



# FAIR HOUSING FOR RENTAL HOMES

A Guide for Renters and Property Owners  
and Managers in the Baltimore Region



Baltimore  
Metropolitan  
Council

The Baltimore Regional Fair Housing Group consists of representatives from Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Harford and Howard Counties, jurisdictions that receive federal housing funds directly from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This booklet is part of the work of the Baltimore Regional Fair Housing Group and its member jurisdictions to affirmatively further the goals of the Fair Housing Act.

The Fair Housing Group thanks Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc., the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, and the Maryland Multi-Housing Association for their review and assistance in compiling this booklet. The Fair Housing Group also thanks HUD for its support under the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) Education and Outreach Initiative.

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The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under a grant with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Government.



Individuals and families looking for a rental home in the Baltimore metropolitan area are protected against discrimination by federal, state, and local laws.

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### **THIS BOOK SERVES THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:**

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It provides general information on:

- The laws that prohibit discrimination in many of the jurisdictions in the Baltimore metropolitan area, and
- Where you can go for more detailed information.

For renters, it provides information on where you can file a complaint.



# FAIR HOUSING PROTECTIONS

The federal Fair Housing Act and state and local laws protect people from many kinds of discrimination. Protections are noted on the table opposite this page. Federal and Maryland protections apply everywhere in Maryland.

PROTECTED CLASS	FEDERAL FAIR HOUSING ACT	MARYLAND CIVIL RIGHTS LAW	CITY OF ANNAPOLIS	ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY	BALTIMORE CITY	BALTIMORE COUNTY	HARFORD COUNTY	HOWARD COUNTY
RACE	●	●	●	No local law - As in other jurisdictions, Federal and Maryland protections apply.**	●	●	●	●
COLOR	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
NATIONAL ORIGIN	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
RELIGION	●	●	●		●	●		●
SEX	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
DISABILITY*	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
FAMILIAL STATUS*	●	●	●		●		●	●
MARITAL STATUS		●	●		●	●	●	●
SEXUAL ORIENTATION		●	●		●	●		●
GENDER IDENTITY*		●			●	●		●
AGE*					●	●	●	●
CREED						●	●	●
OCCUPATION								●
POLITICAL OPINION								●
PERSONAL APPEARANCE								●
SOURCE OF INCOME			●			***		
ANCESTRY						●		

\*More information further in booklet

\*\*Anne Arundel County Executive Order 26 establishes the County Human Relations Commission, which has no statutory enforcement power but whose objective is to receive and refer complaints of discrimination based upon race, creed, color, age, sex, disability, political affiliation, marital status, or national origin.

\*\*\*The City of Baltimore protects some sources of income (alimony and child support), but not others, such as rental assistance.

## WHAT IS PROHIBITED?

A rental property owner or manager is generally prohibited from doing the following based solely on the potential tenant's membership in a protected class identified in the table on page 5:

- Refuse to rent housing
- Refuse to negotiate for housing
- Otherwise make unavailable or deny a dwelling
- Set different terms, conditions, or privileges in renting a dwelling
- Provide different housing services or facilities
- Falsely deny that housing is available for inspection or rental
- For profit, persuade, or try to persuade homeowners to rent (or sell) dwellings by suggesting that people of a particular race, etc. have moved, or are about to move into the neighborhood (blockbusting)
- Attempt to steer persons into or away from neighborhoods or apartment complexes
- Deny any person access to, or membership or participation in, any organization, facility, or service related to the rental of dwellings (such as a listing service), or discriminate against any person in the terms or conditions of such access, membership, or participation.

## WHAT ARE EXCEPTIONS?

In some circumstances, the Fair Housing Act and other laws exempt:

- *Owner-occupied buildings with no more than four units*
- *Single-family housing sold without the use of a broker*
- *Housing operated by organizations and private clubs that limit occupancy to members*
- *Some senior housing facilities and communities are exempt from liability for discrimination based on familial status.*
- *Gender preference may be acceptable if there is a shared kitchen or bath.*

Please contact one of the agencies listed on page 13 for more specific information on any of these exemptions.

## ADDITIONAL PROTECTIONS

No one may:

- *Make, print, or publish any statement, in connection with the rental of a dwelling, which indicates a preference, limitation, or discrimination based on the protected classes listed in the table on page 5. This prohibition applies to single-family and owner-occupied housing that is otherwise often exempt from the laws that prohibit discrimination in housing.*
- *Refuse to consider both applicants' incomes*
- *Threaten, coerce, intimidate, or interfere with anyone exercising a fair housing right or assisting others who exercise the right.*
- *Commit acts of prejudice, violence, harassment, intimidation, or abuse directed against families or individuals or their residential property.*

## FAMILIAL STATUS

In general, familial status protections cover:

- *Households in which one or more children under 18 years old live with:*
  - *A parent*
  - *A person who has legal custody (including guardianship)*
  - *The designee of a parent or legal custodian (designated with written permission)*
- *A pregnant woman*
- *Any person in the process of securing legal custody of a child under 18.*

As a result of this protection, property owners and managers are not allowed to ask tenants or prospective tenants about birth control or family planning practices.

The Fair Housing Act and other laws specifically exempt some senior housing facilities and communities from liability for discrimination based on familial status. (They are not exempt from liability for other forms of housing discrimination.) Please contact one of the agencies listed on page 13 if you need more details on exactly which senior facilities and communities qualify for this exemption.

