



Chapter One

Fair Housing Basics

Section A: A Brief History

The Civil Rights Act of 1866, passed by the Reconstruction Congress, guaranteed property rights to all, regardless of race. It was another hundred years before any real change in fair housing came about, with the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act – Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which added color, national origin, religion and sex. The Fair Housing Act represented the culmination of years of congressional consideration of housing discrimination legislation. Its legislative history spanned the urban riots of 1967, the release of the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission Report, which concluded that America was moving toward two societies, separate and unequal), and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1988, President Reagan signed the Fair Housing Amendments Act, adding two more protected classes (families with children and people with disabilities), strengthening the administrative and judicial enforcement process for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) complaints, and providing monetary penalties in cases where housing discrimination is found to have occurred.

Section B: Fair Housing Laws

1. What fair housing laws apply in Washington state and who enforces them?

The federal Fair Housing Act and its 1988 amendments (FHA) protect people from negative housing actions that occur because of their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or family status, which are “protected classes” under the FHA. State and local fair housing laws cover additional groups, such as marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, participation in the Section 8 Program, etc.

HUD enforces the FHA. The Washington State Human Rights Commission (WSHRC) enforces the Washington Law Against Discrimination, RCW 49.60. Three local agencies enforce fair housing ordinances – King County Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR), and the Tacoma Human Rights and Human Services Department (THR). The state and local laws are considered “substantially equivalent” to the FHA, and HUD contracts with these agencies to handle most fair housing investigations in Washington.

2. Which laws apply to our property?

The Fair Housing Act and the state fair housing law cover most housing rental properties. WSHRC has jurisdiction over housing anywhere in the state of Washington. If a property is located in unincorporated King County, OCR has jurisdiction. SOCR and THR handle complaints within the city limits of Seattle and Tacoma. The City of Bellevue Code Compliance office investigates Section 8 cases in that city (WSHRC handles all other fair housing cases in Bellevue). Appendix A lists the fair housing agencies and their contact information.

Most types of housing properties are covered – leased or rented apartments; houses or condominiums that are sold, leased or rented; rooming houses; cooperatives; temporary shelters; mobile home parks; roommate situations (except a renter can specify a roommate's sex); construction sites; and even empty lots. If uncertain whether a property is covered, contact any local fair housing agency. See the Glossary in Appendix D for a list of exemptions.

3. What housing actions are prohibited by fair housing laws?

Fair housing laws prohibit the following housing actions:

- Refusing to rent to someone or telling someone that a rental is not available even though it is, because of his or her protected class.
- Discriminating in the terms and conditions of rental because of a resident's protected class. [Examples: Sending violation notices to an Asian resident who breaks a rule, but not to a Caucasian resident who breaks the same rule. Charging additional deposits to families with children or to wheelchair users. Allowing Russian residents but not Saudis to use the community center.]
- Making, printing or publishing a notice, statement, or advertisement that indicates any preference, limitation, or discrimination based on a protected class. [Examples: Newspaper ad states "Apartment available for single person. Christians preferred." Manager tells a Vietnamese applicant he'd be more comfortable in another community that has people like him.]
- Failing to provide reasonable accommodations to a person with a disability, refusing to allow a disabled resident to make reasonable modifications, or failing to meet access requirements. [Examples: Refusing to let a blind resident live with a guide dog. Not permitting a disabled person to install bathroom grab bars.]
- Enforcing a neutral rule or policy that has a disproportionately adverse effect on a protected class, unless there is a valid business reason for the rule or policy, and the housing provider can show that there is no less discriminatory means of achieving the same result. [Example: Management has a rule that applicants must have an income of at least three times the monthly rent. Because people with Section 8 vouchers are low income, virtually all voucher holders would be denied tenancy under such a rule. It may be appropriate to apply a different standard – for example, to require Section 8 applicants have an income three

times their portion of the rent, Note that Section 8 program participation is a protected class in Seattle, Bellevue and unincorporated King County.]

- Retaliating against a resident or applicant because he or she has asserted fair housing rights or has been a witness in a fair housing investigation. [Examples: Refusing to make repairs or not making them promptly because a resident filed a fair housing complaint. Evicting a resident because he was a witness in a civil rights investigation.] This applies for informal verbal complaints as well as formal discrimination cases filed with a civil rights agency.

Even though the original allegation might turn out to be unfounded, if a housing provider takes retaliatory action, a retaliation complaint can be supported. [Example: A resident complains of racial harassment. A week later, the manager issues her a parking violation notice, but does not give notices to other residents for the same offense. The resident files a complaint. The civil rights office finds no evidence of harassment; however, the investigation shows that the manager retaliated against the resident for the harassment complaint by issuing the parking notice.]

4. Who can file a fair housing complaint?

Anyone who has been harmed by a housing action may file a complaint. Fair housing laws also protect anyone who is harmed because of association with guests, relatives, friends, roommates, subtenants or others in any of the protected categories. [Example: A housing provider treats a resident badly because he has Mexican guests. The resident and the guests could file complaints.]

Fair housing advocacy organizations that spend resources substantiating fair housing violations also may file complaints. Enforcement agencies have the authority to file a complaint without a complaining party when a situation merits such an action. [Example: Random testing shows a fair housing violation.]

5. How long does a person have to file a fair housing complaint?

Generally, a person must file a fair housing complaint within one year of the harmful housing action (or within 180 days under City of Seattle fair housing law). It is important to keep applications, resident files and other housing-related records on file for a long enough period to be able to respond to housing complaints and/or lawsuits.

6. Who may be held responsible for fair housing violations?

Fair housing complaints generally name all parties related to the property, including the property owner, property management company, individual property management staff, housing developers and contractors, advertising media, screening companies, housing authorities, condominium associations/boards, homeowner associations, mobile home park management, and in some cases, other residents. Each party named in a complaint has a responsibility to respond to the allegations, to produce documentation, and to make themselves available for interviews.

7. What is the relationship between fair housing laws and the state landlord-tenant laws?

Fair housing issues often overlap with requirements of the state's Residential Landlord-Tenant Act (RLTA, RCW 59.18) and the Manufactured/Mobile Home Landlord-Tenant Act (MHLTA, RCW 59.20). Landlord-tenant laws cover rental agreements and leases; deposits and other fees; landlord and tenant responsibilities; a landlord's access to the rental; repairs; moving out and return of deposits; evictions; etc. The definition of retaliation under landlord-tenant laws is different from the fair housing law definition.

Fair housing agencies do not investigate violations of the landlord-tenant laws; however, they investigate inconsistent application of tenancy rules based on protected class. [Example: A fair housing agency won't investigate a situation where a deposit is not returned (a landlord-tenant issue). The agency will investigate an allegation that an African American family's deposit is withheld for carpet damage, when a Caucasian resident's deposit is returned despite similar damage.]

8. We just received a civil rights complaint. What happens now?

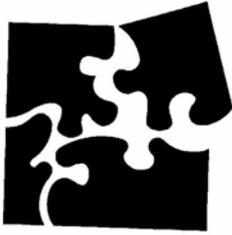
Most housing complaints are filed both with HUD and with the state or local fair housing agency with jurisdiction over the property. Both agencies send paperwork, and the state or local agency conducts the investigation.

Fair housing agencies follow similar procedures for investigating complaints. The Respondents are required to respond to the complaint within a brief time. Fair housing agencies attempt conciliation within 30 days, and offer opportunities to resolve the case throughout the investigation. These agencies use a mediation-style dispute resolution process to attempt a voluntary settlement of cases.

The enforcement agencies are neutral fact-finders. They gather and evaluate documentation, interview relevant witnesses, conduct on-site visits, etc. The resident and housing provider(s) have an opportunity to respond to each other's positions, the material and relevant evidence available to the agency is reviewed, and then the agency makes a final written report.

If an investigation finds insufficient evidence to support the issues, the case is closed with a "no cause" finding. The complaining party may appeal or request a reconsideration, and the respondent has an opportunity to respond to the appeal.

If there is sufficient evidence to support the allegations, a "reasonable cause" finding is issued, the agency assists the parties in conciliating the matter, and the parties sign a settlement agreement. If the parties do not settle, the case is usually referred to the agency's legal department (state cases are referred to the Attorney General's office), and there is an administrative process or a hearing.



Chapter Two

Filling Your Vacancies

Section A: Advertising

9. What advertising is covered under fair housing laws?

Fair housing laws prohibit making, printing or publishing any notice, statement, or advertisement that indicates any preference, limitation, or discrimination based on a protected class.

Fair housing laws cover all types of statements, advertising or marketing used in the rental process, including a brochure, an ad in a newspaper, on the radio, in magazines, on television, on the Internet, a little note at the neighborhood laundromat, a vacancy sign in the window, and word-of-mouth.

These laws prohibit making any verbal statement indicating a preference or limiting housing based on someone's protected class. [Example: A manager cannot tell a family with children that they'd prefer a rental community with a playground.]

10. Who is responsible for nondiscriminatory advertising?

There are no exemptions to the fair housing advertising guidelines. Everyone involved in the advertising process is responsible for ensuring that no statements or notices show preference for or limitation against any protected class. The prohibition against discriminatory advertising applies to all housing transactions, including single-family and owner-occupied housing that is otherwise exempt from the FHA.

Ensure that everyone involved in advertising rentals is aware of the nondiscriminatory advertising requirements. Inform the on-site leasing agents, off-site property management company, and any advertising media that they should follow nondiscriminatory advertising standards. If an advertising service posts available rentals at their storefront location or on the Internet, make sure that they use no discriminatory statements.

To expand marketing options, consider advertising sources such as minority newspapers, social services agencies and organizations for people with disabilities. Local fair housing agencies may be able to refer you to some of these resources.

