

# Stark County Fair Housing Department

Division of Stark County Regional Planning Commission



Fair Housing Newsletter

December 2023 – March 2024

A Quarterly Insight into Housing Discrimination

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

**Live Anywhere**  
**You Can**  
**Afford!**

**Fair Housing**  
**is the Law!**



**HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IS ILLEGAL!**



## SCFHD Offers Many Programs and Services to the Community

### **Housing Discrimination Investigation**

SCFHD staff receives complaints and conducts appropriate investigations that involve fair housing violations. We assist clients in asserting their legal rights involving discrimination in housing.

### **Reasonable Accommodation/ Modification Request**

SCFHD help persons with disabilities make a reasonable accommodation/modification request to their housing provider. SCFHD provides this service because doing so can often avoid a future housing discrimination violation.

### **Sponsor Educational Programs and Workshops**

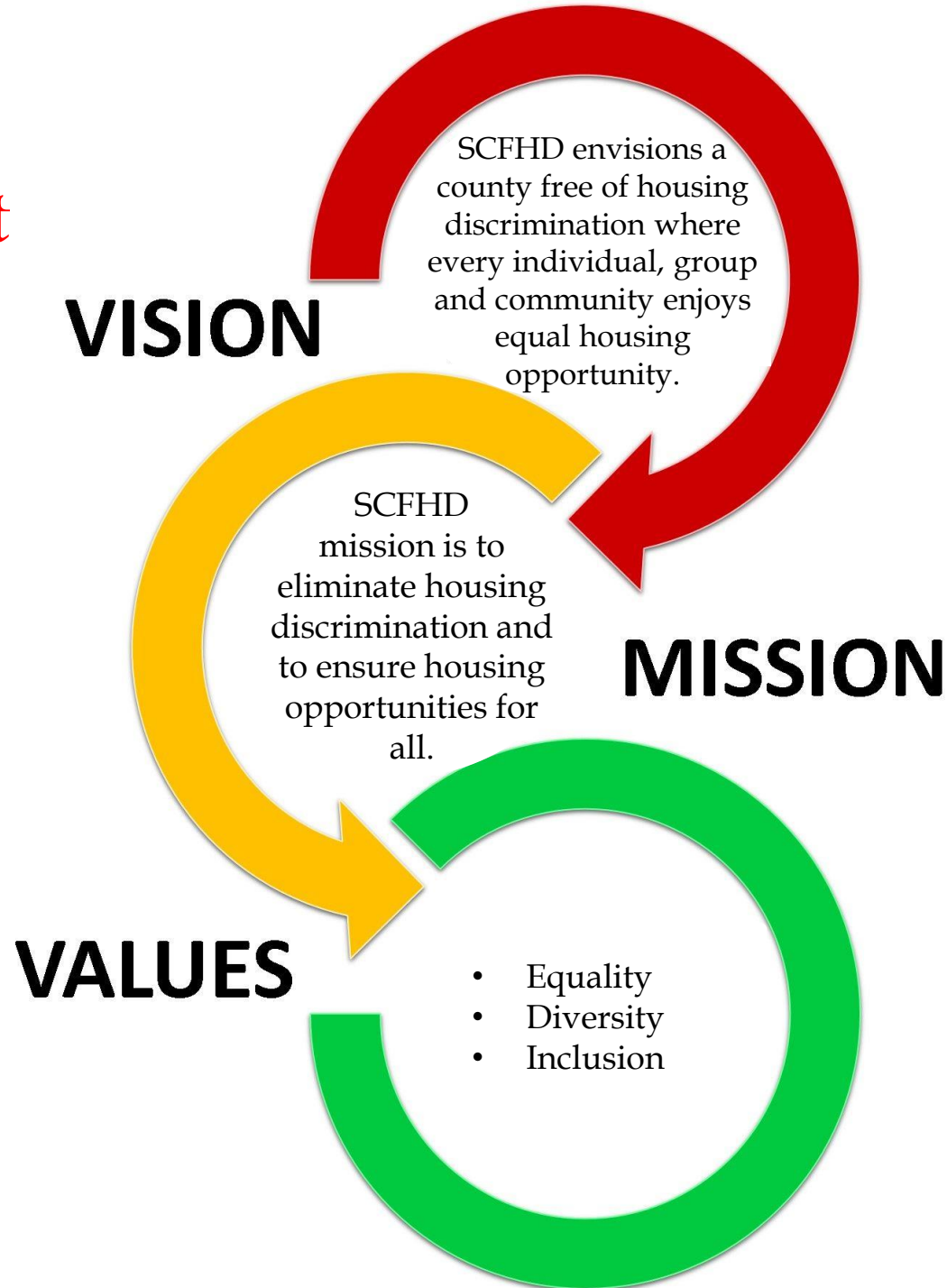
SCFHD plan and implement educational events. Staff conducts presentations, trainings and seminars on the Fair Housing and Landlord Tenant Laws.

