

Fair Housing **In-the-Know** Newsletter



April 2026 – July 2026

A Quarterly Insight into Housing Discrimination

Stark County Fair Housing Department ~ Division of Stark County Regional Planning Commission

Fair Housing Act

58

YEARS

Anniversary

1968 - 2026



APRIL IS

FAIR HOUSING

MONTH

EQUAL
OPPORTUNITY
FOR ALL



*President Lyndon B. Johnson
signed the Civil Rights Act into Law on
April 11, 1968*



Fair Housing is the Law!

This year marks the 58th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (also known as the Fair Housing Act). On April 11, 1968, one week after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of:

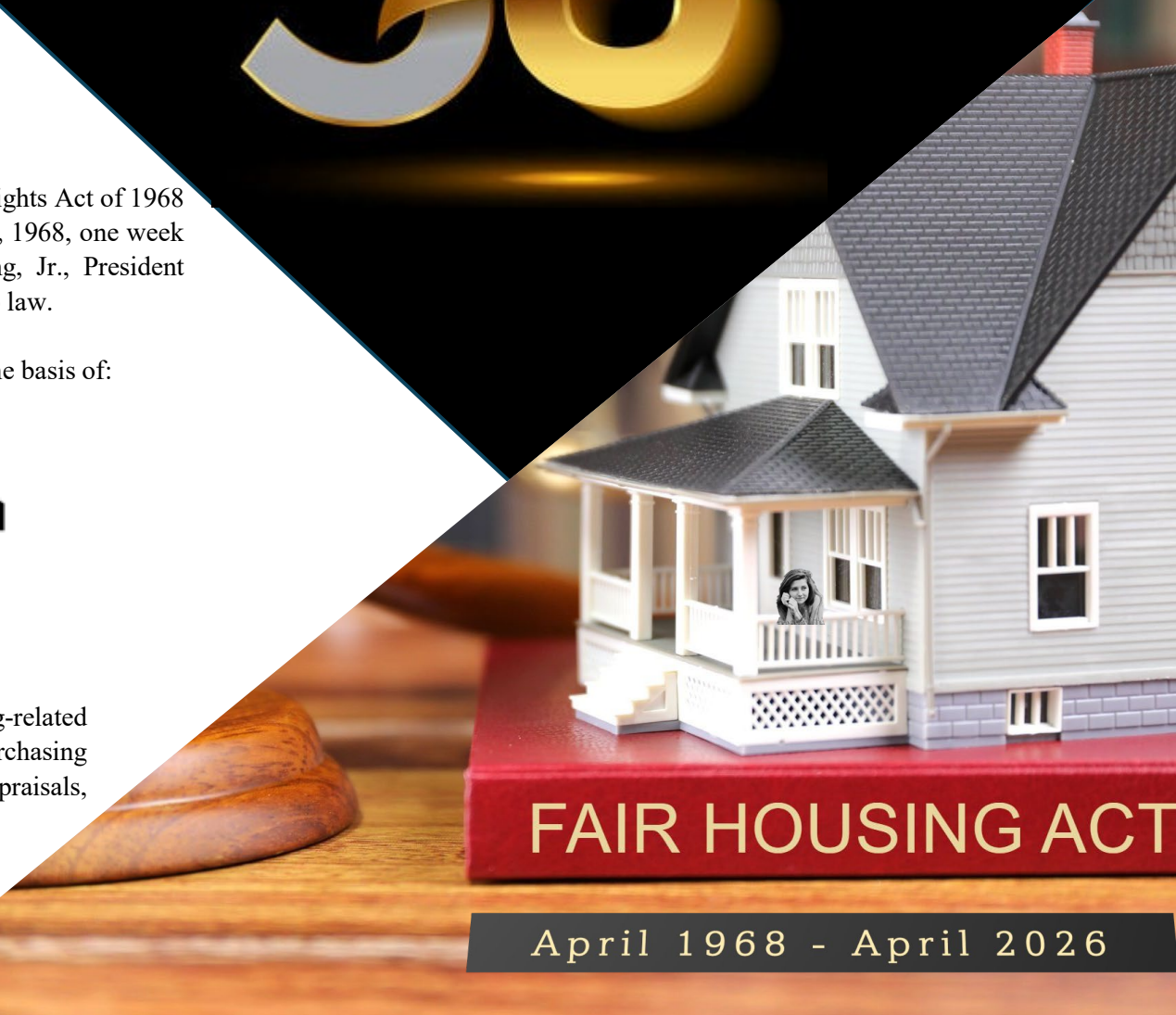
- Race
- Color
- Religion
- Sex
- National Origin
- Disability
- Familial Status



The law protects individuals in all housing-related transactions, including obtaining loans, purchasing insurance, renting or buying a home, appraisals, advertising, land-use, development and zoning.