11. What are the requirements for using fair housing logos and posters?

Using the fair housing logo is a great way to show a commitment to fair housing. Many housing providers use the Equal Housing Opportunity logo in their ads and on their written materials to show that they do business in compliance with fair housing laws. The logo graphic (sample at right) is available in various sizes online at www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf15/hudgraphics/fheologo.cfm.



HUD requires that owners and managers display a fair housing poster with this logo at rental offices. This applies to rentals covered by the federal Fair Housing Act, and to dwellings rented through a real estate broker/agent. (see 24 CFR 100)

The Seattle Municipal Code requires residential property managers and real estate professionals within the city limits to prominently display a letter-sized fair housing poster in their place of business. Failure to display the poster can result in fines.

Free color posters with this logo are available from the fair housing agencies for each jurisdiction (also available on their Web sites). Post them in the rental office and in common areas to alert applicants and residents that fair housing is valued at the community.

12. What can our advertising say?

The language used to advertise can pose fair housing problems. Avoid using words or phrases that show a preference or discourage anyone because of protected class. [Examples: Don't use phrases such as "Christians only" or "perfect for mature professionals".]

There is less of a risk of a fair housing complaint if an ad describes the property and its desirable features (size, location, price, amenities), rather than some target audience.

13. Can we affirmatively market to any protected class?

Fair housing laws permit marketing for certain protected classes. It's okay to advertise –

- that rentals are accessible for people with disabilities
- that families are welcome, or emphasizing amenities such as a playground
- that those who participate in the Section 8 program are welcome
- that this is a HOPA property for seniors, if the property meets HOPA requirements (see Chapter 6)

Indicating that these groups are welcome in a community does not deny any other protected class the opportunity to apply for housing.

14. What about ads with human models or drawings?

Avoid using pictures or images that show a preference or discourage anyone because of protected class. [Example: Don't use a series of newspaper ads publicizing vacancies using only young white models.] For advertising with photographs or drawings of people, portray a variety of individuals who reflect the population as a whole: men, women, children, people with disabilities, and people of various races and ages.

Section B: Application and Screening

15. How do fair housing laws affect application and screening?

Housing providers have the right to determine if an applicant has the income and rental history necessary to be a good tenant. Be certain to screen applicants in a manner that complies with fair housing laws.

It is best to have clear criteria for rental of a dwelling that does not take into account an applicant's protected class. Ensure that all employees involved in the rental process are familiar with and follow each policy consistently with all applicants. The screening agency should also be aware of fair housing requirements.

Although consistency is important, some applicants may require special consideration:

- People with disabilities may need reasonable accommodations during the application and screening process.
- It's okay to refuse rental to individuals who have a history of criminal convictions.
- New immigrants to the U.S. can present challenging screening issues. See Appendix B for a list of effective alternative documents that help determine whether these applicants meet rental criteria.

16. If several applicants want the same rental, can we choose who we think is best, based on our experience?

While experience is invaluable, be careful not to take possible discriminatory actions based on unconscious biases. Some applicants look okay, then turn out to be bad residents; a housing provider working on assumptions may not know that until after they sign a lease. A fair screening process that is applied equally to all applicants will get results that are more consistent (and result in fewer fair housing complaints).

If several applicants are interested in the same rental, it's best to screen them on a first-come, first-served basis, using objective criteria, then offer the rental to the first qualified applicant. It helps to date and time-stamp applications. Pre-printed documents help to ensure that consistent information is gathered.

17. If we feel an applicant won't be a good resident, can we say that a rental is not available when it actually is?

It is a violation of fair housing laws to state that a rental is not available when it actually is. It is best to rely on an objective screening process, not assumptions, to determine if applicants meet your criteria. Fair housing complaints are more easily avoided when applicants receive clear and consistent information about all housing options, including waiting lists.

Ever heard of the "Secret Shopper" program, where someone visits rental communities to observe customer service? Fair housing agencies use a similar testing process to assess a specific complaint or to check a random market for fair housing compliance. Any applicant could be a fair housing tester!

18. Do we have to respond to all rental inquiries?

From a business standpoint, it makes sense to respond to all inquiries – that person asking about rental could make a terrific resident! Rental inquiries come in many forms – walk-ins, telephone calls, e-mails, online inquiries. Here are some tips:

- **TTY Relay Service** – People who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities may make telephone contact via the state's Relay Service. It is a reasonable accommodation to communicate with them by using the Relay Service. Anyone can make phone calls through the Service – just dial 711. For more information, see www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/relay.htm, www.washingtonrelay.com, and www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/deaftips.htm.
- **Linguistic Profiling** – Under fair housing laws, it is not legal to consider an applicant's race, national origin or ancestry when making rental decisions. Sometimes an applicant suspects that an accent was the reason for not getting a call-back, for being told no rental was available, or for being given minimal rental information. Although some people claim they didn't know a caller's race, research shows that most people can determine race just by hearing a caller's voice. These studies indicate that "linguistic profiling" occurs when people use speech characteristics or dialect to identify a speaker's race, national origin, ancestry or religion. It would be discriminatory not to call back, to lie about rental availability, or to withhold rental information because of a caller's perceived race, national origin, ancestry, religion or other protected class.
- **Name Discrimination** – This happens when a housing provider takes a negative rental action based on names alone. A recent housing study showed that more than half of the time, housing providers did not respond or responded negatively to an e-mail from someone with a "black" sounding name, and one-third failed to respond positively to an e-mail from a person with an Arab-sounding name. The study's authors noted that "names may disclose our religious affiliation, sex, social position, ethnic background, tribal affiliation and even age." It would violate fair housing laws to refuse rental because of the perceived national origin, religion or race of an applicant's name.

19. Is it legal to request to see photo ID from applicants?

Some housing providers request identification from applicants for safety reasons or to verify identity. This is okay as long as the request is not based on an applicant's protected class. [Example: Require ID from all applicants, not just from Hispanics.] Be aware that requiring a specific form of photo ID, such as a driver's license, may have a disproportionately adverse effect on members of certain protected classes, since some people with disabilities or people from other countries may not have driver's licenses (but they may have other photo IDs).

20. Can we conduct separate credit checks for each adult applicant?

If a housing provider has a policy of running a joint credit check for married couples, it is okay to ask unmarried couples to file separate applications and to undergo separate credit checks, because they do not have the "community property" status of a married couple.

In the City of Seattle and in unincorporated King County, where "marital status" includes "cohabiting," management should treat an unmarried couple similarly to married couples once they become residents.

Some people, including gay or lesbian couples and heterosexual couples where one person is 62 or older, have registered as domestic partners with the Secretary of State. Regardless of their registration status, they can also be charged separate credit check fees.

21. What if someone who doesn't speak English applies for a rental?

People with limited English proficiency or a heavy accent are covered under the national origin or ancestry protections of fair housing laws. An applicant cannot be turned away because of an accent or because communication is a bit challenging. Make reasonable efforts to lead these applicants through the normal rental procedures in English.

Housing providers are not expected to translate their promotional materials, applications, or rental agreements to meet the language needs of all applicants. However, from a marketing standpoint, it may make business sense to translate some basic forms for a property that is in a community with many foreign language speakers. [Example: Translate application, lease and rules into Spanish.]

Federally funded properties may be required to provide certain rental documents in foreign languages under HUD's Limited English Proficiency regulations. See HUD's "Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons" online at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2004/04-1476.htm>.

22. Can we verify that someone is legally in the U.S.?

Employers are held responsible if they hire someone who may not legally work in the U.S., but housing providers have no similar responsibilities in our state, and are not held accountable if any of their residents are in the U.S. without status.

Don't ask an applicant for proof of legal status just because he or she has an accent, speaks English poorly, or just "looks foreign" – that risks a fair housing complaint based on national origin or ancestry. Under fair housing laws, asking applicants if they are in the country legally is only acceptable if every applicant is asked for proof of legal residency. [Example: It is discriminatory for a manager to ask an Arabic-looking applicant for legal status, but not to ask all other applicants.]

23. What if an applicant is a recent immigrant with no social security number, and with little or no employment or rental history in the U.S.?

Many housing providers use screening criteria that depend on information such as a social security number, past employment and rental history. Alternative documents are available to determine if a recent immigrant is able to pay the rent and follow the rules. Appendix B contains a list of documents that will assist in determining an applicant's identity, rental history, and credit history or ability to pay rent.

24. Is it okay to offer rental "specials" to increase applications?

This is a common marketing practice. Unfortunately, sometimes a prospective renter may note differences in specials that seem related to protected class, and that can lead to fair housing complaints. Here is how to minimize this risk:

- Put all special offers in writing and ensure that all staff are aware of them.
- Make certain all applicants hear about every rental special.
- Document all exceptions made to regular rental rates. If two residents are charged different rates for apparently identical rentals, note why.
- Federal and state fair housing laws allow senior discounts so long as they are based solely on age, are available to families with children, and are not otherwise handled in a way that results in the exclusion of families with children. However, age discrimination is illegal under the Seattle, Tacoma, and King County fair housing ordinances – including the offer of lower rent to a preferred age group. If the intent is to increase the number of good residents, then a rebate could be offered to those who pay promptly and incur no rule violations within their first year of rental.

25. Can we refuse applicants because of their criminal history?

Having a criminal record is not a protected class under fair housing laws. Housing providers can establish screening criteria that rejects applicants with criminal records. However, do not confuse arrests with convictions. Patterns of arrest have been

viewed as discriminatory against some protected classes, so arrest records are likely inappropriate to use as a screening criteria.

It is discriminatory to perform criminal background checks only on certain applicants, or to distinguish between applicants with criminal records based on protected class. [Examples: A manager should not conduct criminal checks only on African American males. Or a landlord cannot accept a female applicant with an assault conviction, and reject male applicants with similar convictions.] The key is to ensure that the process is fair, and neither directly nor indirectly discriminates based on any protected class.

