

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



December 2025 – March 2026

A Quarterly Insight into Housing Discrimination

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



HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IS ILLEGAL!



Increasing

R

E

N

T

My Landlord Increased the Rent

Can He Do This?

There is no rent control in the state of Ohio. Landlords can generally raise the rent by any amount as long as it is reasonable. There are some laws in place to help protect the tenant rights. A landlord can't suddenly decide to raise rent in the middle of a lease unless your agreement specifically allows it. They must give a minimum of 30 days' notice before the increase takes effect. The Ohio Landlord Tenant Law forbids a landlord from retaliating against a tenant by increasing the tenant's rent, decreasing services that are due to the tenant, or bringing or threatening to bring an eviction action.

Tenants need to review the lease agreement. Your lease is a binding contract. It should outline the terms and conditions of your tenancy, including any provisions related to rent increases.

Rent increases come with renting a home, but rents are rising faster than wages. According to the 2025 Out of Reach Report, a Stark County worker must earn more than the minimum wage to afford market-rate rent. Ohio's minimum wage increased to \$11 per hour on January 1, 2026. However, a person must make nearly \$19 an hour to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Stark County.

Some tenants have a difficult decision in trying to figure out what to do when they receive an unexpected rental increase. When you're already stretching your budget to cover rising costs, do you not buy as much groceries or do you put off paying the power or gas bills? If the new rent is going to price you out of your household budget, finding a less expensive rental is what you need to do. It may not be a good idea to put additional strain on your finances by living in a place you cannot afford.



TENANT PROTECTIONS

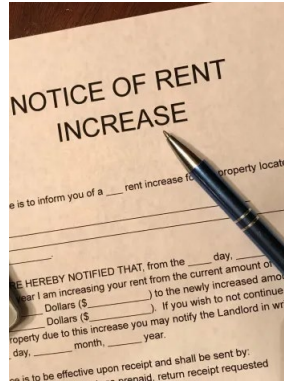




Tenant Protections

What Tenants Need To Know About

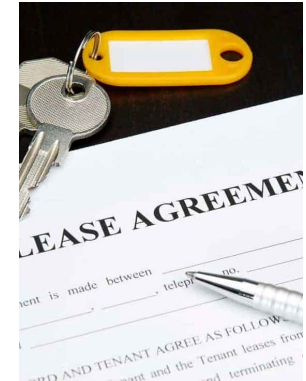
Rent Increases



Landlord must send tenant a written notice before increase



Landlord must provide adequate notice before increase



Rent increases are not allowed during the lease term



Rent increases must be reasonable



Landlords cannot increase rent for retaliatory or discriminatory reasons



Tenant can fight illegal rent increase in court



Why Do Landlords Raise Rent?

Sometimes landlords have good reasons why they *must* raise rent. Here are the most common reasons:

Increase in Expenses

Taxes and insurance on the building might rise. So will the labor and materials necessary to fix things and do normal maintenance.

Renovations or New Amenities

Repairs may be needed. The property may need a new roof, new HVAC, or replacement windows. The units may need to be updated with new appliances or flooring. A major new amenity may be installed.

Improvements in the Local Market

When a neighborhood improves and becomes more desirable, rent amounts will usually rise. A new businesses or an updated park will make the area more marketable which will increase rents.

Adjusting to Overall Market Demand

An increase or decrease in renters will affect rental prices. Some landlords will raise rent in response to the market demand. Furthermore, increased demand for rental units will drive prices up. In addition, market demand for certain types of dwellings can cause an increase in rent. For example, a landlord might raise rent for single family homes if more home seekers are looking for them instead of an apartment building where there are neighbors above, below and beside the tenant.