## ADDITIONAL PROTECTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Fair housing protections generally apply if a person or someone associated with a person:

- *Has a physical or mental disability (including hearing, mobility, and visual impairments, cancer, chronic mental illness, HIV/AIDS, or being in recovery from substance abuse) that substantially limits one or more major life activities,*
- *Has a record of such a disability, or*
- *Is regarded as having such a disability.*

These protections do not apply to a person who:

- *Is a direct threat to the health or safety of others or*
- *Currently uses illegal drugs or uses legal drugs illegally*

If these fair housing protections apply, a housing provider (including a home owners' or condominium association) may not do the following:

- *Refuse to let a tenant make reasonable modifications to his/her dwelling or common use areas, at the tenant's expense, if it is necessary for the tenant to fully use the housing. (Where reasonable, a property owner or manager may require the tenant to restore the dwelling to its original condition when the tenant moves.)*
- *Refuse to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services if it may be necessary for the tenant to use the housing on an equal basis with persons who do not have disabilities. (For example, a property owner or manager may not apply its pet policy to a tenant who has an assistance, service, or companion animal to address his or her disability.)*



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## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

The federal Fair Housing Act does not specifically include sexual orientation and gender identity in the protected classes. However,

- *The State of Maryland law and some local governments do specifically prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (see table on page 5).*
- *The State of Maryland (effective October 1, 2014), Howard and Baltimore Counties, and Baltimore City specifically prohibit discrimination based on gender identity (also noted in table on page 5).*
- *Some sexual orientation or gender identity housing discrimination may still be covered by other federal Fair Housing Act protections. For example:*
  - *A gay man is evicted because the property owner believes he will infect other tenants with HIV/AIDS. That situation may constitute illegal disability discrimination under the Fair Housing Act because the man is perceived to have a disability, HIV/AIDS.*
  - *A property manager refuses to rent an apartment to a prospective tenant who is transgender. If the housing denial is because of the prospective tenant's non-conformity with gender stereotypes, it may constitute illegal discrimination on the basis of sex under the Fair Housing Act.*

## AGE

Baltimore County and Howard County law protects against age discrimination generally. Other jurisdictions enforce this protection in particular ways:

- *In Baltimore City, age is defined as the "Age of Majority" and refers to anyone who has attained the age of eighteen years.*
- *Harford County enforces discrimination against people age 40 and above.*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO FILE A COMPLAINT

The following organizations and agencies are available to help renters and property owners and managers by answering questions about Fair Housing rights. Additionally, please contact the agency or organization in your area if you believe that you have been the victim of housing discrimination.

### Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

6 Saint Paul St., Ste. 900  
Baltimore, MD 21202-1631  
1-800-637-6247

[www.mccr.maryland.gov](http://www.mccr.maryland.gov)

A fair housing complaint can be initiated with the Commission by phone, online, by mail, or in person.

### U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

#### Baltimore Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity (FHEO) Center

10 S. Howard St., 5th Floor  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
410-962-2520

Or file a complaint online:

[www.hud.gov/fairhousing](http://www.hud.gov/fairhousing)

Click on "File a Complaint"

Or go straight to:

<https://portal.hud.gov/FHEO903/Form903/Form903Start.action>

### Annapolis Human Relations Commission

145 Gorman St., 2nd Floor  
Annapolis, MD 21401-2535  
410-263-7998

[www.ci.annapolis.md.us/government/Boards/HumanRelations.aspx](http://www.ci.annapolis.md.us/government/Boards/HumanRelations.aspx)

### Anne Arundel County Human Relations Commission

44 Calvert St., Room 330  
Annapolis, MD 21401  
410-222-1220

[www.aacounty.org/countyexec/humanrelations.cfm](http://www.aacounty.org/countyexec/humanrelations.cfm)

### Baltimore City Office of Civil Rights & Wage Enforcement

10 N. Calvert St., Suite 915  
Baltimore, MD 21202

410-396-3141

[www.baltimorecity.gov/Government/BoardsandCommissions/OfficeofCivilRightsandWageEnforcement/CommunityRelationsCommission.aspx](http://www.baltimorecity.gov/Government/BoardsandCommissions/OfficeofCivilRightsandWageEnforcement/CommunityRelationsCommission.aspx)

### Baltimore County Human Relations Commission

Drumcastle Government Center  
6401 York Rd., Suite 1013  
Baltimore, MD 21212

410-887-5917

[www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/humanrelations](http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/humanrelations)

### Harford County Office of Human Relations

220 S. Main St.  
Bel Air, MD 21014

410-638-4739

[www.harfordcountymd.gov/services/HumanRelations](http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/services/HumanRelations)

### Howard County Office of Human Rights

6751 Columbia Gateway Dr., Suite 239  
Columbia, MD 21046

410-313-6430

[www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments.aspx?Id=1777](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments.aspx?Id=1777)

### Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc.

2530 North Charles St.  
Baltimore, MD 21218

410-243-4400

[www.bni-maryland.org](http://www.bni-maryland.org)

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## THIS BOOKLET BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

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This educational booklet has been created by the Baltimore Regional Fair Housing Group, a committee of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC), in consultation with these partners:

