

Landlords may also legally refuse to rent to people if the tenants cannot afford to pay the rent, or if they receive bad references. Landlords may require references from potential renters. They may ask about the renter's financial and business status, but they MAY NOT ask about their race, color, physical condition, developmental disability as defined in Wisconsin Statute Section 51.05(5), sexual orientation or creed.

The law says that people who rent houses or sell houses must treat people equally. If they ask some people certain questions, they must ask everyone those same questions.

Failure to report discrimination is the greatest threat to the effort to insure fair housing. Individuals covered by one or more of the protected categories are sometimes reluctant to exercise their rights under the law. This unwillingness to use the law allows discrimination to continue.



WHO TO CONTACT FOR HELP

For more information or to file a complaint, contact any of the following agencies:

Department of Workforce Development Equal Rights Division

201 E Washington Avenue, Room A100
PO Box 8928
Madison, WI 53708
Phone: 608-266-6860

City of Wausau Community Development Department

407 Grant Street
Wausau, WI 54403
Phone: 715-261-6680



U. S. Department of Housing & Urban Development Milwaukee Office

310 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1380
Milwaukee, WI 53203
Phone: 414-297-3214
414-297-1423 (TDD)

U. S. Department of Housing & Urban Development Fair Housing

451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410
Phone: 202-708-1112
202-708-1455 (TDD)



HUD Discrimination Complaint Hotline
TOLL FREE: 1-800-669-9777
1-800-927-9275 (TTY)

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Housing Discrimination

Our federal, state and local governments all have laws that forbid discrimination in selling and renting housing. Discrimination means to treat certain people or classes of people unequally or differently because of prejudice – “pre-judging” them because of certain characteristics they have such as being a minority or if they are married or not.

These fair housing laws say that people in certain protected classes must receive equal treatment when they want to buy or rent housing.



For example, Wisconsin law says that landlords must offer members of certain groups called “protected classes” the same rental units at the same prices and with the same terms and services they offer to other people. Also, landlords may not refuse to negotiate or talk about rental terms with members of protected classes; and they may not say a unit is not available when it is.

It is illegal if, for any of these reasons, a person or business discriminates by:

- Refusing to sell, lease, finance or construct housing.
- Refusing to discuss terms of the sale, lease, insurance, financing or rental of housing.
- Refusing to allow inspection of housing for sale, lease or rent.
- Setting different or stricter conditions for sale, lease, rental, insurance, or financing of housing or residential lots.
- Refusing to renew a lease, causing a tenant's eviction, or harassing a tenant.
- Advertising the sale, lease, financing, insurance or housing which excludes people for any of the illegal reasons listed above.

DISCRIMINATION EXAMPLES

Apartment owners and managers may rent to minority home seekers, but control the proportion of minorities in a given development by using a secret “quota” system, or segregate them in one building or on one floor.

Minorities may find themselves paying higher application fees or higher mortgage rates. They may be subjected to more rigorous credit checks than their white counterparts when looking for an apartment or house.

Minorities may be given different information about the availability or location of apartments or homes, amount of rent or sales price, and terms of the lease or sale agreement, than their white counterparts.

WATCH FOR WARNING SIGNS:

- An apartment manager or owner refuses to rent to you (but you have been a good renter in the past and can afford the housing).
- A lending company refuses to give you a mortgage to purchase a home, although you qualify.
- A real estate firm, builder or developer treats you differently than others.
- You are steered to or away from a neighborhood which is primarily composed of one racial or ethnic group.

Wisconsin's Open Housing Law protects people from different treatment in thirteen areas:

- 1) Sex
- 2) Race
- 3) Color
- 4) Sexual orientation
- 5) Disability
- 6) Religion
- 7) National origin
- 8) Marital status
- 9) Lawful source of income
- 10) Age
- 11) Ancestry
- 12) Status as a victim of domestic abuse, sexual abuse, or stalking
- 13) Family status

The Fair Housing Act of 1968, and its amendments, prohibit landlords from discriminating against disabled and physically handicapped people, including those with contagious diseases. Landlords must also allow persons with disabilities to have an attendant to assist them, whether it is part time, full time or on a live-in basis. Under federal and state law, landlords may not discriminate against people with disabilities who have an animal specially trained to help them because of problems they have seeing, hearing, or with

mobility. Landlords may not refuse to rent, or charge extra rent or a larger security deposit, or harass or evict a person with disabilities who has such animals if:

- (1) the tenants show papers from school accredited to train such animals at the landlord's request; and
- (2) the tenants agree to accept responsibility for sanitation problems and damages the animals may cause to the premises. Landlords may refuse to rent units in a building where they live if a physician says the landlord or a family member is allergic to the animal owned by the tenant.

The 1988 amendments also require new multi-family housing starting in 1991 to be accessible to disabled person. For example, all doors in a unit must be wide enough to get through in a wheelchair; electrical outlets must be placed so persons in wheelchairs can reach them; and kitchens and bathrooms must be wide enough for a wheelchair to move around in them. The law gives state and local governments the power to check new housing to make sure it meets the new standards.

Federal, state, and local laws set penalties and fines for people found guilty of housing discrimination.

Anyone, including the state, who believes there has been housing discrimination, may sue for damages, including punitive damages. If they win, the court may also order those who discriminated to pay the victim's court costs and attorney fees.

Fair housing laws do not take away all choices landlords have about to whom they rent. For example, the law does not say that landlords cannot discriminate against people with pets, except for those with “helper” animals mentioned previously.