

# Stark County Fair Housing Department

Division of Stark County Regional Planning Commission



Fair Housing Newsletter

August - November 2024

A Quarterly Insight into Housing Discrimination

**Your Right  
To Live  
Anywhere  
You Can  
Afford!**



**Fair Housing  
is the Law!**



**HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IS ILLEGAL!**

# FAIR HOUSING IS THE LAW!

This year marks the 56th 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 Fair Housing Act into law.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (which can include sexual harassment, sexual orientation and gender identity), national origin, disability and family status. The law protects individuals in all housing-related transactions, including obtaining loans, purchasing insurance, renting or buying a home, appraisals, advertising and zoning.

According to research, more than 4 million fair housing violations occur each year in the rental market alone.





**Discrimination isn't always this obvious.  
But it is just as hurtful and illegal.**

Housing discrimination against families with children under the age of 18 is illegal.

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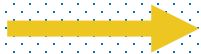
Federal protections regarding sex discrimination in housing have been expanded to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and believe they have been discriminated against in any housing-related transaction can file a complaint.

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Landlords must make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, such as allowing an assistance or emotional support animal in a no-pets building.



The Fair  
Housing Act  
protect people  
from housing  
discrimination  
based on the  
following...



**D**  
**CRIMINAL HISTORY**

**S**  
**SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

**B**  
**I**  
**RACE**

**E**  
**COLOR**

**FAMILIAL STATUS**

**I**  
**S**  
**T**  
**GENDER IDENTITY**

**I**  
**X**

**O**  
**NATIONAL ORIGIN**

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

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



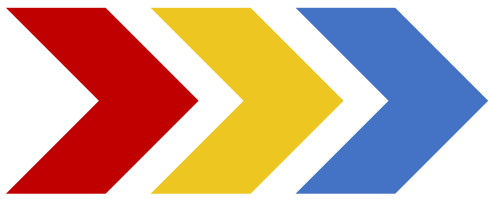
Discrimination because of race or familial status is prohibited under the law. If you believe you may be a victim of housing discrimination, contact the Fair Housing Department.

**Your Choice! Your Right! Your Home!**

## US Dept. of Justice Resolved Sexual Harassment Lawsuit in Youngstown

The Justice Department resolved a lawsuit alleging a violation of the Fair Housing Act against the owner and manager of residential rental properties in Youngstown, Ohio. According to the complaint, the manager subjected tenants to unwelcome sexual comments, entered the homes of female tenants without their consent, touched female tenants without their consent, offered to excuse late or unpaid rent in exchange for sexual acts and took adverse housing-related actions against female tenants who refused his sexual advances from 2009 to 2020. According to the complaint, the owner was liable for the manager's conduct. Under the settlement agreement, the owner and manager will pay **\$199,000**, take steps to vacate any adverse judgments and repair the credit of tenants who were evicted after refusing the manager's advances, undergo fair housing training, and submit reports on their rental activity. In addition, the agreement permanently bars the manager from managing residential rental properties.





“Sexual harassment not only violates the tenant, it also violates the Fair Housing Act. Sexual harassment is discriminatory behavior and illegal,” said Valerie Watson, Fair Housing Manager. Individuals who believe they may have been victims of sexual harassment should call Stark County Fair Housing at 330-451-7775 to file a housing discrimination complaint. The fair housing laws are designed to protect against this and other discriminatory conduct.

## DOJ SETTLES OTHER SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAWSUITS

### Georgia landlord settles for \$600,000

In April 2024, the Justice Department settled a long-running federal housing discrimination lawsuit against a landlord in Georgia. The Georgia landlord has agreed to pay \$600,000 to resolve allegations that he violated the Fair Housing Act (FHA) by sexually harassing and retaliating against his female tenants for over 15 years. The lawsuit alleged that the landlord harassed female tenants by making repeated and unwelcome sexual comments and advances, inappropriately touching their bodies without their permission, entering their homes without their permission or knowledge, requesting sexual acts from them in exchange for rent or other housing-related benefits and taking retaliatory actions against female tenants who rejected his sexual advances or complained about the harassment.

### Michigan landlord settles for \$185,000

In April 2024, the Justice Department settled with a Michigan landlord. The landlord has agreed to pay \$185,000 in damages and a civil penalty to the government to resolve allegations that he violated the Fair Housing Act (FHA). The landlord subjected actual and prospective female tenants to sexual harassment by making unwelcome comments and advances and offered actual and prospective female tenants housing-related benefits in exchange for engaging in sex acts with him.

# STEERING



Since you have a scooter, you can't rent the 2nd floor apartment!

You would be happier on the other side of town!

Families with children on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor only.

I wouldn't buy that!

That's not a good area.

Don't move there!

WHAT AGENTS  
AND LANDLORDS  
**CAN'T** TELL  
YOU

“Steering” is the practice of influencing a home seeker's choice based on their protected characteristics. Steering is a form of discrimination because it limits prospects' choices and denies them the opportunity to buy or rent the housing they choose. Steering also maintains or creates segregation across apartment communities, neighborhoods, county's, cities, and wider communities.

