building is a violation of this law.

Q: I am single. Can a housing provider tell me that he prefers a household with a married couple?

A: No. A housing provider cannot deny anyone housing because of his or her marital status.

Q: I use a wheelchair. Can a landlord charge me a higher security deposit than other tenants?

A: No. A housing provider cannot create additional charges or fees for someone who requires a wheelchair or for any person with a disability.

Q: True or false: It's legal for real estate agents to direct African-American home seekers to predominately African-American neighborhoods.

A: False. Steering restricts an individual's housing choices and perpetuates segregation.

Q: True or false: Landlords who live in their own buildings don't need to comply with fair housing laws.

A: False. The Wisconsin Open Housing Law has no exemptions for owner-occupied housing. There are exemptions for shared living facilities.

Q: I have a disability and use a dog as a service animal to help me live independently. When I applied to live at an apartment complex, the manager told me that no pets are allowed in the complex. Can I keep my dog?

A: If you have a disability and need a service animal in order to live independently, you have the right to request an accommodation to the housing provider's "no pets" rule in order to keep your service animal. Housing providers are obligated to allow reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities.

Q: I'm 23 years old. A rental manager told me that he doesn't rent to people under 25. Is this legal?

A: No. The Wisconsin Open Housing Law protects people 18 years of age and older from discrimination based on age. However, there are exemptions based on age for housing for the elderly.

If you think you may have been illegally denied housing on the basis of your race, national origin, sex, familial status, disability, age, lawful source of income, sexual orientation, or another characteristic, fight back! Call our toll-free statewide complaint intake hotline at 1-877-647-3247. For more information, please see the Fair Housing Center's website, www.fairhousingwisconsin.com.

The Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison also provides educational presentations to neighborhood groups, social service agencies, religious congregations, and others about fair housing law and illegal housing discrimination. For more information on fair housing presentations, please call 608-257-0853.