Your Right to
Equal Opportunity Housing

State of Connecticut
Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, established in 1943 as the Inter-Racial Commission, was the first public civil rights agency in the country. Its enabling statue in 1943 directed the Commission to “investigate the possibilities of affording equal opportunity of profitable employment to all persons.” In 1947, the state enacted the Fair Employment Practices Act which empowered the fledgling Commission to receive, initiate, and investigate employment discrimination complaints.

Prohibitions against housing discrimination began in 1949 with the prohibition of discrimination in public housing. By 1963, the housing law was expanded to protect residents from discrimination based upon race, color, creed, national origin and ancestry in all housing except for owner occupied two family homes. In the years following, the law was further expanded to protect persons from discrimination in housing based upon their having children in the household, their sex, disability, marital status, age, sexual orientation or because of their lawful source of income. The last four classes are not protected under federal law.

The purpose of this brochure is to summarize your right to fair housing. Connecticut’s Discriminatory Housing Practices Act and CHRO’s regulations contain more detail and technical information. If you need further information or would like a copy of the law or regulations, contact CHRO at the following address or visit our website:

State of Connecticut
Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities
Housing Discrimination Unit
25 Sigourney Street
Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 541-3403 or (800) 477-5737 ext. 3403

www.state.ct.us/chro

Connecticut's Discriminatory Housing Practices Act

Connecticut's Discriminatory Housing Practices Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on:

- Race or color
- National origin
- Ancestry
- Creed (Religion)
- Sex
- Marital status
- Age (non-minors)
- Familial status (families with children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians and pregnant women)
- Disability (physical, mental or learning)
- Lawful source of income (income derived from social security, SSI, housing assistance such as Section 8, child support, alimony, public or general assistance)
- Sexual orientation

What Housing Is Covered?

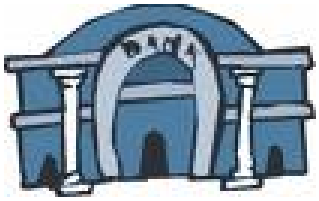
The Act covers most housing. In <u>some</u> circumstances, the Act may exempt owner-occupied buildings with up to four units and housing designed for and occupied by older persons. Other exemptions may apply in certain circumstances.

What Is Prohibited?

In the Sale and Rental of Housing: No one may take any of the following actions based on race, color, national origin, ancestry, creed, marital status, age, familial status, disability, lawful source of income, sex or sexual orientation:

- Refuse to rent or sell housing
- Refuse to negotiate for housing
- Make housing unavailable
- Deny a dwelling
- Set different terms, conditions or privileges for sale or rental of a dwelling
- Provide different housing services or facilities
- Falsely deny housing is available for inspection, sale or rental
- For profit, induce owners to sell or rent (blockbusting)
- Deny anyone access to or membership in a facility or service (such as a multiple listing service) related to the sale or rental of housing, or
- Restrict or attempt to restrict the choices of any buyer or renter (steering)

In Mortgage Lending: No one may take any of the following actions based upon race, color, national origin, ancestry, creed, marital status, age, familiar status, disability, lawful source of income, sex, or sexual orientation:



- Refuse to make a mortgage loan or other loan relating to or secured by residential real estate
- Refuse to provide information regarding loans
- Impose different terms or conditions on a loan
- Discriminate in appraising property
- Refuse to purchase a loan or
- Set different terms or conditions for purchasing a loan

In Addition: It is illegal for anyone to:

- Threaten, coerce, intimidate, or interfere with anyone exercising a fair housing right or assisting others who exercise that right
- Advertise or make any statement that indicates a limitation or preference based on race, color, national origin, ancestry, creed, sex, marital status, age, lawful source of income, familial status, disability or sexual orientation.

Additional Protection
If You Have A Disability

If you or someone associated with you:

- Has a physical or mental disability (including chronic hearing, mobility and visual impairments, chronic alcoholism, chronic mental illness, AIDS, AIDS Related Complex, mental retardation and epilepsy)
- Has a record of such disability or
- Is regarded as having such a disability

Your landlord may not:

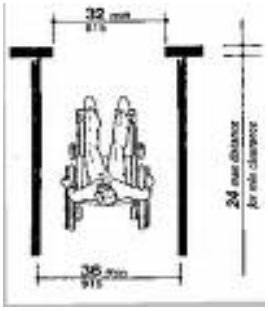
- Refuse to let you make reasonable modifications to your dwelling or common use areas, at your expense, if necessary for the disabled person to use the housing. (Where reasonable, the landlord may permit changes only if you agree to restore the property to its original condition when you move.)
- Refuse to make reasonable accommodations in rules, practices or services if necessary for the disabled person to use the housing.

Example: A building with a “no pets” policy must allow a visually impaired tenant to keep a guide dog.

Example: An apartment complex that offers tenants ample, unassigned parking must honor a request from a mobility-impaired tenant for a reserved parking space near her apartment if necessary to assure that she can have access to her apartment.

Requirements for New Buildings:

In buildings ready for first occupancy **after** March 13, 1991 with an elevator and four or more units:



- Public and common areas must be accessible to persons with disabilities
- Doors and hallways must be wide enough for wheelchairs
- All units must have:
  -An accessible route into and through the unit
  -Accessible light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats, and other environmental controls
  -Reinforced bathroom walls to allow later installation of grab bars
  -Kitchens and bathrooms that can be used by people in wheelchairs

If a building with four or more units has no elevator and will be ready for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, these standards apply to ground floor units.

