



PRESS KIT

1005 Main Street, Suite 1210
Pawtucket, RI 02860
(401) 285-2550

257 Union Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
(774) 473-8333

Press Contact:
Kristina da Fonseca — Executive Director
kristina@southcoastfairhousing.org

SouthCoastFairHousing.org

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about SouthCoast 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 has on individuals and their communities, and the obligation of recipients of certain federal funds to affirmatively further fair housing – all included in this press kit. We hope that you will consider SCFH a resource for reliable fair housing information, and we welcome you to contact us with your fair housing questions.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 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. 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, southcoastfairhousing.org, contains a variety of information about fair housing, including informational brochures in three languages, information about our programs, and an intake form that allows individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination to submit their information to us.

Location and Service Area

SCFH's offices are located at:

1005 Main Street, Suite 1210
Pawtucket, RI 02860

257 Union Street
New Bedford, MA 02740

SCFH serves Rhode Island and Bristol and Plymouth Counties in Massachusetts. It is the only fair housing organization active in Rhode Island and Bristol County, Massachusetts.

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.



FAIR HOUSING FACTS

Massachusetts

In 2016, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination received:

387 fair housing complaints.

226 fair housing complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of disability, the most commonly received fair housing allegation.

110 fair housing complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of race or color, the second most commonly received fair housing allegation.

Source: Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, Annual Report 2016, available at <http://www.mass.gov/mcad/docs/annual-reports/2016-annual-report.pdf>.

Rhode Island

In FY 2016, the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights received:

68 fair housing complaints.

40 fair housing complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of disability, the most commonly received fair housing allegation.

Source: Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, Annual Report, 2016 Fiscal Year, available at <http://www.richr.state.ri.us/2016AnnualReport.pdf>.



WHAT IS FAIR HOUSING?

Fair Housing

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, prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status (presence of minor children) and disability. State laws in Rhode Island and Massachusetts create additional protected classes:

Massachusetts

- age
- sexual orientation
- gender identity
- marital status
- use of housing voucher
- military or veteran status
- genetic information
- receipt of public assistance

Rhode Island

- age
- sexual orientation
- gender identity
- marital status
- military or veteran status
- housing status
- status as a victim of domestic violence.

Fair housing laws also require housing providers, including condominium associations, to grant requests for reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications for people with disabilities. Additionally, 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:

-  encounter reduced opportunities for housing choice;
-  face increased housing, transportation, housing search or other costs;
-  endure emotional distress;
-  experience limited access to employment, educational and community opportunities; and
-  live in segregated communities.

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. Municipal policies may serve to limit 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 offer different loan terms to applicants due to their race.

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

**A ZIP CODE SHOULD NEVER
DETERMINE A CHILD'S FUTURE.**

PROGRAMS

Fair Housing Education and Outreach

SCFH staff conducts fair housing presentations, trainings, and workshops for:

- first-time homebuyers
- housing authority staff
- service providers
- real estate agents and brokers
- community members
- local officials
- landlords and property managers
- volunteers

SCFH maintains a website and social media presence, allowing it to provide the public with access to accurate fair housing information. SCFH develops and distributes a range of informational brochures in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. SCFH staff also provide fair housing counseling and referrals to individuals who believe they have experienced housing discrimination. The majority of SCFH's education and outreach activities are 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 their compliance with fair housing laws, including their obligations to affirmatively further fair housing. SCFH distributes public service announcements and SCFH's staff is available for interviews with media outlets.

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 that have violated fair housing laws. SCFH files, and assists complainants in filing, administrative complaints with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These activities have resulted in settlement agreements that include injunctive and monetary relief, improved policies, affirmative marketing, and attendance at fair housing trainings, ultimately leading to increased housing opportunities for all. The majority of SCHF's enforcement activities are made possible through a Fair Housing Initiative Program – Private Enforcement Initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

For more information about SCFH programs, please contact Executive Director Kristina da Fonseca at (774) 473-8333 or kristina@southcoastfairhousing.org.

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

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 receiving federal funding, to take steps to affirmatively further fair housing. In 2015, HUD issued a [Rule on Affirmatively Further Fair Housing](#) (AFFH) to clarify the obligations of covered entities.

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 Rule states:

“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; and
4. Disproportionate housing needs.

HUD has developed an assessment tool that, along with 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.