58

ANNIVERSARY



FAIR HOUSING ACT

April 1968 - April 2026

**HOUSING DISCRIMINATION
IS ILLEGAL!**

Sexual Harassment in Housing is Illegal

Sexual harassment by a landlord, maintenance worker or anyone associated with the rental property is against the law. The Fair Housing Act protects you from harassment.

Examples:

- A landlord persistently makes unwelcome and lewd comments about a resident's body.
- A property manager touches an applicant's intimate body parts without his or her consent.
- A maintenance person repeatedly sends unwelcome sexually explicit text messages and photos to a tenant.
- A maintenance person refuses to make repairs because you deny sexual favors.

Discrimination because of sex/gender or sexual harassment is prohibited under the law. Sexual harassment can happen to any person, male or female, and can be committed by someone of the same sex or someone of the opposite sex.

“Will the apartment still be available when they meet us in person?”

“We made arrangements to look at an apartment, but when the landlord saw us, he walked away. When we caught up with him, he said the apartment was already rented.”



WHAT IS RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING?



The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing providers from treating renters or homebuyers differently because of their religion or religious practices and rituals. “**Religion**” includes both the practice and non-practice of religion, such as atheism, as well as religions that are outside the mainstream.

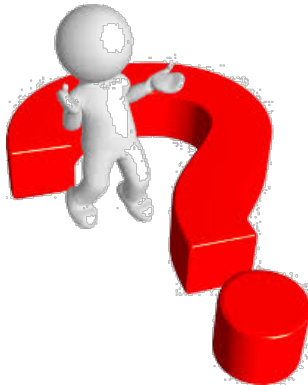
It is illegal to:

- Refuse to rent to women who wear hijabs (religious headscarves) or Sikhs who wear turbans.
- Make discriminatory statements or publish discriminatory advertising.
- Harass because of religious practices or clothing.
- Charge more rent because of his or her religion.
- Call Muslims “terrorists” and tell them they aren’t welcome as tenants or neighbors.
- Prohibit use of a community room for religious purposes, while allowing tenants to use them for secular gatherings, such as parties.
- Allow some tenants to put up Christmas lights, but tell others they cannot put up decorations for their non-Christian holidays.

A housing provider is not required to provide an accommodation from a neutrally applied rule for a person with religious needs. The Act does contain a limited exception that allows non-commercial housing operated by a religious organization to reserve such housing to persons of the same religion.

Test your knowledge.
Answer is on page 13.

Fair Housing and Zoning



QUESTION

Can state and local land use and zoning laws or practices violate the Fair Housing Act if the state or locality did not intend to discriminate against persons on a prohibited basis?



I WAS DENIED HOUSING BECAUSE I HAVE AN ASSISTANCE ANIMAL

Landlords must make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, such as allowing an assistance or emotional support animal in a no-pets building. If you believe you have experienced discrimination, contact the Fair Housing Department to file a complaint.



REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

The FHA makes it unlawful for a person to refuse “to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services, when such accommodations may be necessary to afford such person equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.”

NOTE: Emotional support animals are not limited to dogs and can be any species of animal.



Types of Reasonable Accommodation

- ☐ Allowing a service animal despite a “no pet” policy.
- ☐ Reserving a parking space.
- ☐ Allowing a live-in aide.
- ☐ Allowing a non-tenant to use laundry facilities.
- ☐ Helping Fill Out Forms
- ☐ Transferring of unit without a fee.
- ☐ Changing the rent due date.
- ☐ Informing others (family, social worker, etc.) of new policies.
- ☐ Notifying a tenant with multiple chemical sensitivity in advance of painting and pest treatments.
- ☐ Waiving “guest fees” and parking fees for tenants with a mobility impairment or for a tenant’s home health aide.

FAMILIAL STATUS

**When it comes
to housing,
little things
shouldn't make
a difference.**

If you have children or are pregnant and a landlord refuses to rent to you, requires a higher security deposit, limits the use of facilities, or says you can only live in certain areas of a housing complex... that could be discrimination. Contact Stark County Fair Housing Department at (330) 451-7775.