# Steering Is A Form Of Discrimination

## Examples of Steering

- ❑ “Since you have several children, our experience has shown that we will have fewer complaints from neighbors if you live on the first floor.”
- ❑ “That area of the property is viewed as our ‘quiet’ area, so you should choose an apartment in a different area closer to other young families.”
- ❑ “This property has a lot of Latino residents, so you should fit right in.”
- ❑ “I assume from the last name you are Jewish, like me. I have a vacant apartment that is next door to another Jewish family. Would you like to see it?”
- ❑ “The only available unit we have is on the second floor, so since you use a wheelchair, I can put you on a waiting list for a first floor unit.”



John, who is an Asian man, meets with a real estate broker to discuss purchasing a house for his family. When John names the neighborhood that he is interested in, the broker asks John if he is sure that his family will feel comfortable there. The broker tells John that she has a wonderful listing in another neighborhood where there are more “people like him.” When the broker takes John to see the house, John notices that all of the residents appear to be mostly Asian.

## **Stark County Fair Housing Resolves Disability Complaint**

In June 2024, the Stark County Fair Housing Department resolved a complaint alleging a violation of the Fair Housing Act. The Hartville, Ohio landlord has agreed to make a reasonable accommodation in her rules for a disabled tenant by giving the tenant additional time to vacate the property. The landlord gave her tenant a 30-day notice to vacate so she could renovate the building. Due to the tenant's disability, it was impossible to move within that timeframe. The tenant has severe and life-threatening allergic reactions that can cause her body to go into shock. Finding a home can prove to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for renters who suffer from chemical sensitivity. Fortunately, the tenant located alternate housing. However, to fully use and enjoy her apartment, she needed time to prepare the home by eliminating any hydrocarbons and other chemicals that may cause her harm.

Valerie Watson, Fair Housing Manager, contacted the landlord to discuss reasonable accommodations under the fair housing law. The landlord agreed to give the tenant additional time to vacate the property so the tenant could make her new home safe. “The accommodation allowed the tenant to locate another unit and eliminate any harmful chemicals,” said Ms. Watson.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination based on disability. Such discrimination includes refusing to rent based on a person’s disability, failing to grant reasonable accommodations, or subjecting tenants to discriminatory terms and conditions. Unfortunately, many persons with disabilities continue to experience illegal acts of housing discrimination in Stark County and around the country. It is illegal to deny a reasonable accommodation or modification for a person with a disability who needs such accommodation.

## Reasonable Accommodation Requests

Reasonable accommodations may be requested at any time by or on behalf of:

- A tenant or applicant with a disability;
- A household member with a disability;
- Any other person with a disability associated with a tenant.

A request may be made in writing or orally.

Reasonable accommodation is a change, exception, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service that may be necessary to afford a person with a disability equal enjoyment of the property.

A reasonable accommodation must be granted unless it is an undue financial and administrative burden for the housing provider, or it would entail a fundamental alteration to the nature of the housing provider's operations.

The housing provider or landlord should be prepared to justify their decision if he/she deny a reasonable accommodation request. The housing provider must enter an interactive process before denying a request as unreasonable so as to discuss with the requestor whether any alternative accommodation would “effectively address” the individual's disability-related needs without fundamentally altering the provider's operations or causing an undue financial and administrative burden. The goal is to see if some sort of accommodation may still be achieved.



# TESTERS

## NEEDED ! ! !

Contact  
(330) 451-7775

## Stark County Fair Housing



### Tester Compensation

\$50 stipend per completed on-site test

\$20 stipend per completed telephone or email test

Note: Testers are not employees and are utilized on an as needed basis.

Fair Housing Testers help ensure that people are not denied housing due to unlawful discrimination by meeting with housing providers and documenting the details about their experiences. Fair housing testing is an effective way of protecting people against housing discrimination and securing the rights established under the Fair Housing Act. We are seeking honest, well-organized individuals of all ages, gender, races, and nationalities to assist in fulfilling our mission to ensure everyone has access to housing free from discrimination in Stark County. Contact us at (330) 451-7775 or email [vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov](mailto:vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov)

### Skills we look for . . .

- Ability to follow instructions and remember details
- Good oral and written communication skills
- Attention to detail and accuracy
- Dependable
- Good active listening and observation skills
- Can act the role of a home seeker in a variety of situations
- Able to be reached by cell phone/email
- Have means of reliable transportation

**Fair Housing:** *More Than Just Words*



***It's the Law!***



**Report Housing Discrimination!**  
**Contact Stark County Fair Housing Department**  
**at 330-451-7775**

If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, contact:

**Stark County Fair Housing Department**

Valerie Watson, Fair Housing Manager

Phone: (330) 451-7775

Email: [vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov](mailto:vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov)

Do you think you have been discriminated against?

***Don't Wait***

***Don't Hesitate***

***Let Us***



**Call Stark County Fair Housing!**



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

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