### **Education & Outreach**

SCFHD educational outreach program is part of an ongoing effort to educate the public on the fair housing laws. SCFHD offers presentations, trainings and seminars on the Fair Housing and Landlord Tenant Laws for residents, community organizations, housing professionals, municipalities, real estate professionals, landlords, social workers, and consumers to ensure residents understand their rights and that housing professionals and decision-makers understand the fair housing laws. SCFHD designs and distributes educational material. SCFHD develops the Fair Housing newsletter then emails to county personnel, zoning inspectors, politicians and consumers.

### **Landlord And Tenant Counseling**

SCFHD staff counsels landlords and tenants on their rights and obligations. It is our mission to help prevent problems between tenants and landlords by informing both parties of their rights and responsibilities.

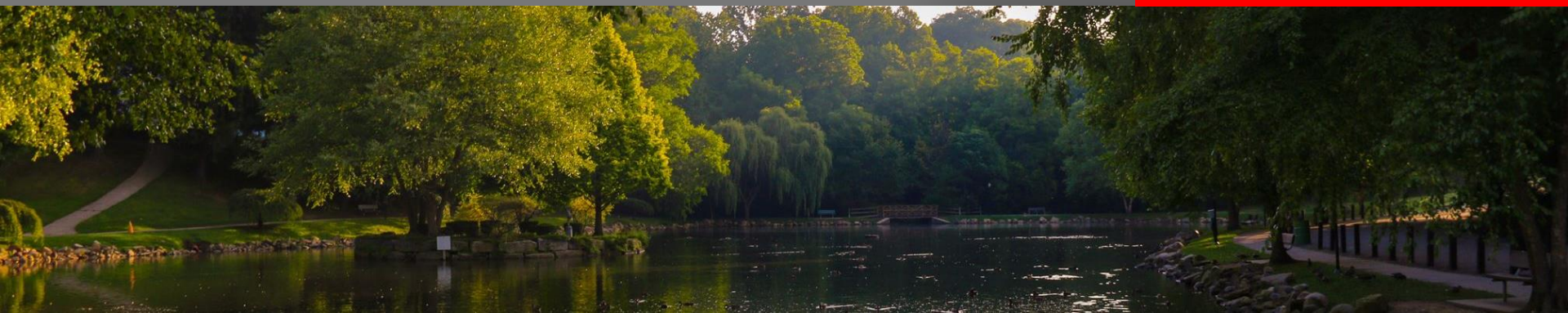


# Fair Housing is the Law!



The solution to housing discrimination starts with you. If you have been trying to buy or rent a house or apartment and believe your rights have been violated, contact the Stark County Fair Housing Department (SCFHD). The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination because of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, having one or more children under 18 or disability.