26. How do fair housing laws affect income and employment requirements?

Housing providers can use income and employment requirements as long as they apply them consistently, without regard to an applicant's protected class. Here are some issues to consider:

- For Section 8 program participants, Housing Authorities have already made a determination that the resident can afford their portion of the rent. The housing subsidy is a mechanism for ensuring that a low-income family can afford a rental in the private market. For those who use income screening criteria (such as "income must equal three times the rent"), calculate only the Section 8 participant's portion of the rent.
- Most credit decisions utilize gross income as the basis for calculating the income to housing cost ratio. "Gross up" non-taxed income such as social security. [Example: Calculate the fixed income of a person with a disability to reflect the taxable income a nondisabled person would have to earn to net the same amount.]
- Requiring that a person's income be garnishable could be a violation of fair housing laws, especially for people on social security disability income. As a reasonable accommodation, waive a garnishable income requirement for social security disability income.
- As a reasonable accommodation, an applicant with a disability may ask to use a co-signer or third party payee.
- Consider aggregating the income of all household members to calculate the ratio. To calculate income, include verifiable employment, public assistance, social security, retirement/pension, asset/interest income, child support, adoption assistance, foster child support, food stamps, veteran's benefits, student employment, and other types of cash income.
- Income stability may be as relevant as employment history. Keep in mind that a requirement that applicants have employment could have a discriminatory effect on certain protected classes, such as people with disabilities or families with children.



Chapter Three

Policies and Rules

Section A: Tenancy Policies and Rules

27. What do we need to know about setting policies and enforcing tenancy rules, from a fair housing perspective?

Fair housing laws require that policies and rules do not single out residents based on their protected class. Rules should not be enforced differently because of a resident's protected class. To minimize the risk of violating fair housing laws, review each policy for protected class language.

Good business practices often are good fair housing practices, too. Put rules and policies in writing to ensure that all residents are aware of them. Apply the rules and policies equally, regardless of a resident's protected class. Treat residents similarly when they don't follow rules. Finally, keep thorough written records of all actions taken when enforcing resident rules and regulations.

Fair housing laws do not prevent a housing provider from warning residents who break the rules, disturb others, create a nuisance, or do not pay rent. Fair housing laws simply require that a resident's protected class doesn't enter into the equation.

28. What policies or rules will help us comply with fair housing laws?

Most rental housing communities have general tenancy rules that outline expected actions and behaviors, such as making timely payments, observing quiet hours, parking in assigned spaces, etc. Review these rules or policies to make certain they do not target any protected class group. [Example: Don't state "children cannot ride bikes in the parking lot" – instead, say "bicycle riding is not allowed in the parking lot".] If in doubt about whether written policies and rules comply with fair housing laws, ask a fair housing agency to review them and suggest rephrasing if necessary.

Many housing communities have begun adopting antiharassment and antidiscrimination policies. Be certain any such policy includes mention of all the protected classes of individuals for the area where the rental housing is located. See Appendix A for a complete list of protected classes.

The Fair Housing Partners of Washington have developed a number of helpful “sample policies” for housing providers to adopt or adapt for their own use:

- Tenant on Tenant Harassment, www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/TT.pdf
- Reasonable Accommodations for People with Disabilities, www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/RA.pdf
- Service Animals, www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/SA.pdf
- Another useful tool is the Disability Access Resources for Housing Providers guidebook, www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/disability.pdf

29. One of our residents is a good friend, so we let her pay her rent late. Will that get us into trouble?

Giving a friend more favorable treatment may leave management vulnerable to accusations of discrimination. Playing favorites may cause other residents to feel that the different treatment is based on their protected class. [Example: A resident gets a \$20 rent increase but other residents get no increase that month. The reason is that management is increasing rent for all residents at the end of their lease terms, but haven’t communicated this to the residents.]

30. Can we establish rules that prohibit smoking, cooking of certain foods, or making other unpleasant smells?

Being a smoker is not a protected class under fair housing laws, so housing providers can set and enforce any rules they like about smoking (including having no-smoking buildings or no-smoking areas).

In many rental communities, the aromas of the residents’ cooking can escape into the hallways. An occasional food odor, such as fish, garlic or curry, is inevitable and should be tolerated by other residents. A housing provider should not deny residents the full use and enjoyment of their apartment by asking them to stop cooking their choice of foods.

Housing providers have a right to establish reasonable rules and regulations for the comfort and peaceful enjoyment of all residents. If any resident creates strong objectionable smells that pervade common areas such as hallways, the cause of the smells doesn’t matter. If a situation involves offensive smells that go beyond normal odors, a housing provider can request that the household stop creating the odor.

31. What fair housing issues should we be aware of in processing maintenance requests?

Maintenance employees are very visible and frequently interact with residents. When they treat residents fairly and professionally, it goes a long way toward preventing fair housing complaints. Housing providers are responsible for the actions of all employees, so it is very important to train maintenance staff on fair housing issues.

A common complaint that fair housing enforcement agencies receive is that members of one protected class get their maintenance requests handled more quickly than do members of another protected class. To avoid this type of allegation, consider establishing a clear maintenance response policy and document requests for repairs. Keep thorough documentation of work requests and maintenance actions taken, for one year or longer. It is best to stay in communication with residents about their repair requests, especially if there are delays.

32. What are some examples of evictions that could violate fair housing laws?

The eviction process is a costly part of doing business – be sure not to make it more costly by evicting for discriminatory reasons. When a resident breaks rules that call for an eviction, know how to evict lawfully, and follow eviction laws consistently and fairly. An eviction will comply with fair housing laws if the resident's protected class is not a factor in the decision to evict .

Here are examples of situations that could violate fair housing laws (some of these situations are not covered in all jurisdictions):

- a single female resident is told that her partner is approved to move in with her, then is evicted when management learns that her partner is of a different nationality or race than the resident
- a couple in a large one bedroom rental is asked to vacate after they have a child
- residents who associate with people of a particular sexual orientation are treated negatively by management

33. How can we evict residents without violating fair housing laws?

A housing provider can evict a resident for valid, nondiscriminatory reasons such as breaking the rules after being warned, repeatedly being late with rent, failing to pay rent, damaging the rental property, or breaking public laws. The resident's protected class should not be considered in the decision to evict. Remember to be consistent and keep thorough written records.

34. When can we make an exception to the rules?

Whenever an exception is needed. If exceptions must be made when implementing rules, document them carefully. [Example: A late fee is charged for residents who pay rent late during their first year of residency, but no fee is charged for a long-term resident who previously made timely payments and pays late once.] Analyze situations on a case-by-case basis when making exceptions to a rule. Don't make exceptions based on someone's protected class. Document the reasons for the exceptions thoroughly.

Remember, an applicant or resident who is a person with a disability may need a reasonable accommodation in order to use and enjoy a dwelling. A housing provider is required to make needed accommodations, even if they may constitute an exception to the usual rules. See Chapter 4. For more detailed information, see the Sample Policy on Reasonable Accommodations for People with Disabilities by the Fair Housing Partners of Washington State.

35. What records should be kept to document our management actions?

It's best to keep all written records concerning:

- resident payments
- complaints from other residents
- warnings issued, both verbal and written
- information leading to an eviction.

Remember that people can file fair housing complaints from six months to a year after the alleged discriminatory action, depending on the jurisdiction (and longer to file a lawsuit). Keeping thorough records will help in responding to allegations of discrimination. Also, keep all applications, resident files and prior policies on file for a reasonable length of time to be able to respond to any fair housing complaints or lawsuits.

Section B: Harassment

36. What constitutes harassment under fair housing laws?

Fair housing laws prohibit housing providers from harassing residents because of their protected class. Housing providers are responsible for the behavior of their employees and vendors. Harassment includes various negative actions that are taken because of someone's protected class – sexual harassment, selective enforcement of rules, derogatory statements, ignored maintenance requests, etc.

A housing provider can be found liable if the harassing treatment rises to the level of “severe or pervasive” conduct that creates a hostile living environment. One or two incidents will rarely constitute harassment. However, in situations where the episodes were egregious, courts have determined that the “severe or pervasive” standard was met when there was a single incident.

The best prevention strategy is to write and periodically distribute a non-harassment policy to all residents, employees and contractors, and to train employees on how to prevent and remedy all forms of harassment. If a resident reports harassment, respond quickly and effectively, and follow up to ensure that the problem does not recur. Finally, remember to document everything. For more detailed information, see the Sample Policy on Tenant on Tenant Harassment available from the Fair Housing Partners of Washington State.

37. What types of conduct are considered to be sexual harassment?

Sexually harassing conduct can be verbal (derogatory remarks, slurs, jokes, intimidation, and even threats of violence), physical (body gestures, whistling, ogling, unwelcome touching or physical violence), or visual (inappropriate sexually-oriented written materials or pictures). Sexual harassment also occurs when a resident’s housing is conditioned on agreeing to sexual favors. [Example: A manager demands a date in exchange for a rent reduction.] The legal term for this type of harassment is quid pro quo – “this for that”. Again, the treatment is considered harassment if it rises to the level of “severe or pervasive” conduct.

38. A resident said our maintenance worker told her she’d get a quicker repair if she gave him a kiss. What should we do?

This is an example of quid pro quo harassment. Employers are responsible for the behavior of their employees and vendors who work on-site. If a resident complains of sexual harassment, take prompt action to remedy the situation and prevent harassment in the future. Follow up with the resident and document everything.

This type of situation can be handled more effectively if there is a written harassment policy. The policy should clearly outline what a resident can do and who to contact if harassment occurs.