These requirements for new buildings do not replace any more stringent standards in the State building code or local laws.

Housing Opportunities For Families

Unless a building or community qualifies as housing for older persons, it may not discriminate based on familial status. That is, it may not discriminate against families in which one or more children under age 18 live with:

- A parent
- A person who has legal custody of the child or children or
- The designee of the parent of legal custodian with the parent or custodians written permission

Familial status protection also applies to pregnant women and anyone securing legal custody of a child under 18.

Exemption: Housing for older persons is exempt from the prohibition against familial status or age discrimination if:

- It is determined that it is specifically designed for and occupied by elderly persons under a Federal, State or local government program or
- It is occupied solely by persons who are 62 or older or
- It houses at least one person who is 55 or older in at least 80 percent of the occupied units and adheres to a published policy statement, rules and procedures that demonstrate an intent to house persons who are 55 or older.

If You Think Your Rights Have Been Violated

CHRO is ready to help you with any problem involving housing discrimination. If you think your rights have been violated, contact the CHRO to discuss your situation, to obtain the forms for filing a formal complaint, or to make an appointment for assistance in filing a formal complaint. A formal notarized complaint must be filed no later than 180 days after an alleged violation, but you should file as soon as possible.

What to tell CHRO:

- Your name and address
- The name and address of the person your complaint is against
- The address or other identification of the housing involved
- A short description of the alleged event(s) that caused you to believe that your rights were violated
- The date these events occurred.

Where to Write: Send your inquiry or formal complaint (signed and notarized) to:

State of Connecticut
Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities
Housing Discriminations Unit
25 Sigourney Street
Hartford, CT 06106

Where to Call:

(800) 477-5737 ext. 3403 (Toll free in Conn.)

or

(860) 541-3403

What Happens When You File A Complaint?

CHRO will notify you when it receives your complaint and will normally:

- Notify the alleged violator of your complaint and require an answer be submitted
- Investigate your complaint and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the Act has been violated

Conciliation: CHRO will try to reach an agreement with the person your complaint is against. A conciliation agreement must protect both you and the public interest. If an agreement is signed, CHRO will take no further action on your complaint. However, if CHRO has reasonable cause to believe that a conciliation agreement is breached, CHRO can file suit to enforce the agreement.

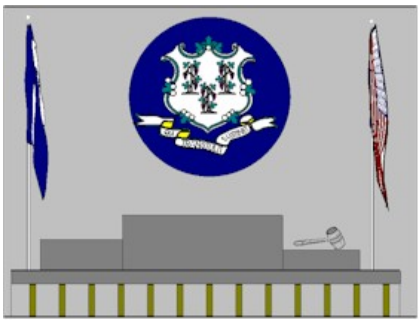
Complaint Referrals: If CHRO has determined that your complaint also alleges a violation of the Federal Fair Housing Act, CHRO will assist you in filing a federal complaint with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

What If You Need Help Quickly?

If you need immediate help to stop a serious problem that is being caused by a violation of the Discriminatory Housing Practices Act, CHRO may be able to assist you as soon as you file a complaint. CHRO may go to court to seek temporary or preliminary relief, pending the outcome of your complaint, if:

- Irreparable harm is likely to occur without CHRO's intervention
- There is substantial evidence that a violation of the Discriminatory Housing Practices Act occurred

Example: A builder agrees to sell a house but, after learning the buyer is black, fails to keep the agreement. The buyer files a complaint with CHRO. The Commission may go to court to prevent a sale to any other buyer until CHRO investigates the complaint.



What Happens After A Complaint Investigation?

After investigating your complaint, CHRO will inform you as to whether there is reasonable cause to believe that discrimination occurred. If reasonable cause is found, your case will be heard in an administrate hearing to begin within 90 days, unless you or the respondent want the case to be heard in Superior Court. Either way, there is no cost to you.

The Administrative Hearing: If your case goes to an administrative hearing, CHRO attorneys will litigate the case on your behalf. You may intervene in the case and be represented by your own attorney if you wish. An Administrative Hearing Officer will consider evidence from you and the respondent. If the Hearing Officer decides that discrimination occurred, the respondent can be ordered:

- To compensate you for actual damages, including humiliation, pain and suffering.
- To provide injunctive relief or other equitable relief, for example to make the housing available to you
- To pay reasonable attorney's fees and costs
- To provide other affirmative relief

State Superior Court: If you or the respondent choose to have your case decided in Sate Superior Court, a CHRO attorney will file a suit and litigate on your behalf. Like the Administrative Hearing Officer, the Superior Court Judge can order relief, and award actual damages, attorney's fees and costs. In addition, the court can award punitive damages and impose civil fines.

In Addition

You may file suit: You may file suit at your expense in State Superior Court within one year of an alleged violation. You may bring suit even after filing a complaint with CHRO if you have not signed a conciliation agreement and CHRO has not started a hearing. A court may award actual and punitive damages and attorney's fees and costs.

Other Tools to Combat Housing Discrimination: If there is noncompliance with the order of a Hearing Officer, CHRO may seek temporary relief, enforcement of the order or a restraining order in Superior Court.

For Further Information

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