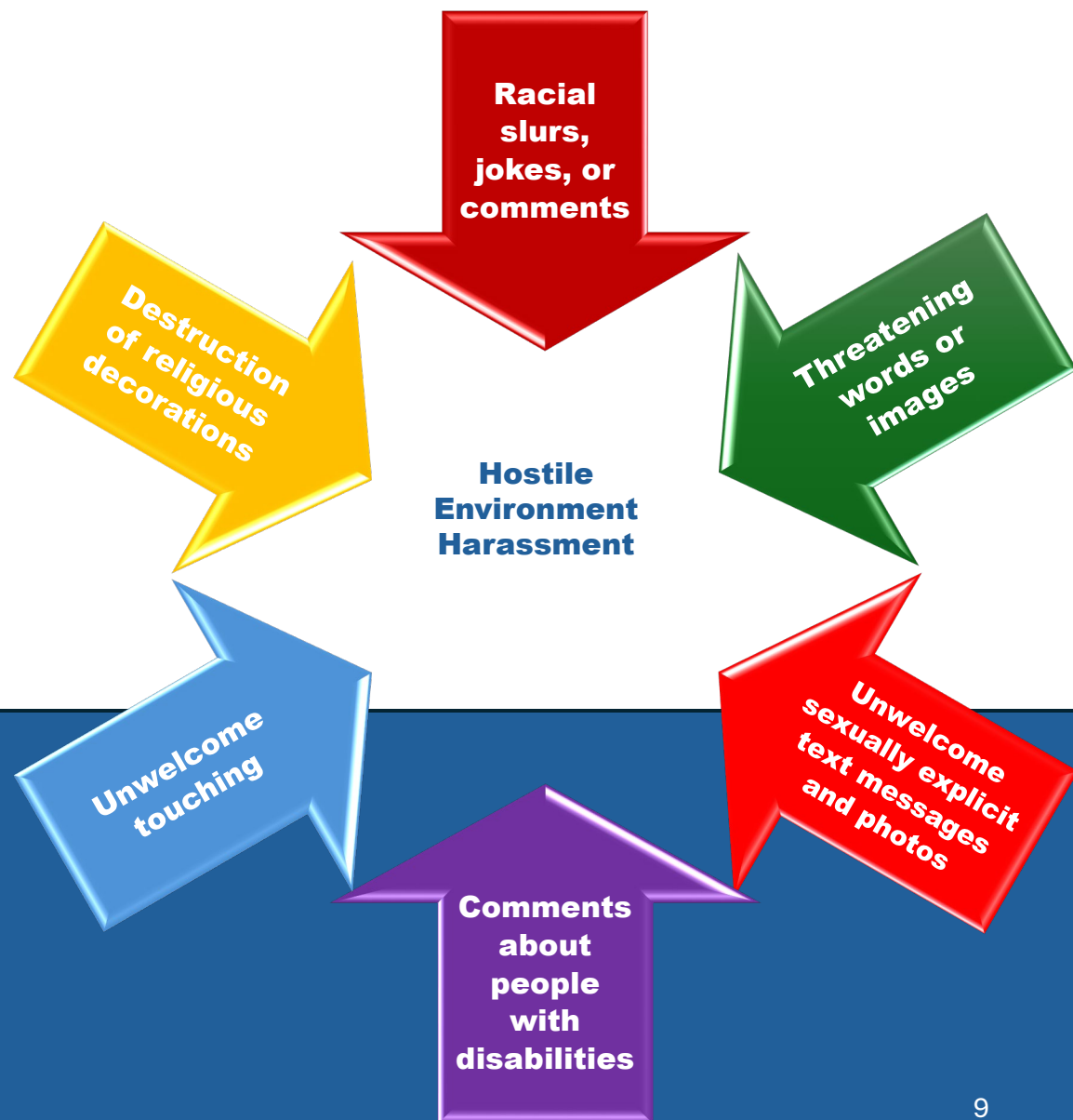
Are Landlords Responsible For Neighbor-On-Neighbor Harassment?

Yes, the Fair Housing Act (FHA) protects against neighbor harassment and discrimination, making it illegal for anyone to interfere with a resident's right to enjoy their housing based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or familial status. The FHA covers "hostile environment" harassment which addresses direct interference or threats related to these protected classes, with housing providers potentially liable if they don't take action.

Hostile environment harassment involves subjecting a person to unwelcome conduct that is severe or pervasive, that it alters the terms and conditions of tenancy and results in an environment that is intimidating, hostile, offensive, or otherwise significantly less desirable. Even a single incident of harassment may constitute hostile environment harassment if it is severe enough to interfere with the use and enjoyment of housing.

Unwelcome offensive or sexual conduct, remarks of a sexual nature, or unwelcome touching by a landlord or a landlord's employee, constitute a hostile environment and are unlawful. Neither psychological nor physical harm must be demonstrated to prove that a hostile environment exists.

Hostile Environment Harassment May Include...