Section C: Tenant on Tenant Harassment

39. A resident complained that her neighbor harassed her. What should we do?

The word “harassment” means different things to different people. When someone reports harassment, gather specific information about what words and behaviors were involved. This helps management to determine if behavior is based on the resident’s protected class. If so, follow the antiharassment policy.

40. How should we deal with a harassment complaint?

If there are threats of violence or actual physical violence, call 911 or urge the resident to do so. For non-emergency situations, tell the complaining resident that complaints are taken seriously and an investigation will be conducted.

Start an investigation right away –

- Interview the complaining resident and any witnesses who might have observed the incident.
- Interview the alleged harasser. Let the person know that harassment based on protected class will not be tolerated.
- Document the complaint and the investigation results in both the complaining resident's and alleged harasser's files.

If harassment cannot be verified –

- Remind everyone involved that management has made a serious commitment to a housing environment free of harassment.
- Promptly inform the complaining resident of the investigation results and the actions taken.
- Remind everyone that retaliation against the complaining resident or witnesses will not be tolerated. Monitor for retaliation.
- For ongoing resident conflict that appears not to be associated with protected class, refer residents to the local Dispute Resolution Center or other mediation services, or consider hiring an outside consultant/mediator.

If the investigation verifies the harassment complaint –

- Proceed with progressive disciplinary action against the harasser, up to and including eviction if necessary for ongoing or serious violations.
- Promptly inform the complaining resident of the investigation results and the actions taken.
- Remind everyone that retaliation against the complaining resident or witnesses will not be tolerated. Monitor for retaliation.

41. We don't get involved in private resident disputes. A resident claims a neighbor called him a negative racial name. Should we do anything?

When a housing provider is aware that a resident may be experiencing harassment because of his protected class, the provider has a legal responsibility to investigate, to take action to stop any harassing behavior, and to ensure that it does not recur. If a housing provider fails to take effective action, a fair housing complaint can be filed.

Section D: Domestic Violence Issues

42. We issued a vacate notice to a household that had a domestic violence incident. Is this okay under fair housing laws?

Fair housing cases have been filed when management took action against the entire household after a woman was a victim of domestic violence. [Example: A husband is arrested after beating his wife, who then obtains a protection order. Management sends the household an eviction notice under its “zero tolerance for violence policy”. Although the policy is applied equally to all households where violence occurs, it has a disproportionate adverse impact on women, who are the victims of domestic violence the majority of the time.] In a situation where a female is the domestic violence victim but is capable of maintaining her tenancy, such a policy should not be used to evict her.

The Washington State Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RLTA, RCW 59.18) provides guidance for housing providers when residents or applicants are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. For more information, see “Landlord/Tenant Issues For Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and/or Stalking” by the Northwest Justice Project, online at www.washingtonlawhelp.org/WA.

43. Can we refuse to rent to someone who has been involved in a domestic violence incident?

Fair housing laws do not protect individuals who have a criminal record or rental history of being a perpetrator of domestic violence, so it is okay to refuse them rental. When a woman’s screening report shows a domestic violence incident, she should not be automatically rejected. Instead, ask her to provide information confirming that she was the victim. If she was and she otherwise qualifies for rental, process her application just like for other applicants. Do not make generalizations that she will bring trouble to the rental – look at her circumstances individually.

Section E: Retaliation

44. What is retaliation under fair housing laws?

Retaliation is an act of harm by a housing provider against an applicant or resident because he or she has asserted fair housing rights, or has been a witness in a fair housing situation. The fair housing complaint can be formal (a civil rights complaint) or informal (a verbal complaint to management). [Examples: A resident complains of harassment, then the manager won’t make repairs for her. Or a resident is a witness in an investigation, then the manager tells her he’s watching her more closely for rule violations.]

A retaliation complaint can be supported even when the underlying complaint is not proven. [Example: A resident gets a notice for noise, then she files a harassment complaint with a civil rights agency. The manager gets upset about the complaint, so he issues a notice to vacate to the resident, who then files a retaliation complaint. An investigation shows that there was no harassment. However, the resident wins the retaliation case, because the manager gave her the vacate notice only because she filed the harassment complaint.]

After receiving a fair housing complaint, a housing provider can still take appropriate actions when that resident violates the rules. Be consistent – issue rule violation notices throughout a person’s tenancy and for all residents similarly, so that management actions can be supported. Inconsistency can look like possible discrimination.



Chapter Four

People with Disabilities

Section A: Disability Law 101

45. What disability laws apply to housing?

Fair Housing Act, state and local fair housing laws

- Prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and against those who associate with them.
- Requires provision of "reasonable accommodations" as necessary to afford such person(s) equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.
- Requires housing providers to allow residents with disabilities to make "reasonable modifications" to rentals and common areas.
- Requires accessibility design and construction for covered multifamily housing.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

- Prohibits discrimination based on disability in any housing, program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

Americans with Disabilities Act

- **Title II** prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs, services, and activities provided or made available by public entities (state and local public housing, housing authorities, housing assistance and housing referrals).
- **Title III** covers housing community areas that are open to the public (such as a rental office) or available for use by the public (such as a clubhouse rented to non-residents).

46. Who is considered a person with a disability?

Various fair housing laws use the terms "handicap" and "disability" interchangeably. Disability is the preferred term when referring to this group.

Federal law defines a person with a disability as:

- a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (“major life activity” means those activities that are of central importance to daily life, such as seeing, hearing, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, caring for one’s self, learning, and speaking)
- someone who is regarded as having such an impairment
- individuals with a record of such an impairment.

The Washington State Law Against Discrimination and local fair housing laws define disability more broadly, and include some people with temporary disabilities.

47. Who does not have a disability?

Under fair housing laws, the definition does not include:

- sex offenders
- current illegal drug users (however, fair housing laws do protect people who are recovering from substance abuse)
- those with convictions for the illegal manufacture or distribution of a controlled substance

Section B: Welcoming People with Disabilities

48. Can we target our marketing to attract people with disabilities?

Under fair housing laws, housing providers may affirmatively market to people with disabilities. It helps to use the international symbol of access in ads and on signs (sample at right). The symbol graphic is available online at www.gag.org/resources/das.php.



To expand marketing options, consider advertising sources such as minority newspapers, social services agencies and organizations for people with disabilities.

49. How can our community show that we welcome people with disabilities?

There are many ways to demonstrate this.

- Use the fair housing logo and access symbol. Ads, brochures, signs and application materials can reflect accessibility and fair housing compliance.
- Make sure that the rental community meets the state and federal accessibility standards. For older buildings, ensure that the leasing office is accessible and that there is an accessible route from public transportation to the office.

- It's a wise practice to develop a reasonable accommodations/modifications policy and have it available for applicants and residents.
- Make certain a model rental is on an accessible route. Rental staff should know the community's accessible routes and be able to point out access features.
- Not all disabilities are obvious, so let all applicants and residents know that reasonable accommodations will be provided upon request. Include a written notice in application materials and in resident rules that states a willingness to provide accommodations.
- Train staff on how to respond to reasonable accommodation requests in a timely and professional manner.

For more detailed information, see the Sample Policy on Reasonable Accommodations for People with Disabilities available from the Fair Housing Partners of Washington State.

50. What questions can we ask applicants about disabilities, and what questions should we avoid?

It is usually unlawful to ask if an applicant or resident has a disability, or to ask about the nature or severity of the person's disabilities. When the housing property is a recipient of federal low-income housing tax credits or is designed to provide housing for people with a certain type of disability, the following inquiries may be made of all applicants:

- Can you meet the requirements of tenancy?
- Do you qualify for a dwelling legally available only to persons with a disability or to persons with a particular type of disability?
- Do you qualify for housing that is legally available on a priority basis to persons with disabilities or to persons with a particular disability?

Do not ask questions such as:

- How did you become disabled?
- Do you take medication?
- Why are you getting SSI?
- What does that service animal do?
- Can I see your medical records?
- Have you ever been hospitalized for mental illness?
- Have you ever been in drug or alcohol rehab?
- Are you capable of living independently?

51. What if an applicant or resident voluntarily shares information about a disabling condition?

Whether in casual conversation, or in the process of requesting a reasonable accommodation, sometimes a person will reveal information about a disability, medical treatment, or details about what tasks a service animal does. Management must keep this information confidential and should not share it except –

- with management employees who need information to assess or make a decision to grant or deny a reasonable accommodation request, or
- disclosure required by law (for example, a court-issued subpoena).

It is not appropriate to discuss a resident's disability with another resident. [Example: A resident in a "no pets" community who wants a dog asks why another resident has one. The manager, who knows the dog is a service animal, should not disclose that the resident with the animal is disabled. Instead, the manager can say "Federal and local fair housing laws require our community to make exceptions to the 'no pets' rule under certain circumstances. If you believe you may qualify for an exception, management would be pleased to schedule a confidential meeting to discuss this matter."]

Section C: Reasonable Accommodations & Modifications

52. What are accommodations and modifications?

Fair housing laws require similar treatment for all applicants and residents. However, these laws also require reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications for people with disabilities.

A **reasonable accommodation** is a change made to a policy, program or service that allows a person with a disability to use and enjoy a dwelling, including public and common use areas. Examples include:

- providing rental forms in large print
- providing a reserved accessible parking space near a resident's rental
- allowing a resident to have a service animal in a "no pets" building
- permitting a resident who has developed mobility limitations to move to the ground floor.

A **reasonable modification** is a physical change made to a resident's living space or to the common areas of a community, which is necessary to enable a resident with a disability to have full enjoyment of the housing. Examples include:

- adding bathroom grab bars
- lowering closet rods
- installation of a ramp

See Appendix C for a list of common accommodations and modifications.

