

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



August – November 2025

A Quarterly Insight into Housing Discrimination

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



***HOUSING  
DISCRIMINATION  
IS ILLEGAL!***

# *Fair Housing and Landlord-Tenant Seminar*



**Stark County Fair Housing Department sponsored a Fair Housing and Landlord-Tenant Seminar in Alliance on May 20, 2025. Mayor Andrew Grove gave the opening remarks. Valerie Watson, Fair Housing Manager, and Ryan Maxwell, Managing Attorney at Community Legal Aid, were the speakers. Watson gave an overview on the Fair Housing Act and discussed how Criminal Background Screening relates to the law. Maxwell provided information on Landlord and Tenant Rights and Responsibilities under the Ohio Landlord-Tenant Act.**



## WATSON GAVE AN OVERVIEW ON THE FAIR HOUSING LAW



Maxwell spoke on  
Landlord/Tenant  
Rights and  
Responsibilities



# MAXWELL WROTE A QUICK NOTE ABOUT WITHHOLDING YOUR RENT . . .

DO NOT WITHHOLD YOUR RENT  
DO NOT WITHHOLD YOUR RENT  
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Rent  
Due

# Rent Escrow

# Rent Deposit

R.C. 5321.07 – R.C. 5321.10



Tenants cannot withhold rent as a general practice. However, they can deposit rent with the court in certain situations. This process, known as rent escrow, allows the tenant to pay the rent to the court, which holds it in trust until the issue is resolved.

Attorney Maxwell explained what tenants can do if the LANDLORD fails to address issues in their apartment. The tenant may provide written notice to the landlord specifying the issues and provide the landlord an opportunity to cure, usually 30 days unless there is an emergency. If the tenant is current in rental payments, a tenant can then do one of the following :

- Deposit all rent in full and on time with the local municipal court
- Apply to the Court for an order directing the landlord to remedy the issue
- Apply for an order reducing the rent until the landlord remedies the issues
- Apply for an order to use the rent deposited to remedy the condition on their own without the landlord
- Terminate the rental agreement.

## NO SELF-HELP EVICTIONS

R.C. 5321.15

Attorney Ryan Maxwell spoke on Self-Help Evictions. A landlord cannot initiate any of the below against a tenant whose right to possession has terminated for the purpose of recovering possession:

- Termination of utilities or services
- Exclusion from the premises (aka a 'Lock Out')
- Threat of any unlawful act



# RACE/ COLOR



Steering minority home seekers to sections of city neighborhoods

Denying housing

# NATIONAL ORIGIN



Being denied housing because of your country of origin or because of your accent or appearance

## Examples of Fair Housing Violations

# RELIGION



Treating renters differently because of their religion or because they wear religious clothing or engage in religious practices and rituals

# FAMILIAL STATUS



Steering families to certain floors, buildings or neighborhoods

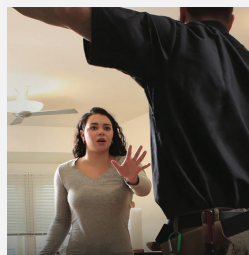
Denying families with children

# DISABILITY



Refusing to make reasonable accommodations or modifications for persons with disabilities

