

The Massachusetts Fair Housing Center (MFHC) is a private, non-profit fair housing organization serving central and western Massachusetts. MFHC's mission is to enforce the civil rights laws; educate tenants, landlords, and community groups in fair housing practices; and assist people who have experienced housing discrimination.

MFHC provides the following services:

- Education and community outreach about fair housing issues;
- Investigation of complaints;
- Free legal advice and representation to the victims of discrimination;
- Information on fair housing practices real estate agents, landlords, and others who provide access to housing.

\*Remember: Always document your housing search. Keep records of where you call and whom you speak to. Documentation is key in the investigation process.

If you think you may have experienced discrimination in your pursuit of housing, if you have any questions, or if you want more information, please contact:



57 Suffolk Street, Holyoke, MA 01040

[www.massfairhousing.org](http://www.massfairhousing.org)

[info@massfairhousing.org](mailto:info@massfairhousing.org)

Voice/TTY 413-539-9796 ext.101

Fax 413-533-9978

Call Toll Free

1-800-675-7309

In Central Massachusetts

Voice 508-799-7496

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This publication is available in Spanish and other languages upon request.

# Fair Housing for Individuals Receiving Public or Housing Assistance



**1-800-675-7309**

**Defending  
Civil Rights**

**PURSUING JUSTICE**

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## **Fair Housing for Individuals Receiving Public Assistance or Housing Assistance**

The Massachusetts anti-discrimination law states that it is illegal for anyone furnishing rental accommodations to discriminate against any individual because such individual is a recipient of:

- Federal, state or local public assistance (e.g.: TAFDC, SSI, Welfare, Food Stamps), or receives medical assistance,

Or because a tenant is a recipient of:

- A federal, state, or local housing subsidy, including rental assistance or rental subsidies (e.g.: Section 8, MRVP, or Chapter 707).

This law also prohibits discrimination because of any requirement of the public assistance, rental assistance, or housing subsidy programs. For example, a landlord cannot refuse to sign a lease or refuse to have an apartment inspected when a federal or state rental program requires these actions.

A housing provider may only refuse to rent to someone who receives public assistance or rental assistance if the housing provider has a legitimate business reason for doing so, for example, the renter has a poor credit history. Courts have recognized that a landlord can refuse to accept a tenant on rental assistance if that program will not pay the rent the landlord is charging. However, the housing provider must be prepared to prove that his or her business reasons are legitimate.

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## **Common Forms of Discrimination**

### **Misrepresenting the Availability of Housing:**

A landlord, owner, or real estate agent tells you that the housing is unavailable, when in fact; it has not been rented or sold.

### **Refusals to Rent or Sell:**

It is illegal for a landlord or real estate agent to refuse to rent to someone because he or she has a rental subsidy or because he or she receives any kind of public assistance.

### **Discriminatory Advertising:**

Any written statement in a newspaper or other publication; or any oral statement that indicates preferences or limitations for certain people is illegal. That includes any advertisement or brochure that is created by the owner of the property or someone working on their behalf. Advertisements that read “no Section 8,” “month to month tenancies only,” or “no leases” are discriminatory.

### **Discrimination in Terms or Conditions:**

It is illegal for any landlord or property manager to require a tenant receiving rental or public assistance to adhere to different terms or conditions than tenants who do not. For example, if someone receiving public assistance or a housing subsidy is required to meet higher income requirements, charged additional fees, or told he or she must be on protective payments to qualify, this is discrimination.

### **Use of Threats, Intimidation, or Coercion:**

Any attempt to prevent someone receiving public or housing assistance from renting or enforcing his or her rights under the law by suggesting that the housing provider will have the assistance terminated or that the housing provider will interfere with the individual's benefits in any way is discrimination.

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**If you or someone you know has experienced housing discrimination call MFHC immediately.**

When you call MFHC, we will:

- Listen to your story and collect important information;
- Thoroughly investigate the complaint;
- Review the results of the investigation with you and help make decisions about what to do next;

If there is evidence of discrimination, MFHC will help you file a complaint with the proper agency or refer you to a MFHC trained attorney to file a lawsuit.

If the case is resolved in your favor, you may be awarded money for any damages you suffered. It may also be possible for you to move into the housing you were denied.

**Always report any incident of discrimination!** Complaints can be made anonymously if you don't feel comfortable sharing your identity.