53. When do we know that an accommodation or modification is needed?

The duty to accommodate arises when the housing provider has knowledge that a disability exists and that an accommodation or modification may be required for the disabled person to use and enjoy the housing. Here are key points:

- The applicant or resident must make a request for an accommodation or modification.
- The request does not need to mention fair housing or use the words "reasonable accommodation" or "reasonable modification."
- The request should describe the accommodation or modification, and explain the disability-related need for the requested action. [Example: A resident who becomes disabled may request a transfer to a ground floor apartment because climbing the stairs has become difficult.]
- The request does not need to be in writing. Although management may use a specific form, an accommodation or modification cannot be refused just because the person requesting it did not use the form. It is important for management to document these requests.
- Reasonable accommodations or modifications can be requested whenever they are needed. A person may make requests when applying for housing, when entering into a rental agreement, during tenancy, and even during an eviction process.
- An individual with a disability may make multiple requests for accommodations, as the need arises.

Evaluate each request on a case-by-case basis, in a timely and professional manner, and document interactions with the resident. A housing provider has an obligation to provide prompt responses to reasonable accommodation requests. An undue delay in responding to a request may be considered to be a failure to provide a reasonable accommodation. If in doubt about whether accommodation policies and rules comply with fair housing laws, ask a fair housing agency to review them and suggest rephrasing if necessary.

54. Are we required to have a formal procedure for processing accommodation or modification requests?

No. Fair housing laws do not require that a housing provider adopt any formal procedures for reasonable accommodation requests. However, having formal procedures may aid people with disabilities in making requests for reasonable accommodations and may aid housing providers in assessing those requests so that there are no misunderstandings as to the nature of the request. Also, in the event of later disputes, documentation of actions taken will provide records to show that the requests received proper consideration. For more information, see the Sample Policy on Reasonable Accommodations for People with Disabilities available from the Fair Housing Partners of Washington State.

55. Can we require documentation of a disability or the need for a requested accommodation or modification?

Whether to request documentation and what documentation to request depends on how obvious the person's disability is and whether there is a connection between the disability and the requested accommodation or modification.

- If the person's disability is obvious, or otherwise known, and the need for the accommodation is also clear, do not request information about the person's disability or the need for the accommodation. [Example: An obviously blind applicant asks for rental documents in large print – no verification of the disability or the need is necessary.]
- If the disability is known, but the need for the accommodation is not readily apparent or known, request only information necessary to evaluate the disability-related need for the accommodation. [Example: Management knows a resident has seizures. The resident wants to get an assistance dog – request that he document the disability-related need for the dog.]
- If neither the disability nor the need is clear, ask for proof of both. [Example: Someone with no obvious disability asks for an accessible parking space – request that he document both that he has a disability and his disability-related need for the parking.]

HUD and the U.S. Department of Justice have indicated that the documentation that can be requested is a letter of verification from a doctor or other medical professional, or other qualified third party who, in their professional capacity, has knowledge about the person's disability and the need for reasonable accommodation. Do not ask for specific information about the disability or for medical records!

Interactive Process – The accommodation/modification process should be an interactive discussion between the housing provider and the applicant or resident. In most cases, the person with a disability knows best what accommodation or modification will meet his or her needs. If the person's proposal is not feasible, the housing provider can suggest alternative accommodations that may meet the resident's needs.

56. How do we know if an accommodation or modification request is “reasonable”? When can we refuse a request?

An accommodation or modification is reasonable if:

- it is related to the resident’s disability needs
- is not an undue administrative and financial burden for the housing provider
- does not fundamentally alter the nature of the provider’s operations.

Undue Burden – The request must not impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the housing provider. The determination of undue financial and administrative burden must be made on a case-by-case basis involving various factors, such as the cost of the requested accommodation, the financial resources of the provider, the benefits that the accommodation would provide to the requester, and the availability of alternative accommodations that would effectively meet the requester’s disability-related needs. [Example: An applicant who uses a walker prefers a third-story rental in a older walk-up building – the housing provider does not have to install an elevator if such a modification is cost-prohibitive.]

Fundamental Alteration – The requested accommodation or modification must not require the housing provider to make a fundamental alteration in the essential nature of the provider’s operations. [Example: A resident with a disability cannot do his own housekeeping and the housing provider does not supply housekeeping for residents. A request for such services is not reasonable.]

Refusing a request – When a housing provider refuses a requested accommodation because it is not reasonable, the provider should discuss with the requester whether an alternative accommodation would effectively address the person’s disability-related needs. If an alternative accommodation would effectively meet the person’s needs and is reasonable, the provider must grant it.

A failure to reach an agreement on an accommodation request is in effect a decision by the housing provider not to grant the requested accommodation. Someone who was denied an accommodation may file a fair housing complaint to challenge that decision.

Direct Threat – Fair housing laws do not provide protection for a person with a disability whose tenancy would constitute a direct threat to the health or safety of others, or would result in substantial physical damage to the property of others, unless the threat can be eliminated or significantly reduced by reasonable accommodation.

To establish direct threat, a housing provider needs recent, objective evidence of behavior that puts others at risk of harm. Even someone who is considered a direct threat or who has caused substantial property damage may request a reasonable accommodation during the eviction process by presenting information that he or she has taken steps to prevent future harm. The housing provider has a duty to consider the reasonable accommodation before taking action.

57. Do we have to provide accessible parking spaces?

Resident parking – If parking is provided for residents, it is a reasonable accommodation to provide reserved accessible spaces for disabled residents.

- Use the standard accommodations process for accessible parking requests. If a resident has a state disabled parking permit, this is generally sufficient proof of the need for a reserved accessible parking space.
- Many people who need an accessible parking space don't need an extra-wide space with an access aisle – they often need only a regular-size parking space nearest to their front door or on the most accessible route to the front door. Discuss specific parking needs with the resident.
- Even if parking spaces are not normally assigned, provide a reserved parking space to a resident with a disability.
- Post a sign at the head of the parking space saying the spot is reserved, so that other people do not park there.
- Strictly enforce a resident's reserved accessible parking space, and be prompt in responding to complaints when others park there. Let vendors know these spaces are off limits.

Guest parking – If parking is provided near the rental office or for guests, some of those spaces must be accessible.

- Locate at least one accessible guest parking space near an on-site rental office, with an accessible route from the parking to the office.
- Guest parking is subject to ADA Title III rules, which require that at least 2% of all guest spaces in each lot meet access requirements and be designated with appropriate signage. These spaces must be at least 96" wide and must have an adjacent access aisle at least 60" wide. An access aisle can be shared between two accessible parking spaces. At least one of these spaces must be van accessible, with a 96" access aisle.
- Strictly enforce accessible guest parking spaces, and be prompt in responding to complaints when others park there. Let vendors know these spaces are off limits.

Cooperative housing and condominiums – Sometimes a governing board or owners group has only limited control over parking spaces. Boards should assist within their means to the person seeking a parking accommodation. If another resident owns the desired space, the two owners can negotiate a swap.

58. What do we need to know about service animals?

When an applicant or resident who has a disability requests to live with a service animal, follow the usual accommodation process. It is a reasonable accommodation to allow residents to live with service animals that meet their disability-related needs.

- Some fair housing laws define a service animal as "any animal that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability." Other fair housing laws define them as "an animal that does work, performs tasks or provides medically necessary support for the benefit of an individual with a disability." King County's fair housing law also includes "therapeutic companion" animals.
- Service animals are **not** pets. A person with a disability uses a service animal as an auxiliary aid – similar to the use of a cane, crutches or wheelchair. Fair housing laws require that service animals be permitted despite "no pet" rules.
- Owners of service animals should not be charged pet deposits or fees. General cleaning or damage deposits can be charged, if all residents are similarly charged. A resident with a service animal is liable for any damage the animal causes.
- While the most common service animals are dogs, they may be other species, such as cats, monkeys, birds or other animals.
- Service animals may be any breed, size or weight. Do not apply pet size or weight limitations to service animals.
- Service animals need no special licenses or visible identification. Some owners of service animals choose to put special collars or harnesses on their animals. If city or county laws require pet licenses for dogs and cats, rental management can require service dogs or cats to be licensed. In some cases, such licenses are free or discounted for service animals. [Note: If management does not require licenses for pet dogs and cats, then licenses cannot be required for dogs or cats that are service animals.]
- Service animals need no "certification". There are no state or national standards for certifying service animals, and no government agencies provide certification.
- A person may train his or her own service animal.
- Because service animals provide different types of assistance, in some cases a person with a disability may require more than one service animal.
- The service animal's owner is responsible for the animal's care, should observe leash laws, properly dispose of animal waste, and ensure the animal behaves around others and does not break tenancy rules (such as noise rules).

For more detailed information, see the Sample Policy on Service Animals available from the Fair Housing Partners of Washington State.

59. What about other residents or staff who are afraid of or allergic to animals?

If a staff member or another resident has a fear of or a minor allergy to dogs or other animals, this is not a disability, so they have no right to an accommodation.

In rare situations, a person's allergy is so severe that contact with an animal may cause respiratory distress. That person may request an accommodation, which must be provided, if reasonable. [Example: It may be necessary to move the allergic person or the animal owner elsewhere.]

60. What else should we know about reasonable modifications?

Where it is reasonable, permission for a modification may be conditioned on the following.

- The resident provides a reasonable description of the proposed modification(s), reasonable assurances that the construction will be done in a workmanlike manner, and agrees to obtain any required building permits.
- The resident agrees to restore the premises to the condition that existed before the modification, reasonable wear and tear excepted. Restoration is not needed when the modification would not interfere with the next resident's use and enjoyment of the premises. [Example: A narrow door is widened and a closet clothes rod is lowered. Upon move-out, the rod should be replaced to its original height, but the widened door can remain.]