# SEX

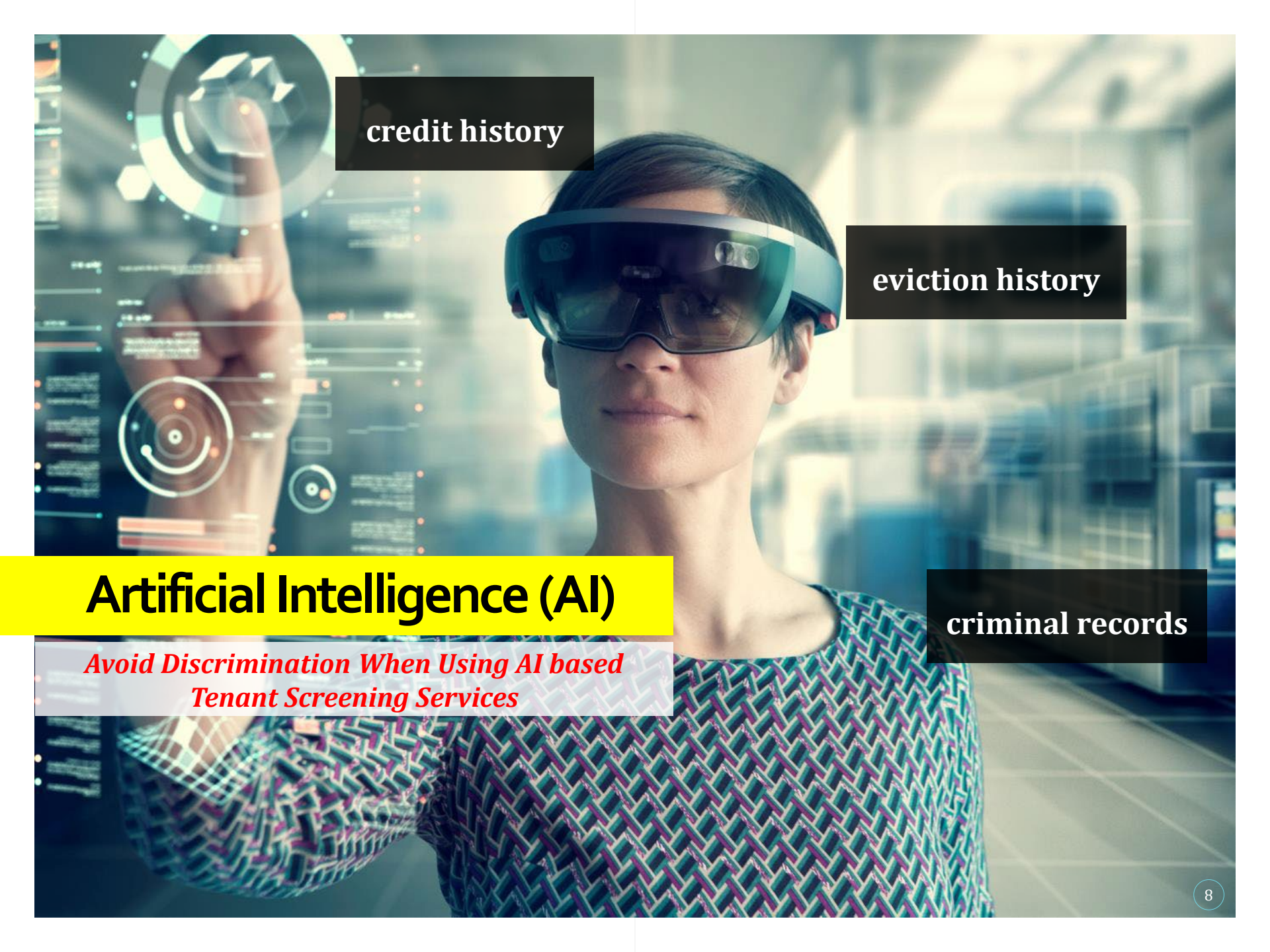


Unwelcomed and uninvited sexual advances by a landlord towards a tenant

# ADDITIONAL FAIR HOUSING VIOLATIONS

- Local government taking action against, or denying a permit for a home because of the disability of individuals who live or would live there
- Charging higher rent or an additional deposit because someone needs a service animal to assist them with their disability
- Using overbroad criminal history-related bans
- Having rules that target or restrict children
- Denying housing, evicting, or charging more rent because someone has a child or are pregnant
- Advertising children are not welcome



A woman with dark hair is wearing a pair of futuristic, dark-colored augmented reality (AR) glasses. She is looking slightly to the right. In the background, there is a blurred image of a modern building. Overlaid on the left side of the image is a complex digital interface with various charts, graphs, and data points. The interface includes a large circular chart at the top left, several smaller circular gauges, and various lines of text and data. The overall aesthetic is high-tech and futuristic.