Landlords and housing providers must take prompt action to stop discriminatory harassment by tenants or others in their properties, or they can face liability.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT APPROVES AGREEMENT RESOLVING CLAIMS OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON NEIGHBOR HARASSMENT

In October 2021, HUD approved a Conciliation Agreement between the owners of an apartment complex in Tucson, AZ, and a same-sex African-American couple residing at the complex. The settlement resolves allegations that the property owners and manager discriminated on the basis of sex and race when they failed to address the couple's complaints of neighbor harassment, which included physical intimidation and disparaging statements being made about the couple's race and sexual orientation. The owners also retaliated against the couple for complaining about the harassment.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination based on race and sex, which includes discrimination because of sexual orientation. The Act also prohibits housing providers from failing to take prompt actions to correct and end discriminatory harassment by other tenants where the housing provider knew or should have known of the discrimination.

Under the Agreement, **the housing providers will pay \$15,000** to the couple, create a tracking system for all reports of harassment, respond in a timely manner and provide fair housing training for their employees.

Fair Housing Word Scramble

Can you
unscramble these
words.

Hint...all words
are associated
with the fair
housing law.

- AFRI IOHSUNG
- UANSIIRNIICMODT
- IAIALFLM STTUSA
- BAIITYLIDS
- ECAR
- OORCL
- EXS
- ROEIGINL
- NOATLIAN IINOGR
- IMRTIYAL STTASU
- ACNSETRY
- EXUSLA OEIONNTRTIA
- NDEREG ITEIYDTN
- IVCIL SGIHRT CTA
- EPRCTDTEO LSSAC



Answers are on page 13

What is Housing Discrimination?

What conduct is prohibited by Fair Housing Laws? Discrimination can take many forms and occurs at different stages of a housing transaction. Here are some of the practices prohibited under fair housing laws:

- ☐ Refusing to rent, sell, insure or finance housing
- ☐ Misrepresenting the availability of housing
- ☐ Advertising or making any statement that indicates a preference or limitation
- ☐ Steering individuals into or away from certain buildings or neighborhoods to segregate populations
- ☐ Offering different terms and conditions in the sale or rental of housing
- ☐ Refusing a reasonable modification to the premises for persons with disabilities
- ☐ Refusing to provide a reasonable accommodation by altering rules, policies, practices, or services for persons with disabilities
- ☐ Harassing or failing to take corrective action regarding complaints about harassment
- ☐ Threatening, coercing, intimidating, interfering with or retaliating against a person for exercising or assisting others to exercise their fair housing rights





Fair Housing Word Scramble

Questions are on page 11

- FAIR HOUSING
- DISCRIMINATION
- FAMILIAL STATUS
- DISABILITY
- RACE
- COLOR
- SEX
- RELIGION
- NATIONAL ORIGIN
- MILITARY STATUS
- ANCESTRY
- SEXUAL ORIENTATION
- GENDER IDENTITY
- CIVIL RIGHTS ACT
- PROTECTED CLASS



Up-Coming Tester Training Session

APRIL 15, 2026

Contact us at (330) 451-7775 or email
vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov
for more information and to reserve
your space by March 30, 2026.



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

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?

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.

I FEEL THAT I HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Have you ever thought, "Can they really say or do that?" If so, you're not alone. Discrimination can be subtle or unclear. If you think you are experiencing discrimination...

- **Take Notes Immediately.** Write down exactly what happened. Include date, time, names and titles. Be as detailed as possible. Document exactly what was said or done that felt discriminatory. The more specific your notes are, the easier it will be to recall what happened. Writing it down while the details are fresh in your mind reduces the risk of forgetting key information later.
- **Collect any Evidence You May Have.** Gather text messages, emails, business cards, videos or recordings.
- **Contact Stark County Fair Housing Department** at (330) 451-7775 as soon as possible so we can investigate the claim. Fair Housing Testers will help us determine if you were denied housing due to unlawful discrimination.



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

David Thorley
President

Robert Nau
Executive Director

Valerie Watson
Fair Housing Manager
Newsletter Editor
Newsletter Graphic Designer

Do you think you have been
discriminated against?

Don't Wait

Don't Hesitate

Let Us



Contact:

Stark County Fair Housing Department
Valerie Watson, Fair Housing Manager
Phone: (330) 451-7775 (direct line)
Email: vjwatson@starkcountyohio.gov