Do not require an increased security deposit for residents who wish to make modifications. If it is necessary to ensure that funds will be available to pay for the restorations at the end of the tenancy, the housing provider may negotiate that the resident pay into an interest bearing escrow account, over a reasonable period, an amount of money not to exceed the cost of the restorations. The interest in the account accrues to the benefit of the resident.

61. Who pays for disability accommodations and modifications?

The housing provider is responsible for ensuring general access to the facility and meeting minimum accessibility standards. Under fair housing laws, a housing provider is required to bear accommodation costs that do not amount to an undue financial and administrative burden. Most reasonable accommodations are no or low cost; however, a housing provider may need to spend money to provide legally required accommodations. Housing providers may not require people with disabilities to pay extra fees or deposits as a condition of receiving a reasonable accommodation or modification.

Generally, the resident will bear the expenses of making reasonable structural modifications to a property. However, if the property receives federal funds, the housing provider usually pays, unless there is financial and administrative hardship.

For more information about disability rights and responsibilities, see:

- HUD Disability Rights and Resources, www.hud.gov/offices/ftheo/disabilities
- Joint Statement of the U.S. Dept. of HUD and the Dept. of Justice, “Reasonable Accommodations Under the Fair Housing Act”, www.hud.gov/offices/ftheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf
- Joint Statement of the U.S. Dept. of HUD and the Dept. of Justice, “Reasonable Modifications Under the Fair Housing Act”, www.usdoj.gov/crt/housing/fairhousing/reasonable_modifications_mar08.pdf
- HUD, “Disability Rights in Housing”, www.hud.gov/offices/ftheo/disabilities/inhousing.cfm
- HUD, “Insurance Policy Restrictions as a Defense for Refusals to Make a Reasonable Accommodation”, www.fairhousing.com/include/media/pdf/insuranceguidance.pdf

Section D: Accessibility Requirements

62. What are the benefits of accessible housing?

Accessibility is not only mandated by federal and state laws – it makes a housing property more marketable and benefits everyone. When housing is accessible, applicants, current residents, and guests (with or without disabilities) have a safer and more convenient environment. Accessibility features also allow housing providers to adapt to the changing needs of their residents, many of whom wish to age in place.

63. Are there building codes that comply with HUD access guidelines?

HUD recognizes ten “safe harbors” for compliance with the Fair Housing Act’s design and construction requirements. For detailed information, see www.fairhousingfirst.org. Information about these safe harbors as well as HUD’s policy for their use may be found in the “Report of HUD Review of the Fair Housing Accessibility Requirements in the 2006 International Building Code,” online at www.hud.gov/offices/ftheo/disabilities/modelcodes/IBC-Notice.pdf.

64. What are the accessibility standards for rental housing?

Housing built before 1976 – Title III of the ADA applies to public areas at the community (parking lots, rental offices, community rooms rented to the public, and routes of travel from public transportation to those areas). Under this law, housing providers should remove barriers that impede the access or use of these areas for disabled people where such removal is “readily achievable” – easily accomplishable

and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense. Whether an action is readily achievable is determined on a case-by-case basis, considering the nature and cost of the action needed, and the overall financial resources of the housing provider. If additions or alterations to the community are planned, refer to state and federal codes for new construction.

Housing with four or more units, constructed for first occupancy on or after March 13, 1991 – Under the FHA, all rentals in an elevator building must be accessible and all ground floor rentals in a non-elevator building must be accessible.

These buildings must have:

1. an accessible entrance on an accessible route
2. accessible public and common use areas, including parking areas, curb ramps, passenger loading areas, building lobbies, lounges, halls and corridors, elevators, public restrooms, rental or sales offices, drinking fountains or water coolers, mailboxes, laundry rooms, community and exercise rooms, swimming pools, playgrounds, recreation facilities, nature trails, etc.
3. usable doors
4. accessible routes into and through the dwelling unit
5. accessible light switches, electrical outlets, and environmental controls
6. reinforced walls in the bathroom to allow later installation of grab bars and
7. usable kitchens and bathrooms.

For more HUD information about disability access, see:

- Fair Housing Accessibility First (a HUD-funded education program that helps home builders and architects design and construct housing that meets the FHA accessibility requirements), www.fairhousingfirst.org
- “Fair Housing Act Design Manual,” www.huduser.org/publications/destech/fairhousing.html
- “Accessibility Requirements for Buildings,” www.hud.gov/offices/ftheo/disabilities/accessibilityR.cfm



Chapter Five

Families with Children

Section A: Welcoming Families with Children

65. What is a family with children?

Families with children include:

- households that have one or more children under the age of 18
- a parent, step-parent, adoptive parent, guardian, foster parent or custodian of a minor child
- a pregnant woman or someone in the process of acquiring legal custody of a child.

Families with children are a protected class under fair housing laws, which refer to this group as “familial status” and “parental status”. Fair housing laws make it illegal to refuse to rent or sell to a family because they have children. These laws also make it illegal to subject families with children to different terms and conditions of tenancy, harsher rules, or restrictions on the use of common areas.

66. Can we say “Families Welcome” in our advertising and on our community signage? Should we avoid certain words or phrases?

It is okay to market to families with children. Indicating that they are welcome in a community does not deny any other protected class the opportunity to apply for housing.

In print advertising, avoid words or phrases such as “adult community” or “perfect for mature professionals”, which reflect a preference for residents without children. When discussing a rental with an applicant family, do not point out that there is no on-site play area or that the community is on a busy street, unless this information is given to all applicants.

Communities that qualify under the “Housing for Older Persons Act” are exempt from the requirement to rent to families with children. If they choose to do so, they can advertise that children under 18 are not allowed as residents. See Chapter Six.

67. Can we discourage a family with kids from renting if our second floor apartments have unsafe balconies and no window screens?

No. Safety concerns are not a valid reason to deny housing to families with children. If an unsafe condition exists on the property, consider making it safe for all residents to avoid general liability for injuries. If that is not feasible, point out safety concerns to every applicant, not just families with children.

Also, HUD guidance states that it violates the Fair Housing Act for a housing provider to deny a family the opportunity to live in a dwelling that has not undergone lead hazard control.

68. We've had problems with teenagers causing property damage. Can we refuse to rent to families with teens or charge them a higher damage deposit?

No. Familial status protections apply to all children under the age of 18. Don't single out a certain age group of children, such as teens. Under some local fair housing laws, this would be age discrimination as well. Making a generalization based on the actions of some residents (in this case teenagers) and creating a blanket rule based on that generalization will likely violate fair housing laws.

69. We run criminal background checks on our adult applicants. Can we run them on teenagers too?

Fair housing laws may be violated if a rule is applied that only affects families with children, or when a neutral policy that is applied to all residents adversely impacts families with children. [Example: Requiring screenings for children could subject a family to additional fees, which would make the application process more burdensome for them.] If a housing provider has a policy of screening juveniles only in certain properties and/or neighborhoods, an issue of race or national origin discrimination might be raised. If the housing is in a jurisdiction where age is a protected class, such screening may constitute age discrimination.

70. Is it okay to refer families with kids to a building near the playground and to have another quiet building for residents without children?

No. This type of segregation is called "steering" and it is illegal. If a housing provider were to designate certain buildings as "non-family" housing, a family might be denied a place to live until a rental became available in the "family" building. All applicants should be shown any available rentals at the community. Let them decide where they would like to live.

If a resident asks that a nearby apartment not be rented to a household with children because they might be too noisy, explain that rental decisions are not made based on protected class, such as familial status.

71. We told a couple with a teenage son and daughter they must take a three-bedroom apartment, so their kids don't share the same bedroom. Is that okay?

No. Denying a two-bedroom rental to a family because they have children of opposite sexes, or requiring them to rent a larger apartment, is a direct violation of fair housing laws based on both familial status and sex.

Section B: Occupancy Standards and Surcharges

72. What is an occupancy standard? Do we need one?

Fair housing laws allow housing providers to establish reasonable limits on the number of occupants allowed in each rental. However, when a housing provider sets a policy that unreasonably limits the number of occupants, it affects families with children more severely than households without children. Establishing appropriate occupancy standards can reduce the risk of violating fair housing laws.

73. We heard that an occupancy standard of two-per-bedroom or “two plus one” is okay. Is that true?

HUD has stated that a two-person-per-bedroom occupancy standard is generally reasonable. However, this standard is not absolute, and other considerations should be kept in mind. It is best to review a number of factors to determine whether an occupancy standard is overly restrictive, such as the size of bedrooms and the rental unit, the configuration of the unit, the age of children, other physical limitations of the housing, and local zoning codes or laws.

74. How can we establish a reasonable occupancy standard?

One critical factor in establishing an occupancy standard is the zoning or building occupancy code that applies to the housing community. Measure the rooms in each rental unit and apply the local building code. If a restrictive occupancy standard is set, be prepared to substantiate legitimate business-related factors that led to the standard, such as the age or condition of the dwelling and its accompanying systems (sewer, septic, electric, water, etc.).

For more information about occupancy standards, see:

- HUD “Keating memo” – www.hudclips.org/sub_nonhud/cgi/pdf/33568.pdf
- Washington State Human Rights Commission guidance memo on occupancy standards – www.hum.wa.gov/fairhousing/standards.htm
- Local zoning codes – www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/occupancy.htm

75. Is it okay to charge a base rent for up to three residents, plus \$50 per month for each additional occupant?

Fees or surcharges for extra occupants have a greater negative effect on families with children than on households without children. If an extra amount is charged, it must be based on actual increased utilities use or other legitimate business costs. Many communities have installed individual utility meters to monitor costs directly.

