

Fair Housing

In Pennsylvania, the right to choosing housing free from discrimination is protected by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, which establishes protections for individuals based on their race, color, religious creed, national origin, ancestry, sex, familial status, age, disability, and use, handling, or training of a guide or support animal for disability. Despite that protection, there are still significant barriers that keep individuals from accessing a home that meets their needs. Here's what you can do about it:

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing is all of our responsibilities.

- **Issue:** While fair housing laws have been in place for over 50 years, significant housing equity issues persist, fostering segregation and housing inequality, which hurts all Pennsylvanians. Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) is a mandate established in the Fair Housing Act of 1968 which requires all recipients of federal funds to take meaningful actions, in addition to combating discrimination, that overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to opportunity, based on protected characteristics. Federal efforts to enforce the AFFH mandate have not made significant progress towards its goals, so Pennsylvania needs to take a leading role in ensuring that state, county, and municipal leaders actively work to break down barriers that prevent residents from achieving fair housing choice.
- **Impact on Protected Classes:** While residents have protections from acts of discrimination, discriminatory housing policies have led to systemic housing inequalities, limiting the supply, availability, and distribution of housing resources, and keeping individuals in protected classes from accessing needed housing.
- **What you can do:** Explore legislation that provides additional accountability to state agencies, local and municipal government to ensure rules and policies with discriminatory effects are not deepening housing inequalities in Pennsylvania.

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Effective state-wide code enforcement will allow individuals and families to live in safe, healthy housing, reducing housing instability and illness, and providing consistency for housing providers who do business in multiple municipalities.

- **Issue:** According to the US Housing Survey, over 234,000 households in PA live in homes with significant health and safety issues, like holes in the roof, lack of functional plumbing, broken heat, and more. These housing conditions can cause serious air quality issues through mold and pest infestations, and long-term health consequences.
- **Impact on Protected Classes:** It's typically people living in housing at the lower end of the housing market that are impacted by these conditions, and who often don't have the resources to move or hold their landlords accountable. We see this impacting individuals in protected classes at a higher rate than the general population.
- **What you can do:** Introduce amendment to the Landlord-Tenant Act of 1951 that would provide effective measures for code enforcement.

Source of Income Protection would greatly expand opportunities within the Housing Choice Voucher program and other housing assistance programs, improving housing mobility and available housing for individuals in protected classes.

- **Issue:** Many housing providers deny rental housing to people who have Housing Choice (Section 8) Vouchers. The Housing Choice Voucher program has been shown to increase housing stability for households with very low income and provide opportunities for households to move to areas of opportunity. Source of Income protections would keep housing providers from automatically denying someone rental housing, based on the type of income or housing assistance they receive.
- **Impact on Protected Classes:** People with disabilities, older adults, single parent female head of households, and households of color are groups who primarily benefit from this program in Pennsylvania. Without having source of income protection, many households struggle to find a landlord who will accept their housing assistance and lose their housing assistance if they cannot find housing in time.
- **What you can do:** Introduce and/or support legislation to add Source of Income as a protected class in the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act.

Want to learn more about how you can take action to support Pennsylvanians' rights to equitable housing? Contact PHRC Director of Fair Housing & Commercial Property, Adrian Garcia: adrgarcia@pa.gov or call the PA Fair Housing Line: (855) 866-5718.

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