**Remember...Fair Housing is Your Right!**



# Protected Classes



**Race**



**Color**



**Sex**



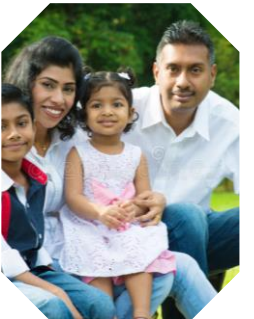
**Religion**



**National  
Origin**



**Disability**



**Familial Status**

**T**he Fair Housing Act is a federal law that prohibits discrimination in home sales, financing, and rentals based on a person's Protected Class. The law protects individuals in all housing-related transactions, including obtaining loans, purchasing insurance, and renting or buying a home, appraisals, advertising and zoning.



**Fair Housing**  
 **For All**

Real estate agents refusing to return phone calls.

Appraisers deflating property values

Landlords giving false information

Loan officers steering borrowers to higher cost loan products

Landlords steering families to certain floors or buildings

Charging fees for an emotional support animal

No kids

## What Housing Discrimination Looks Like:



Denying housing because of applicant's gender identity or sexual orientation

Lenders denying a woman's application because she is on maternity leave

Harassing, intimidating, or interfering with anyone exercising his/her fair housing rights

Denying housing based on arrest records

Denying property insurance

Sexual Harassment

Refusing to make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities

Rules against children

Failing to design and construct housing in an accessible manner

Denying a request to install a wheelchair ramp

Imposing restrictions on group housing for persons with disabilities

White only

# HUD Announces Proposed “30-Day Notice” Rule for Nonpayment of Rent

*Proposed rule would provide residents of public housing or in properties receiving project-based rental assistance 30 days notice to cure lease violations for nonpayment of rent*

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in the Federal Register on December 1. If finalized, the rule would require public housing agencies (PHA) with tenants in public housing and owners of properties participating in HUD Multifamily project-based rental assistance programs to provide their tenants with written notification at least 30 days prior to filing for an eviction due to nonpayment of rent in court. The proposed rule would also require that the 30-day notice include instructions on how tenants can cure lease violations for nonpayment of rent and information on how to recertify their income and request a minimum rent hardship exemption if applicable to avoid eviction.

The rule would provide stability for millions of residents. It would give renters an opportunity to catch up if they fall behind on rent and avoid evictions. The proposed rule would also prevent landlords and PHAs from facing costly unit vacancies.

This proposed rule would affect an estimated 3.9 million people in 2.2 million households.



# Justice Department Files Civil Rights Lawsuit Against Ohio Landlord for Sexually Harassing Tenants

## Sexual Harassment in Housing is Illegal



The U.S. Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against an owner and manager of residential rental properties in Youngstown for engaging in sexual harassment in violation of the Fair Housing Act.

The lawsuit alleges that the Landlord sexually harassed female tenants at properties that he owned or managed in Youngstown since at least 2009. The Landlord subjected tenants to repeated and unwelcome sexual comments, touched them without their consent, entered their homes without permission and offered to overlook late rent payments, waive rent or perform repairs in exchange for sexual contact. The lawsuit also alleges that the Landlord initiated evictions or threatened to evict tenants who refused his sexual advances.

The lawsuit seeks monetary damages to compensate persons harmed by the harassment, civil penalties to

vindicate the public interest and a court order barring future discrimination.

No one should be subjected to sexual harassment under any conditions. Sexual harassment by a landlord, maintenance worker or anyone associated with your rental property is against the law. Individuals who believe that 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.





# U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Final Rule on Harassment in Housing

## Sexual Harassment in Housing is Illegal

HUD and courts have long held that harassment in housing or housing-related transactions on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, and familial status is prohibited under the Fair Housing Act. The final rule specifies how HUD will evaluate claims of "hostile environment" and "quid pro quo" harassment in both private and publicly-assisted housing.