Section C: Family Friendly Rules and Regulations

76. Can our rules say “children cannot ride their bikes on the walkways”?

Rules of conduct that apply only to children are unlawful under local, state and federal fair housing laws. If the goal is to ban bicycle riding on the walkways, the rule must apply to all residents, regardless of age. The fair housing agencies welcome calls from housing providers with questions regarding the phrasing of resident rules.

77. Is it okay to have rules such as “parents are responsible for damage done by their children” and “parents must supervise their children at all times”?

No. These rules specifically target families with children. Most leases and rental agreements hold residents responsible for damages caused by their guests and their household. If tenancy rules repeat this point, do not single out children. Whenever a rule applies to all minors, it likely violates fair housing laws, because “children” includes kids from birth to 17 years of age. Common areas that are available to residents for recreation, such as a grassy area, must also be available to children for play. Consider why each resident rule is needed. For safety reasons, some areas, such as a pool, fitness room, dumpster area or parking lot, may warrant supervision of very young children by an adult.

78. Can we set a curfew so kids don’t loiter and cause problems at night?

General tenancy rules that outline quiet hours and limit noise must be applicable to all residents. It is okay to restrict all residents from certain common areas at certain times. [Example: No residents in the pool between 10 pm and 7 am.] Fair housing laws do not permit curfews for children only. In some situations, common areas can be restricted for children of certain ages for safety reasons (see below) and under HOPA regulations (see Chapter Six).

79. Our pool rules include adult swim hours and require that swimmers under 18 have an adult present. Is that okay?

Pool rules should be reasonable for all residents to use and enjoy, including children. Fair housing laws do not permit “adult” swim hours. One alternative is to designate a lap swim time at certain hours of the day, open to all residents.

It is helpful to use existing health and safety laws as guidelines for setting age restrictions. Washington Administrative Code states that when no lifeguard or attendant is present at a pool, children 12 years or younger must have a responsible adult (18 or older) present (WAC 246-260-100). This law permits children between the ages of 13-17 to swim with at least one other person present who is 13 or older. [Example: Two 13 year olds could swim together without any adult present – this is the buddy system, where one can rescue or call for help if necessary.]

80. Do fair housing laws allow us to require that children have an adult present when using the hot tub or sauna?

Any rule excluding everyone under 18 years old without an adult present would likely be too strict. However, some areas might be dangerous for very young children, such as saunas or hot tubs. The Consumer Product Safety Commission and other safety organizations state that children under age six should not use spas or hot tubs, and children between 6-12 years should have an adult with them when using a hot tub or whirlpool, and should not stay for longer than 5-10 minutes at a time.

Washington state law requires "age and developmentally appropriate supervision of any child that uses hot tubs, swimming pools, spas, and other man-made and natural bodies of water", and states "All spa pool facilities must have signs ... cautioning that children under the age of six should not use a spa pool" (WAC 388-148-0170 and 246-260-131). If the community's spa or hot tub rules are in the range of these age guidelines, fair housing laws will likely consider them reasonable.

81. Is it okay to set age limits for use of our fitness room equipment?

Yes, because some fitness equipment may not be safe for small children. When setting age limits, it is helpful to look at industry standards, because there are no state or federal laws that state the age of people who can safely use weight training equipment. Fitness centers managed by local governments and private businesses allow some children under age 18 to use weight training equipment. Many fitness centers permit children aged 15-17 to use fitness equipment without adult supervision, some require adult supervision for 13-15 year old children, and few allow anyone under 13 to use their facilities. Equipment manufacturers' height and weight recommendations may also provide reasonable guidance. If the community's fitness room rules are in the range of these age guidelines, fair housing laws will likely consider them reasonable.

Remember, there is a difference between rules for equipment use and rules for who can enter the room. Children should be permitted to accompany their parents or a responsible adult, so long as they don't touch the equipment or cause disturbances for others. [Examples: A dad works out while his 5 year old sits quietly to the side with a coloring book. A mom works out while her baby sleeps in a carrier nearby.]



Chapter Six

Other Protected Classes

Section A: Housing for Older Persons

82. What is the Housing for Older Persons Act? What kinds of housing does HOPA cover?

The Housing for Older Persons Act (HOPA) is an amendment to the federal Fair Housing Act. Under this law, a community that qualifies for the housing for older persons exemption can refuse to rent to families with children, provided it meets certain requirements.

Three types of housing qualify under HOPA:

1. HUD Secretary designated elderly housing
2. housing for residents who are 62 or older, whether private or assisted
3. housing intended and operated for occupancy by residents who are 55 years of age or older. For 55 or older housing, the following criteria must be met:
 - At least 80% of the occupied rentals are occupied by at least one person who is 55 years of age or older
 - The owner or management of the housing facility/community must publish and adhere to policies and procedures that demonstrate an intent to provide housing for persons 55 or older and
 - The facility/community complies with rules issued by the HUD Secretary for verification of occupancy through reliable surveys and affidavits.

HOPA covers housing communities or facilities that are governed by a common set of rules, regulations or restrictions. Typical examples include: a condominium association, a cooperative, a property governed by homeowners or resident association, a municipally zoned area, a leased property under common private ownership, a manufactured housing community, a mobile home park.

The following are not covered by HOPA:

- a portion of a single building
- a duplex
- a group of single family houses dispersed throughout a geographical area

83. How can we show our intent to operate as a 55+ property?

It should be clear to anyone driving by, calling about, or living at the community that it is a 55 or older property.

- Any signage or printed material should include HOPA language stating that it is a “55+ Community” or an “Age 55 or Older Housing Community” or similar language.
- When advertising or describing the community to applicants, be certain they know that it is intended for occupancy by at least one person age 55 or older per unit. Avoid using phrases such as “adult living” or “adult community” or telling applicants that it is an “adult only” property.
- Ensure the lease provisions, rules, regulations and any written materials referring to the community indicate that it is a 55 or older property.

A housing provider should not use the word “adult” or “adult community” in advertising or when describing the community to prospective renters.

84. How do we calculate the 80% occupancy requirement?

HOPA requires that at least 80% of the occupied units must be occupied by at least one person 55 or older. The remaining 20% of the units may be occupied by persons under 55, if the facility/community so chooses. When calculating the 80% occupancy requirement, housing providers do not need to include:

- units that have been continuously occupied by the same household since September 13, 1988, that did not and do not currently contain at least one person over the age of 55
- units occupied by employees under 55 years old, who provide substantial management and maintenance services to the community
- units occupied solely by persons who are necessary or essential to provide medical and/or health and nursing care services as a reasonable accommodation to residents
- unoccupied units

A 55 or older owner or tenant might be temporarily absent from the housing without affecting the exemption status. [Example: The occupant is on vacation, hospitalized, or absent for a season without affecting the community’s exempt status. The occupant may allow a relative or house sitter under 55 to live in the unit during this

absence.] The unit would still be counted as part of the 80% as long as the housing is not rented out, the owner/tenant returns on a periodic basis, and maintains legal and financial responsibility for the upkeep of the dwelling.

85. How should we obtain age verification?

HOPA requires that a housing community compile a list of occupants and verify the ages of the occupants. Reliable age verification documentation includes a birth certificate, a driver's license, a passport, immigration card, military identification, or any other state, local, national or international documentation, provided it contains current information about the age or birth of the person. Some other documentation is considered reliable, such as a self-certification signed by an adult member of the household asserting that at least one occupant in the unit is 55 years of age or older.

HOPA requires that a housing community survey its resident lists every two years to ensure that it meets the 80% requirement. A community's failure to survey or resurvey its list of occupants does not demonstrate intent to provide housing for older persons, and could jeopardize the community's status as 55+ housing.

86. May we impose an age limitation more restrictive than that required by HOPA and qualify for the 55 or older exemption?

Yes. For example, a housing facility/community may require:

- that at least 80% of the units be occupied by at least one person 60 years of age or older
- that 100% of the units are occupied by at least one person 55 or older
- that 80% of the units be occupied exclusively by persons aged 55 or older

However, before establishing more restrictive occupancy policies, check on state and local laws that may prohibit discrimination based on age (such as the King County Fair Housing ordinance).

87. We meet HOPA requirements, and permit families with children to occupy up to 20% of our rentals. Can our rules say children under 18 are not allowed in certain areas?

Yes. If a 55+ property qualifies under HOPA, it is exempt from the Fair Housing Act's prohibition against discrimination based on familial status. The community may restrict children under 18 from benefits of the community, or otherwise treat their households differently than senior households. However, the community cannot discriminate against any resident or potential resident based on other protected classes, such as race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, etc.

If the community is a project-based Section 8 elderly or elderly/disabled property, management may not exclude otherwise eligible families with children.

88. Our housing community does not meet the 80% occupancy requirement. How can we qualify for HOPA status?

There are two ways to establish housing for older persons – new construction and conversion.

- “Newly constructed housing” is that which has been entirely unoccupied for at least 90 days prior to reoccupancy, due to renovation or rehabilitation. Once the housing reopens and can meet all three HOPA requirements covered on the previous slide, it is HOPA housing.

The housing community is permitted to discriminate against families with children until 25% of its units are occupied. If, at that time, the community does not have a resident 55 years or older in at least 80% of occupied units, then the community may not discriminate against families with children.

- An existing community can convert to housing for older persons if 80% of its units become occupied by at least one person 55 or older. A community can't reserve unoccupied units for older persons, or advertise itself as housing for older persons, or evict families with children in order to reach the 80% threshold. If a family with children seeks to occupy a vacant unit before the facility has met all of the requirements needed to become housing for older persons, the family must be allowed to live there. The facility may not make existing families with children feel unwelcome or otherwise discourage them from continuing to reside there. However, nothing prevents the offering of positive incentives that might lead some families to seek housing elsewhere. If the community achieves the 80% threshold without discriminating against families with children, it may then be considered a HOPA community.