The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to deny housing to families with children under the age of 18.

It is illegal to:

- ❖ Steer families to certain floors, buildings or neighborhoods.
- ❖ Have rules that target or restrict children.
- ❖ Deny housing or evict because you have a child or are pregnant.
- ❖ Charge more rent because you have a child.
- ❖ Advertise stating children are not welcome.

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Housing Discrimination
Against Families With
Children Is **ILLEGAL**



Housing discrimination is also prohibited based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, or disability.



Have a Fair Housing Question?

Email your question to

vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov

We may publish the answer in the next issue of the Fair Housing In-the-Know Newsletter



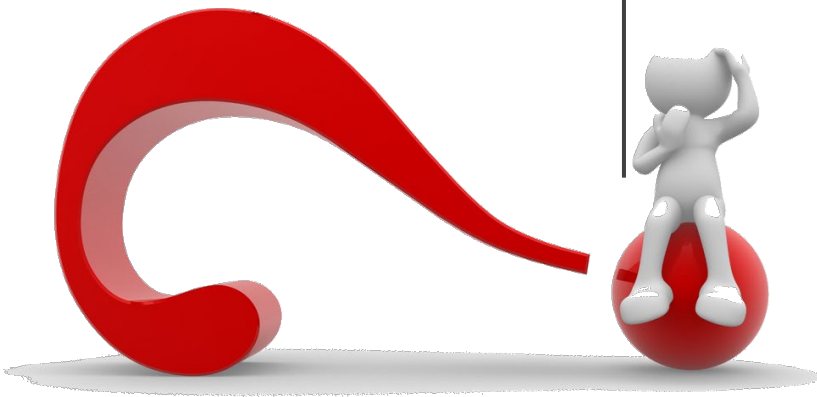
Question is on page 7

Fair Housing and Zoning

ANSWER



Yes. Even absent a discriminatory intent, state or local governments may be liable under the FHA for any land use or zoning law or practice that has an unjustified discriminatory effect because of a protected characteristic.



2026 Stark County Law



Valerie Watson, Fair Housing Manager, was a presenter at the Governmental Law Seminar on February 28, 2026. Watson spoke on Fair Housing and Zoning.

The Fair Housing Act (FHA) covers all housing transactions including the rental, sales, **zoning**, appraisal, lending, home insurance, **land-use**, advertisement, and the **development** of housing. The FHA prohibits local government from making zoning or land use decisions or implementing land use policies that exclude or otherwise discriminate against protected persons, including individuals with disabilities. Local government **MAY NOT**:

- Reject a proposed affordable housing development in response to neighbors' fears or stereotypes.
- Require neighbor notification or a public hearing only for the development of affordable housing or group homes.
- Refuse to allow an exception to a setback requirement as a reasonable accommodation for a disabled resident.
- Impose spacing requirements on group homes for persons with disabilities.