**Sexual Harassment is Illegal When...** A landlord, employee, or agent demands sex or other unwelcome sexual conduct in exchange for housing or housing-related services. This is called **Quid Pro Quo Harassment**. It involves subjecting a person to an unwelcome request or demand and making submission to the request or demand a condition related to the person's housing. Literally quid pro quo means "This for that."

### **Examples:**

- A landlord demands nude photos in return for approving a rental application.
- A maintenance person requests sexual favors in return for making needed repairs.
- A property manager evicts a person because that person refuses to have sex.



# Sexual Harassment



**Sexual Harassment is Illegal When...** A landlord, employee, agent, or another tenant engages in unwelcome sexual conduct that is severe or pervasive and interferes with a person's right to access, maintain, or use and enjoy housing or housing-related services. This is called **Hostile Environment Harassment**: It involves subjecting a person to unwelcome conduct that is sufficiently severe or pervasive such that it interferes with or deprives the person of the right to use and enjoy the housing.

It also may be called **Unwelcome Behavior or Conduct**: It involves behavior by other tenants or housing staff that is deemed offensive or unwelcome. This behavior can include inappropriate remarks or jokes, discriminatory behavior such as taunting or teasing about a person's gender, disability, race, color, national origin, children, religion or any other protected characteristic, and it might be untoward gestures and unwanted romantic advances. It can be in person or on social media, texts, email, flyers, signage, or any other conduit for communication.

**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.



EQUALITY

DIVERSITY &

INCLUSION

All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talent.