credit history

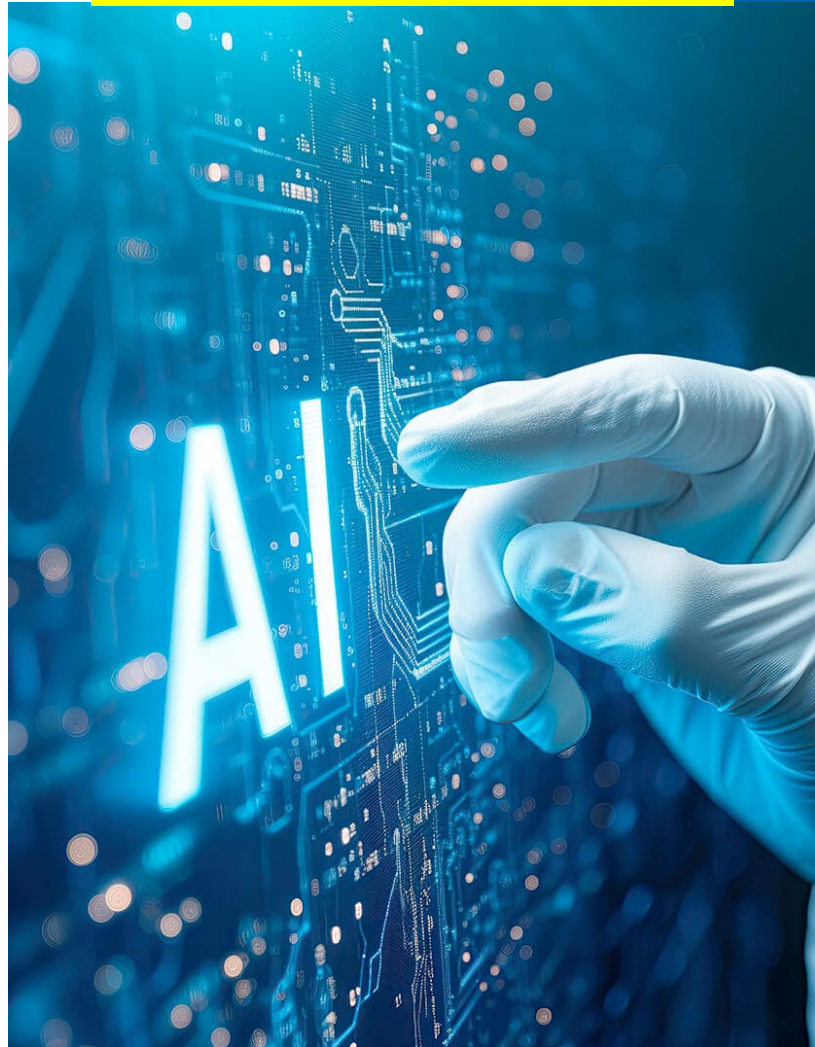
eviction history

# Artificial Intelligence (AI)

*Avoid Discrimination When Using AI based  
Tenant Screening Services*

criminal records

Overbroad screenings in the areas of **credit history**, **eviction history**, and **criminal records**, pose fair housing concerns. Overbroad screenings, including screenings that fail to account for individual circumstances, are likely to have an unjustified discriminatory effect based on personal characteristics protected under the Fair Housing Act (FHA). The use of AI and machine learning in tenant screening can potentially obscure the reasons for a denial, leading to less transparency in the process. Housing providers should be aware that the FHA applies to tenant screening and housing advertising, including when algorithms and AI are used to perform those functions. The FHA applies to housing decisions regardless of who makes them and the technology used.





# CRIMINAL RECORD

What is your policy on renting to prospective tenants with a criminal record?

# What Does the Fair Housing Act has to do With Criminal Records

For people of color, specifically Black and Hispanic Americans with criminal records, the barriers to locating housing are experienced at disproportionate rates. These barriers are largely due to **criminal background screening processes that are often unreasonably restrictive and discriminatory**. Most housing providers perform background checks on prospective tenants when screening applicants. As a result, those who have criminal convictions on their record are likely to face more scrutiny and possibly a denial than those who do not.



*Arrest without conviction is not justifiable.*

A denial based on a criminal record could have a disparate impact on individuals of a particular race, national origin, or other protected class. A landlord who enforces rules which have a disparate impact is subject to the same penalties under the FHA as a landlord who intentionally discriminates.

Landlords must consider:

- Date of conviction
- Nature
- Severity
- What the person has done since conviction.

Policies that exclude persons based on criminal history must be:

- ☐ Substantial
- ☐ Legitimate
- ☐ Nondiscriminatory interest



*Not all ex-cons will pose a risk to safety or property!*

**Landmark  
\$1,187,500**

***Settlement Reached  
in Fair Housing Case  
Challenging Criminal  
Record Ban***

One of the first cases in the country to challenge overly broad bans on renting to people with criminal records as discriminatory under the Fair Housing Act, resulted in an \$1,187,500 settlement. A New York-based non-profit that provides housing and other services to formerly incarcerated individuals filed a Fair Housing lawsuit against the owners and operators of a complex. The Fortune Society tried to rent apartments for its clients. When defendants learned that Fortune was seeking housing for formerly incarcerated people, they refused to rent to them per the defendants' policy prohibiting anyone with a criminal record from renting their apartments. This ban was discriminatory and had an unlawful disparate impact on the basis of race and color.