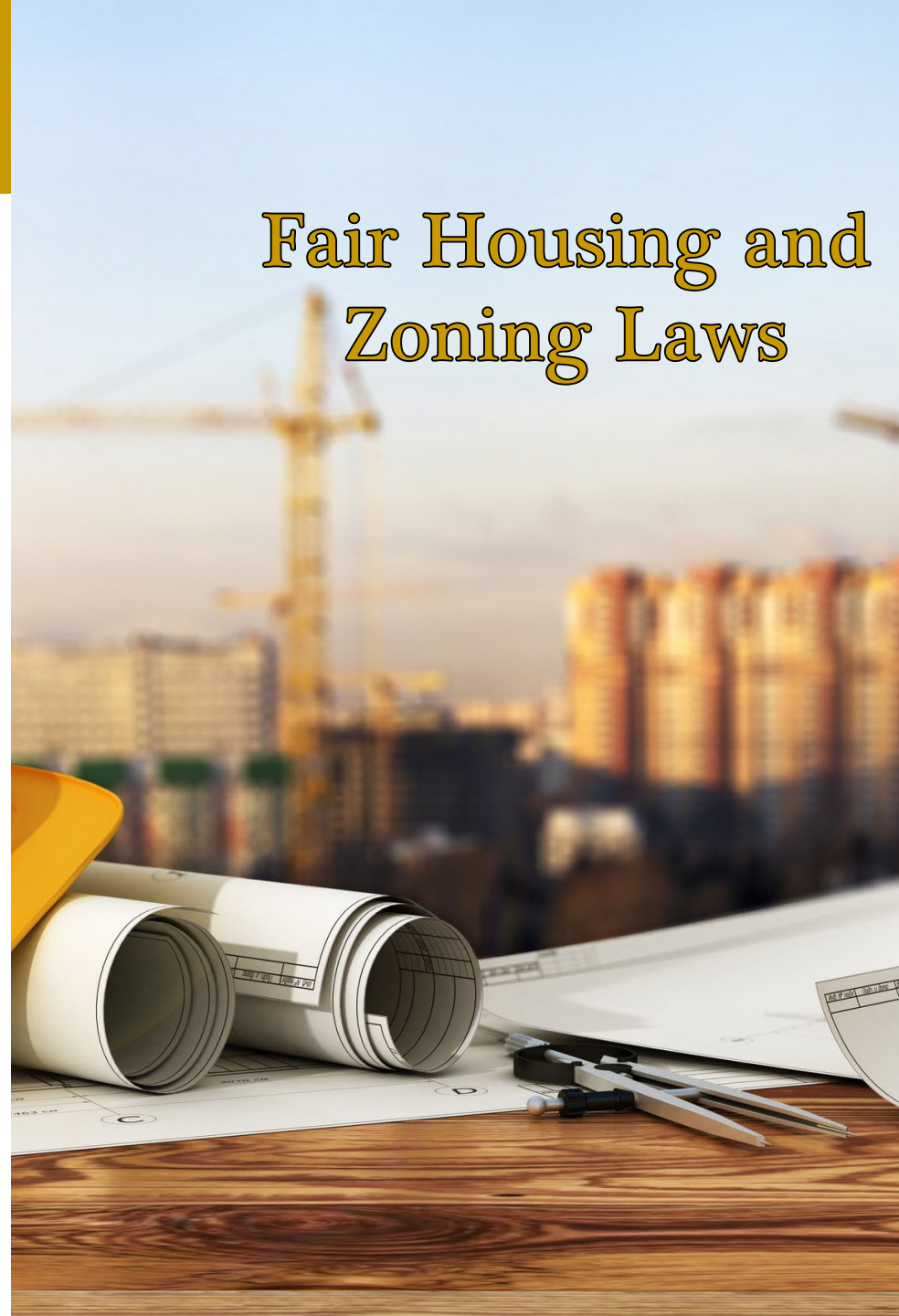
Governmental Seminar

It is also discriminatory for Local Government to. . .

- ★ delay or temporary suspend a development because residents are members of the protected classes
- ★ have burdensome or an expensive process for residents to apply for a conditional use
- ★ refuse to make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, in land use and zoning regulations, policies and procedures
- ★ Require additional studies, steps or delays when a development may be occupied by members of the protected classes.

FHA mandates that zoning officials “change, waive, or make exceptions in their zoning rules to afford people with disabilities the same opportunity to housing as those who are without disabilities.”

Fair Housing and Zoning Laws





Save the Date

Landlord Conference and

expo

2026

Sponsored by

Stark County Fair Housing
City of Alliance Fair Housing
City of Massillon Fair Housing



Saturday, September 19
9 am - 3 pm

The Landlord Conference and Expo will be held at the R. G. Drage CTC, 2800 Richville Dr SE, Massillon, Ohio. The event will feature sessions from professionals that will cover a variety of housing subjects including Landlord-Tenant Relations, Fair Housing, Health & Safety Requirements, Rental Registration Requirements, Criminal Trespass, Legal Issues and more.



CALLING ALL
LANDLORDS

Join us at this must attend event

LANDLORD
CONFERENCE
& **Expo** 2026

CALLING ALL EXHIBITORS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS! The conference includes an active Expo Hall. Please consider supporting this important educational event! We welcome all exhibitors/vendors to join us and use this prime opportunity to engage with landlords and showcase your services. For more information or to reserve a space, contact Anna Jordan at (330) 830-1717 or ajordan@massillonohio.gov



The Stark County Regional Planning Commission administers the Fair Housing Program on behalf of the Stark County Commissioners



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Do you think you have been
discriminated against?

Don't Wait

Don't Hesitate

Let Us



Contact:

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Email: vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov

