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## PRESS KIT

To Whom it May Concern,

Thank-you for taking the time to learn more about South-Coast Fair Housing! SouthCoast Fair Housing was formed to eradicate housing discrimination, increase housing opportunities for all, and help develop inclusive communities. As we work to achieve this mission it is essential that accurate information about fair housing reach the public. We hope to engage the community in conversations about housing choice and segregation with the goal of improving access to fair housing.

We encourage you to familiarize yourself with SCFH's mission, the impact housing discrimination can have on individuals and their community, and the obligation of recipients of certain federal funds to affirmatively further fair housing. You will find all of this information included in this press kit. We hope that you will consider SCFH a resource for reliable information, and we welcome you to contact us with your fair housing questions.

If you have any questions moving forward, please contact me at [kristina@southcoastfairhousing.org](mailto:kristina@southcoastfairhousing.org) or by calling (774) 473-8333.

Sincerely,

Kristina da Fonseca  
Executive Director

# ABOUT SOUTHCOAST FAIR HOUSING

## **Mission**

SouthCoast Fair Housing (SCFH) is a private, non-profit fair housing organization established in 2012. SCFH's mission is to eradicate housing discrimination, increase equal housing opportunities, and help develop inclusive communities. SCFH works to accomplish these goals through education and outreach, advocacy, and enforcement activities.

SCFH's website, available at [southcoastfairhousing.org](http://southcoastfairhousing.org), contains a variety of information about fair housing, including informational brochures in three languages, and an intake form that allows individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination to submit their information to us.

## **Location**

SCFH's office is located at 257 Union Street, in New Bedford. SCFH is the only non-profit fair housing organization in Bristol County, and also serves Plymouth County, in Massachusetts. SCFH is also available to work with partners in Barnstable County, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.



## Affiliations

SCFH is a supporting member of the [National Fair Housing Alliance](#) (NFHA). Founded in 1988 and headquartered in Washington, DC, NFHA is the only national organization dedicated solely to ending discrimination in housing.

SCFH is a member of the [South Coast LGBTQ Network](#), a collaboration of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning groups and allied organizations in the South Coast community of Massachusetts. The Network's mission is to build and maintain a comprehensive support network for LGBTQ individuals and families across the age spectrum.

SCFH is also a member of the [New Bedford Homeless Service Provider Network](#), a membership-driven collective of over 70 organizations, agencies and individuals committed to working together in addressing homelessness.

SCFH is a member of the [National Legal Aid and Defender Association](#), America's oldest and largest nonprofit association devoted to excellence in the delivery of legal services to those who cannot afford counsel.

*FAIR HOUSING IS NOT AN OPTION.  
IT IS THE LAW.*

# WHAT IS FAIR HOUSING?






## Fair Housing Laws

Fair housing is the right of all people to be free from discrimination in the rental, sale, or financing of housing. The federal Fair Housing Act, originally passed in 1968 one week after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status and disability. Massachusetts' fair housing law also prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, the receipt of public assistance or the use of a housing voucher, military or veteran status, and genetic information.

Fair housing laws also require housing providers to grant requests for reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications for people with disabilities. The laws set minimum requirements for accessibility for some new and reconstructed housing, allowing individuals with disabilities to experience the full use and enjoyment of their homes.

## Impact of Housing Discrimination

Housing discrimination takes a toll on its victims, those who experience discrimination may:

-  suffer from emotional distress;
-  make choices about future housing searches with the goal of limiting their exposure to additional discrimination;
-  endure increased housing, transportation, housing search or other costs;
-  experience limited access to employment, educational and community opportunities; and
-  live in segregated communities.

# WHAT IS FAIR HOUSING?

Housing discrimination can occur in a variety of circumstances. For instance, an individual may experience discrimination during a housing search, or during a tenancy. Landlords may pursue evictions for discriminatory reasons, such as the pregnancy of a tenant. Individuals may suffer harassment from neighbors or housing providers on the basis of their race, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or disability. Municipal policies may serve to limit the housing choice of people with disabilities or the development of group homes for people with disabilities, or may perpetuate segregation by limiting the development of new and varied housing. Real estate professionals may steer homebuyers from one neighborhood to another, and mortgage lenders may refuse to lend to a person receiving disability income.

Housing discrimination also impacts the larger community, resulting in municipalities, neighborhoods and even apartment buildings segregated by race, color, national origin, socioeconomic status or other characteristics. Housing segregation can lead to segregated schools; differences in property values, housing and educational quality, and municipal, financial and other services between segregated neighborhoods; and decreased socialization and understanding among people with differing characteristics.

*"A ZIP CODE SHOULD NEVER  
DETERMINE A CHILD'S FUTURE."*  
HUD SECRETARY JULIÁN CASTRO.

# PROGRAMS

## Fair Housing Education and Outreach

SCFH staff conducts many fair housing presentations, trainings and workshops for first-time homebuyers, staff of housing authorities and service providers, real estate agents and brokers, community members, local officials, landlords, and volunteers. SCFH also maintains a website and social media presence, allowing it to provide the public with access to accurate fair housing information. SCFH has also developed and distributed a range of informational brochures in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. SCFH staff provide fair housing counseling and referrals to individuals who believe they have experienced housing discrimination. A large portion of SCFH's education and outreach activities have been made possible through a Fair Housing Initiative Program - Education and Outreach grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

## Fair Housing Advocacy

SCFH works to encourage municipalities to improve compliance with fair housing laws, including their obligations to affirmatively further fair housing. SCFH's Executive Director is available for interviews with media outlets and works to distribute public service announcements.

## Fair Housing Enforcement

SCFH's enforcement program includes investigating complaints of discrimination and conducting audits of the housing market. The organization files enforcement actions against individuals and entities caught discriminating. SCFH has filed, and has assisted complainants in filing, administrative complaints with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These activities have resulted in settlement agreements that include monetary relief, improved policies, affirmative marketing, and attendance at fair housing trainings, ultimately leading to increased housing opportunities for all.

For more information about South Coast Fair Housing programs, please contact the Director, Kristina da Fonseca at (774) 473-8333 or [Kristina@southcoastfairhousing.org](mailto:Kristina@southcoastfairhousing.org)

# FAIR HOUSING FACT SHEET

- It is estimated that more than four million acts of discrimination occur each year in the rental housing market.\*
- In 2014, Americans reported more than 25,000 complaints of housing discrimination.\*
- In 2014, nonprofit fair housing groups investigated 69 percent of the national total of reported complaints, and the remaining complaints were investigated by government agencies.\*
- Discrimination on the basis of disability is the most commonly reported form of discrimination. Discrimination against individuals with disabilities is easier to detect because it is often blatant.\*

\*"Where you Live Matters: 2015 Fair Housing Trends Report" National Fair Housing Alliance.





# AFFIRMATIVELY FURTHERING FAIR HOUSING

For more than forty years, the federal Fair Housing Act and federal regulations have required the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and state and local jurisdictions and municipalities receiving federal funding, to take steps to affirmatively further fair housing. In 2015, HUD issued a [Rule on Affirmatively Further Fair Housing](#) (AFFH).

According to the Rule, AFFH means “taking meaningful actions, in addition to combating discrimination, that overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to opportunity based on protected characteristics. Specifically, [AFFH] means taking meaningful actions that, taken together, address significant disparities in housing needs and in access to opportunity, replacing segregated living patterns with truly integrated and balanced living patterns, transforming racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity, and fostering and maintaining compliance with civil rights and fair housing laws. The duty to affirmatively further fair housing extends to all of a program participant’s activities and programs relating to housing and urban development.”

The Rule identifies four fair housing issues that entities must assess:

1. Patterns of integration and segregation;
2. Racially or ethnically concentrated area of poverty;
3. Disparities in access to opportunity;
4. Disproportionate housing needs.

HUD has developed an assessment tool that, along with HUD data and local data and knowledge, may be used by entities in preparing a required Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH). The goals identified in each entity’s AFH must inform the strategies and actions in subsequent planning processes and actions. The AFH process must include community participation.

SCFH is available to assist entities at all stages of the AFH process.