



(image description: SouthCoast Fair Housing logo)

## **SouthCoast Fair Housing**



(image description: a smiling mixed-race couple holding a baby in front of a home sold sign)

## **Your Fair Housing Rights**

### **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.

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What actions does the law prohibit?

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.

Is there any type of housing that is exempt from fair housing laws?

In some circumstances, the federal Fair Housing Act may exempt owner-occupied buildings with four units or less and the Massachusetts and Rhode Island-Fair Housing statutes may exempt owner-occupied

buildings with two or three units. Communities that qualify for the “Housing for Older Persons” exception under the Fair Housing Act are permitted to exclude families with children under the age of 18. These communities must meet all the requirements of the exemption.



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

Does a Person with a Disability Have any Additional Fair Housing Rights?

Yes. Housing providers must permit reasonable accommodations requested by residents with disabilities. A “reasonable accommodation” is a change to a rule, policy, or practice that may be necessary for a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. For example, reasonable accommodations include allowing an assistance animal even if there is a “no pets” policy. Housing providers must also permit reasonable modifications, or physical changes to the structure of the building. In some cases, a housing provider may be required to pay for a modification. A request for a reasonable accommodation or modification may be denied if, determined on a case-by-case basis, providing it (1) would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the housing provider; (2) would pose a direct threat to people or property; or (3) would fundamentally alter the nature of the provider’s operations. When a housing provider refuses a requested accommodation because it is not reasonable, the provider

should discuss with the requester whether there is an alternative accommodation that would effectively address the requester's disability-related needs.

#### SIGNS OF POSSIBLE DISCRIMINATION:

- You receive an eviction notice after your housing provider finds out you are gay.
- You are regularly asked by housing providers if you have a criminal record prior to completing an application.
- A housing provider tells you the apartment is no longer available after you show up in person.
- Your children are not permitted to use the common areas.
- Your housing provider refuses to allow you to install a ramp to accommodate your disability.

#### 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).



(image description: SouthCoast Fair Housing logo)

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.

This publication was supported in part by funding under a grant with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. SouthCoast Fair Housing, Inc. is solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication.