



(image description: SouthCoast Fair Housing logo)

## **SouthCoast Fair Housing**



(image description: two smiling women of different races sitting closely together outside holding coffee mugs)

## **FAIR HOUSING FOR INDIVIDUALS IN RECOVERY FROM DRUG OR ALCOHOL ADDICTION**

### **HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IS ILLEGAL**

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing-related transactions because of *race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability* or *familial status (presence of minor children or pregnancy)*.

The Massachusetts and Rhode Island fair housing statutes prohibit housing discrimination on the basis of these additional protected classes:

- age,
- veteran or military status,
- sexual orientation,
- gender identity,
- marital status,
- receipt of public assistance\* (e.g., food stamps)
- use of housing subsidy\* (e.g., Section 8)
- genetics\*
- status as a victim of domestic violence‡

\*Massachusetts only

‡ Rhode Island only

Fair housing laws apply to a wide variety of housing transactions, including rentals, sales, home mortgages, appraisals and homeowners insurance. Landlords, real estate agents, lenders, insurance companies, and condominium, cooperative and homeowners associations must not discriminate because of one's membership in a protected class.



(image description: apartment building at dusk with small porches casting shadows)

## WHAT THE LAW PROHIBITS

The law prohibits actions such as denying housing, limiting access to housing, discouraging homeseekers, making or publishing discriminatory statements, or creating different rules, fees, or standards because of one's membership in a protected class.

Landlords, owners, and other housing providers may not discriminate against someone searching for housing because they believe the person is in recovery or because, in fact, the person is in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction.

## EXAMPLES OF UNLAWFUL ACTIVITY

Landlords and other housing providers may not:

- refuse to rent or sell to a person who was once addicted to a controlled substance but is not a current user;
- ask for more information than would be asked of any other potential tenant;
- ask about medical treatment or whether the person is able to live independently;
- impose different terms and conditions because an individual or group is in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction.

## ARE ALL HOUSING PROVIDERS COVERED BY THESE LAWS?

No. The federal fair housing law exempts landlords renting owner-occupied buildings with four units or less. Exemptions may also apply under Massachusetts and Rhode Island fair housing laws. However, there may be other laws that apply to a particular landlord.

## GROUP HOMES OR SOBER HOMES

Group homes or sober houses for people in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction are protected from discrimination by the state and federal fair housing laws.

Cities, towns, zoning boards, boards of health, or others involved in city or town government cannot:

- refuse to grant an occupancy permit to a group home or sober house solely because it will house people in recovery;
- subject the group home or sober house to health or fire inspections more frequently than housing for individuals or families;
- require the group home or sober house to comply with “single room occupancy” zoning, fire or occupancy standards.

**City and town governments must treat group homes or sober houses for individuals recovering from addiction the same way they would treat single family residences.**

#### FAIR HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE IN RECOVERY

Both the federal and state fair housing laws prohibit discrimination in housing because of a disability. **The definition of disability includes people who are in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction.** The law does not protect current illegal users of a controlled substance. If a person is denied housing because of fears or stereotypes about people in recovery, the housing provider is engaging in unlawful behavior and is violating the fair housing laws.

#### WHEN LOOKING FOR HOUSING, SAVE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- Date and time of all contacts
- Name of the person and/or company with whom you spoke
- Address of the property, including unit number
- Information about all units offered to you
- Details about any statements made to you related to your protected class (i.e., questions about the ages of your children or source of income)

REMEMBER: Save all emails and text messages sent to or received from a housing provider!

## **Fair Housing is Your Right!**

SouthCoast Fair Housing, Inc. (SCFH) works to eliminate housing discrimination and help develop inclusive communities throughout Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. SCFH provides fair housing education, outreach, advocacy, and enforcement activities to ensure all individuals have equal housing opportunities.

If you contact SCFH to file a complaint, we may:

- Conduct an interview to obtain the facts
- Investigate your complaint
- Review investigation results with you and discuss your options
- Help you file a complaint
- Offer legal representation to victims of housing discrimination

For more information, to schedule a fair housing training, or to file a housing discrimination complaint, call (774) 473-9994 or (401) 285-2550, visit [southcoastfairhousing.org](http://southcoastfairhousing.org) or email [info@southcoastfairhousing.org](mailto:info@southcoastfairhousing.org).



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For more information or to file a housing discrimination complaint, contact:

SouthCoast Fair Housing

257 Union Street  
New Bedford, MA 02740  
(774) 473-9994

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

[SouthCoastFairHousing.org](http://SouthCoastFairHousing.org)

To contact us via TTY, using your TTY call 711, call MassRelay at 800-439-2370 (or 1-866-930-9252 for Spanish), or call Rhode Island Relay at 1-800-745-5555 (or 1-866-355-9214 for Spanish) and provide our phone number.

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