For more information about HOPA, see:

- HOPA Act, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=104_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ76.104.pdf
- HOPA Final Rule, http://www.hud.gov/offices/ftheo/library/hopa_final.pdf
- Q&A About HOPA, <http://www.hud.gov/offices/ftheo/library/hopa95.pdf>
- Conversion to HOPA, www.fairhousing.com/include/media/pdf/conversiontohousingforolderpersons.pdf

Section B: Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

89. What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is a protected class under state and local fair housing laws, which define it as actual or perceived male or female heterosexuality, bisexuality, or homosexuality. The Washington Law Against Discrimination and some local fair housing laws include gender expression/identity under this protected class.

90. What should management do when a gay resident complains that his neighbor called him derogatory names?

All residents, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender residents, have a right to enjoy their housing without being subjected to harassment. Housing providers should take immediate action to stop harassment that is based on protected class. When someone complains about harassment, conduct a thorough investigation, keep in contact with the complaining resident, and if the investigation reveals harassment based on protected class, take appropriate steps to stop it. Monitor for retaliation against anyone who filed a complaint or was a witness. (See Chapter Three, Section B) For more information, see the Sample Policy on Tenant on Tenant Harassment available from the Fair Housing Partners of Washington State. Depending on the severity, certain types of harassment may also be considered hate crimes.

For more information about sexual orientation, see:

- Washington State Human Rights Commission, “Guide to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Discrimination, and Washington State Laws: Self-Assessment Checklist for Compliance and Suggested Best Practices for Real Estate and Housing Transactions”, available online at www.hum.wa.gov/documents/FairHousing/Self-Assessment-%20Housing%20and%20Real%20Esate.pdf
- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), www.pflag.org
- Stonewall, “Frequently Asked Questions”, www.stonewall.org.uk/information_bank/frequently_asked_questions/default.asp

91. What is gender identity?

Gender identity is a protected class under state and local fair housing laws. These laws define gender identity as a person's identity, expression, or physical characteristics, whether or not traditionally associated with one's biological sex or one's sex at birth. This includes men, women, and those who identify as transsexual or transgendered (and one local law includes transvestite), and includes a person's mannerisms and dress.

Gender identity is one's internal sense of male or female. Some people go through a medical or social process to transition from one gender to another (i.e., male to female or female to male). A person's gender identity does not determine a person's sexual orientation. Transgender people can be heterosexual, bisexual, or gay/lesbian.

Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity (sense of themselves as male or female) or gender expression differs from that usually associated with their birth sex. Transsexuals often seek medical interventions, such as hormones and surgery, to make their bodies as congruent as possible with their real gender. The process of transitioning from one gender to the other is called sex reassignment or gender reassignment.

Some people crossdress. Crossdressers include men and women of all sexual orientations, including people who are heterosexual. Historically, some people used the term "transvestite". This term is now considered by many people to be offensive. Crossdressers generally have an identity that matches their birth sex.

92. What do we call a transgender resident – him, her, Mr., Ms.?

It is important to have one's gender recognized and validated, and many people find it extremely disrespectful to be called by a pronoun or name inconsistent with their gender presentation. Some transgender people obtain a court ordered name or gender change, which is reflected on their identification documents. Management should never disclose a resident's gender non-conformity or transgender status to others.

Use names and pronouns that are appropriate to the person's gender presentation and identity; if in doubt, ask the person's preference. An intentional and persistent refusal to respect a person's gender identity may be viewed as harassment. Also, management should take steps to ensure that residents do not harass other residents because of their transgender status. [Example: Management must take action to remedy the situation when a male-to-female transgender resident reports that a neighbor made verbal slurs and made fun of the resident's transgender status.]

93. One of our residents is transitioning from male to female. Management doesn't have a problem with her using the women's room at the community center, but another resident expressed concern. What should we do?

Usually, the simplest solution is the best – use the restroom matching the current gender presentation. If the transgender resident "presents" as a female, she should use the women's room. Some transgender people do not feel safe in either the men's or women's restrooms because of harassment from others. Where possible, provide a single stall restroom for use by anyone who desires increased privacy. Such a facility would also make it easier for transgender people and others to change clothes for activities such as swimming. However, no one should be required to use a unisex restroom either as a matter of policy or due to harassment by others. Those

who object to transgender people using the restroom with which they identify may simply not be aware of the social and medical process that transitioning individuals undergo.

For more information about gender identity, see:

- American Psychological Association, “Answers to Your Questions About Transgender Individuals and Gender Identity,” www.apa.org/topics/transgender.html
- Human Rights Campaign, “Coming Out as Transgender,” www.nctequality.org/Resources/Coming_Out_as_Transgender.pdf
- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Transgender Network (TNET), www.pflag.org/TNET.tnet.0.html

Section C: Participation in the Section 8 Program

94. What is “Section 8” and how does the program work?

The Section 8 program, also known as the Housing Choice Voucher Program, is a federal government program that assists very low-income families, the elderly and those with disabilities to afford housing in the private housing market. The program helps low-income households by paying a portion of a unit’s rental cost. Local housing authorities administer the subsidy provided by HUD.

The Section 8 program works with thousands of housing providers in Washington. In the program, housing providers can screen and select residents based on their normal procedures and can evict Section 8-assisted residents if they violate the lease. Contact the local Housing Authority to learn more about the program.

When a Section 8 resident locates an available rental house or apartment, the Housing Authority inspects the dwelling to ensure that it meets an acceptable level of health and safety. When the residence passes inspection, a contract and one-year lease are signed and rent payments begin. The Housing Authority pays their portion of the rent directly to the housing provider each month, and the resident pays his or her portion of the rent to equal the total rent charged for that unit.

The resident is expected to comply with the lease and program requirements, to pay rent on time, and to maintain the apartment in good condition. The housing provider is expected to provide services according to the lease and to maintain the apartment in a decent, safe and sanitary manner throughout the duration of the tenancy.

95. Do we have to rent to someone with a Section 8 voucher?

If applicants are qualified, it doesn't make good business sense to turn them away just because they have a section 8 voucher.

In the City of Seattle, City of Bellevue, and unincorporated King County, fair housing laws protect those who participate in the Section 8 program, who cannot be denied rental just because they have a Housing Choice Voucher.

96. We only offer six-month leases and we require that applicants make three times the monthly rental amount, so can we turn voucher holders away?

There is no requirement to alter to normal rental policies to accommodate the Section 8 program, though housing providers can choose to offer one-year leases to Section 8 voucher holders only. Also, it does not make sense to apply a "three times the rent" income standard to a Section 8 participant, who will not be responsible for the full rent amount. It would be more reasonable to require they make three times the amount of their portion of the rent.

In the City of Seattle, City of Bellevue, and unincorporated King County, those who participate in the Section 8 Program are protected against discrimination. In these areas, someone cannot be refused rental just because they have a Section 8 voucher. The Section 8 program involves an initial one-year lease, so a housing provider must waive a six-month lease limit for voucher holders in these jurisdictions.

Although an income requirement is a neutral policy that is applied consistently, it has the effect of making rental impossible for all Section 8 voucher holders. These policies have a "disparate impact" would be considered discriminatory. It does not make sense to apply this standard to a Section 8 participant who will not be responsible for the full rent amount.

97. Can we increase our rent amounts to match the maximum amount allowed on a new applicant's voucher?

Housing providers can only request a rent amount equal to that of their other rentals. A Section 8 unit cannot be charged more than is charged for all other similar rentals. If this is an owner's only rental, then the owner may charge an amount equal to other similar rentals in the area. The Housing Authority will perform a "rent reasonable" test prior to approve the rent, and will not allow rents outside the comparable figures.

98. If market rates go up, can we raise the rent for a current resident with a voucher?

A housing provider has the right to request an increase in rent at the end of each lease term. As with the initial rent, the Housing Authority will perform a "rent reasonable" test prior to approving the rent and will not allow rents outside the comparable figures.

Section D: Veteran/Military Status

99. Who is included in Veteran/Military Status?

An honorably discharged veteran or an active or reserve member in any branch of the armed forces of the United States, including the National Guard, Coast Guard, and Armed Forces reserves. State law prohibits discrimination on the basis of veteran or military status only when a discharge has been honorable. (There are four types of military discharges other than honorable – general, undesirable, bad conduct, and dishonorable.)

There are a number of federal protections on the basis of veteran status. For example, the federal Service Members Civil Relief Act protects service members from eviction while the service member is in a period of military service [50 U.S.C. App. §531 (1)(a)]. A landlord should not deny rental to a service member or reservist based on the assumption that he or she would be called to active duty before the terms of the lease are completed. Similarly, a real estate agent should not steer or persuade a service member to buy a home in a certain area simply because of its proximity to a military base or other military families. Housing providers should be aware that federal laws do not always distinguish among the various types of discharges.

100. As a housing provider, what should I know about veteran and military status discrimination?

With the large number of veterans returning from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places where the American military serves, it is important to protect these individuals from harmful, preconceived, and stereotyped notions about veterans and people serving in the military. A housing provider must not negatively consider veteran or military status when making housing-related decisions. In addition, housing policies and practices must not have an adverse impact on veterans or those in the military by preventing a housing provider from selling or renting to veterans or those currently in the military.

Many veterans are protected by fair housing law's prohibition against discrimination based on disability. As a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a number of veterans are returning to the United States with disabilities. These disabilities are not only physical, but also include mental conditions such as traumatic brain injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Even though people with these conditions do not show physical signs of injury, these conditions are considered disabilities under most fair housing laws. Housing providers should not discriminate against individuals returning home from war or other military service based on veteran status or disability status. In addition, veterans and service members may require reasonable accommodations for their disabling conditions (see Chapter Four).