

NATIONAL ORIGIN, RELIGION, AND IMMIGRATION STATUS

Protection under the Federal Fair Housing Act

The Federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing, both public and private, based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, and disability. Discrimination based on immigration status is often directly related to national origin or religion.

National origin discrimination involves different treatment in housing or housing-related transactions because of a person's ancestry, ethnicity, birthplace, culture, or language. People cannot lawfully be denied housing opportunities because they or their family are from another country, associate with people from other countries, or participate in customs associated with a particular national origin.

It is illegal for a landlord to treat you differently because of your immigration status, national origin, or religion. That means housing providers cannot:

- refuse to rent to you because you are an immigrant or refugee or because of your religious faith;
- refuse to rent to you because you are not from the United States;
- charge you more rent or a higher security deposit;
- require you to get a cosigner solely because you are an immigrant or refugee or because of your religion;
- tell you not to cook certain foods because of the smell;
- refuse to rent to you because you or some of your family members do not speak English or it is not your primary language;
- tell you that you must speak English when outside of your apartment;
- force you to choose an apartment near other people who are from the same country, speak the same language as you, or are of the same religion;
- enforce rules against you or your family because you are an immigrant or refugee or because of your religion, but not enforce those rules against anyone else;
- steer prospective buyers or renters to or away from specific neighborhoods or buildings;
- provide a different level of service or housing amenities.

Housing providers can ask for identification and conduct credit checks to ensure you can pay rent. Some housing providers may ask whether you are in the country legally, request your green card or visa, or request your Social Security number to verify that you can meet the lease terms. Housing providers, however, cannot use this information to deny an applicant or charge different prices solely based on your national origin, religion, or immigration status.

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It is illegal for a landlord to ask you to identify your religion or to ask you questions about your immigration status because of how you look, talk, or dress.

You are also protected if you are buying a home, attempting to get a mortgage, or in any other housing-related transactions.

Fair housing laws continue to protect you once you live in your home or apartment. A landlord, owner, real estate agent, or other housing professional cannot:

- ask you to remove your head scarf, hijab, burka, keffiyeh, kippah, other religious clothing, or other religious symbols;
- evict you because of your religion, immigration status, or refugee status;
- threaten or harass you because of your religion, immigration status, or refugee status.

Examples of harassment or threats include:

- threatening to report you to the police or immigration authorities because of your immigration status;
- saying you will be deported;
- telling you to go back to your own country;
- painting graffiti or writing/yelling ethnic slurs, including the use of slurs or threats to harm you or your family if you do not move out;
- blocking access to your home, belongings, or property amenities (like a swimming pool or laundry area).

What should I do if I suspect my fair housing rights have been violated?

If you suspect you have been the victim of housing discrimination, please call us toll-free at 1-877-979-3247 to discuss the situation. You can also fill out a contact form on our website (www.fhcmichigan.org). FHC staff will follow up with you to obtain additional information concerning your allegation or complaint of discrimination. We will keep the information you provide confidential. We will not report undocumented immigrants to the authorities.

Retaliation is illegal. Please report any attempt immediately to the FHC.

If you come into contact with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) after filing a complaint with the FHC, you should notify ICE that you are pursuing a fair housing complaint. It is illegal to coerce, intimidate, threaten, or interfere with a person's exercise or enjoyment of rights granted or protected by the Fair Housing Act, including threats to report a person to ICE if they report housing discrimination. The FHC does not inquire about immigration status when investigating housing discrimination claims.

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The Fair Housing Center is a nonprofit organization that provides investigative services (testing), advice, advocacy, conciliation, attorney referrals, and community education for Clinton, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, Shiawassee, and Washtenaw counties. The FHC's mission is to end discrimination in housing and public accommodations and to promote accessible, integrated communities.

Sources

National Fair Housing Alliance, 2017

["Fair Housing Laws Protect Immigrants, Refugees, and People of all Religious Faiths"](#)