The FAIR

# HOUSING ACT

(also known as the Civil Rights Act of 1968)



Race

Color

National Origin

Religion

Sex

Familial Status

Disability

## PROTECTED CLASSES

The FHA applies to rental, homebuying, lending, insurance, appraisals, zoning and other housing related activities.



Protections are not just for houses and apartments. Discrimination is illegal in dorms, nursing homes, shelter and other types of housing.

**APRIL**  
is **FAIR HOUSING**  
**MONTH**



**HOUSING FOR ALL**

- **EQUAL TERMS & CONDITIONS**
- **EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY**
- **FREE OF DISCRIMINATION**

Fair Housing  
is the **Law!**

# FAIR HOUSING



**Test your knowledge on the fair housing law? Answers are on page 15.**

1. Which of the following new leasing agent needs fair housing training before she begins performing her leasing agent duties?
  - a. Amber, a recent Harvard grad who's never worked in the industry but took fair housing courses at college
  - b. Brandy, a veteran leasing agent who received fair housing training from her previous employer
  - c. Chloe, a newly promoted leasing agent who got fair housing training as part of the orientation she received when she began as a maintenance worker
  - d. All of the above
  - e. None of the above
  
2. Based on the federal fair housing law, which of the following people would be protected:
  - a. A divorced female, single parent
  - b. A 35 year old single Jewish man
  - c. A 50 year old white man
  - d. All of the above





## WHAT TO DO IF YOU EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION

While it is common to think of housing discrimination in terms of a door being slammed in someone's face or a bigoted remark being offered as the reason for a refusal to rent or sell property, the reality is somewhat different today. That is not to suggest that blatant forms of discrimination do not exist, because they do. An unsuspecting home seeker is not always confronted with a "slammed door." Instead, a home seeker may be greeted by a "revolving door" and politely turned away from the desired housing.

Here are some steps to take if you think you're experiencing discrimination:

- ✓ Take Notes Immediately. Write down exactly what happened. Include key details, (Ex. date, time, names, titles and specific actions or statements. Take notes of what exactly was said or done that made you feel discriminated against.
- ✓ Collect and save any texts, emails, or recordings.

### OBTAIN AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE REGARDING:

- What unit (s) were offered, date of availability, etc.?
- What are the terms and conditions (i.e., lease, deposit, application, credit check, etc.)?
- What questions did the manager ask? (i.e., income, employment, family size, marital status, etc.)
- The name and/or description of the person with whom you spoke.

If you have experienced housing discrimination, please contact the Stark County Fair Housing Department at (330) 451-7775.

# TIME FOR ANSWERS



## 1. Answer: D. All of the above

All employees who directly interact with prospects, tenants, and/or members of the public should receive and successfully complete fair housing training before they perform their duties. Amber needs fair housing training because she has no experience as a leasing agent. Brandy has experience and previous fair housing training, however, it doesn't eliminate the need to provide additional training since previous training was at a different company. Chloe has received previous fair housing training, however, it was part of her orientation as a maintenance worker. Leasing agent is a completely different job. While there may be some overlap, fair housing training for maintenance work doesn't suffice for leasing agent duties and vice-versa.

NOTE: Fair housing training should be on a continuous basis for all.

## 2. Answer: D. All of the above

All persons who are in a protected class are protected including a single parent (familial status), a Jewish man (national origin), and a 50 year old white man (race) .



# 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

# What is Testing?

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Fair housing testing is an effective way of protecting people against housing discrimination and securing the rights established under the Fair Housing Act. Fair Housing tests measure the quality, quantity and content of information provided to potential renters and homebuyers based on protected classes under the law.



## What do Testers do?

Fair Housing Testers help ensure that people are not denied housing due to unlawful discrimination by meeting with landlords, property managers and or real estate agents. A factual report of the events is then compiled by the Tester. The Tester's experience is then compared to the experience of a partner tester. The reports are analyzed by the Test Coordinator and the results either support or dispel allegations of discrimination. Testers can make the difference when it comes to moving a case forward. Testers are paid a stipend for the training, as well as for each test they complete. We will send you an application form and reserve a space for you in our up-coming tester training session.

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)

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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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