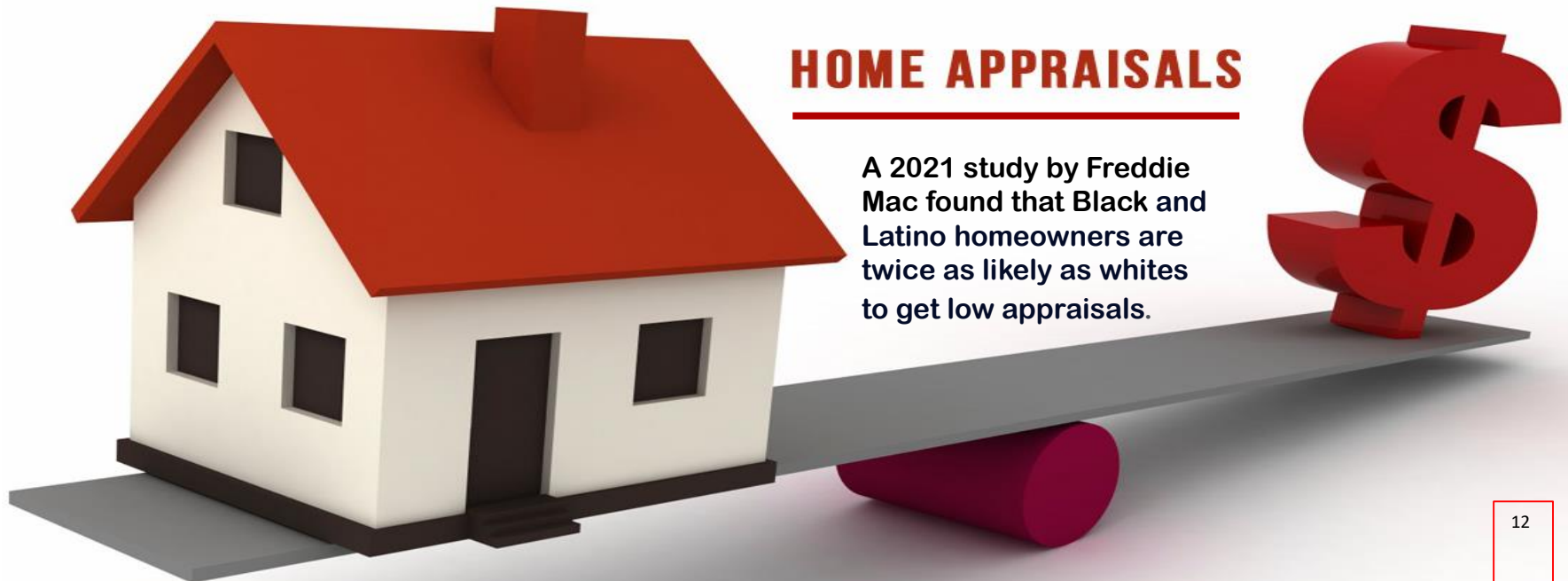
-John F. Kennedy

# Lawsuit Alleging Race Discrimination in Home Appraisal Process Settled with Appraiser

In March 2023, a Black couple living in Northern California settled their lawsuit against a real estate company which had estimated the pair's Northern California home to be worth nearly \$500,000 less than when a white friend pretended to be its owner. The couple believed Real Estate Appraisals had undervalued their home due to race.

The first appraisal the couple received placed a \$995,000 value on the home. Upon receiving the appraisal, the clients suspected the appraiser had undervalued the home and decided to get a second opinion. Before the second appraiser did their appraisal inspection days later, the family erased any evidence of their racial identities inside their house, removing family photos and African-themed art” and instead displayed pictures of their white friend’s family who also stood in for the family during the appraisal. The second appraisal valued the home at \$1,482,500 — nearly half a million dollars more than the first appraisal.

In addition to an undisclosed monetary settlement, the defendants agreed to attend a training session, not discriminate in the future and to watch the ABC documentary, **Our America: Lowballed**.



# What is Appraisal Discrimination?



A **home appraisal** is the process through which a real estate appraiser determines the fair market value of a home. **Appraisal discrimination** is assigning a lower value to a home because of the race or ethnicity of the person who lives there.

Homeownership has been the primary way that Americans have built wealth. However, due to America's history of discriminatory and racist housing policies, people of color have not had equal access to this wealth-building opportunity. Still today, appraisal discrimination continues to be a problem, contributing to the widening racial wealth gap. Appraisers have historically undervalued homes in communities of color. The Fair Housing Act makes it unlawful to discriminate in the appraisal process on the basis of race, color, and other protected classes.

# Bill Introduced to Help Renter Pet Owners

## Pet Friendly Rental Act



Ohio State Representatives announced the introduction of House Bill 277, the Pet Friendly Rental Act.

The act will provide a tax credit for landlords who allow renters to have cats and dogs without breed or size restrictions or a non-refundable fee or charging additional pet rent.

Landlords won't be forced to accept pets; they just won't qualify for the tax credit. Although most landlords are pet friendly, many people still face pet-related issues from landlords and are forced to surrender their pets to shelters. Eligible landlords could get a tax credit of \$750 per unit up to a max of \$7500.



make a  
difference!

### **Tester Compensation**

**\$50 stipend per completed on-site test**

**\$20 stipend per completed telephone or email test**

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

If you are passionate about civil rights, oppose discrimination and believe that all people should have equal opportunity in housing, contact us. Stark County Fair Housing Department needs people from ALL backgrounds to test effectively for housing discrimination. Experience with renting housing is helpful, but not required.

# BECOME A FAIR HOUSING TESTER

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.

### **Skills we look for in a tester:**

- At least 18 years old
- Good oral and written communication skills
- Attention to detail and accuracy
- Dependable
- No felony convictions
- Never convicted of fraud or perjury
- 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
- Reliable transportation

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***



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

Stark County Regional Planning Commission  
**Stark County Fair Housing Department**  
201- 3rd St. NE, Suite #201  
Canton, Ohio 44702

Phone: (330) 451-7389

Fax: (330) 451-7990

Website: [www.rpc.starkcountyohio.gov](http://www.rpc.starkcountyohio.gov)



**Joseph Skubiak**  
President

**Robert Nau**  
Executive Director

**Valerie Watson**  
Fair Housing Manager  
Newsletter Editor  
Newsletter Graphic Designer