

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

You have fair housing rights!

What is fair housing?

Fair housing is the right to choose where you live without being discriminated against because of a protected characteristic.

Protected characteristics are specific traits about a person protected by federal, state, and local laws. In the box to the right are the characteristics protected by federal and state laws.

Fair housing laws protect people in many housing-related activities. Whether you are buying or renting a home, or getting insurance, you are protected.

Illegal **housing discrimination** means being treated unfairly **because of a protected characteristic**.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Protections

Michigan's fair housing law protects people from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

- **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's lasting physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to others. Examples: straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual.
- **Gender identity** refers to a person's internal sense of their own gender. Examples: man, woman, nonbinary.
- **Gender expression** refers to how a person outwardly shows their gender through their name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, voice, behavior, and more.

Michigan's law also protects you from discrimination based on what a housing provider *thinks* or believes your sexual orientation or gender identity is, even if they are wrong.

Protected Characteristics:

Federal Government

- **Race**
- **Skin Color**
- **Religion**
- **National Origin**
- **Sex**
- **Familial Status** (having kids under 18 in your home or pregnancy)
- **Disability** (includes physical and mental disabilities)

State of Michigan

All federally protected characteristics, plus:

- **Marital Status**
- **Age**
- **Sexual Orientation**
- **Gender Identity or Expression**
- **Source of Income** (rental housing only)

What might illegal housing discrimination look like?

Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression could look like a housing provider...

- Telling you an apartment is no longer available after meeting you and your partner.
- Telling you a specific neighborhood is not "right for people like you."
- Requiring extra application documentation for you than for other applicants, such as proof of name changes or gender transition.
- Refusing to add your otherwise qualified partner to your lease.
- Ignoring your complaints that another tenant is harassing you because of your sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Retaliating against you for reporting housing discrimination.

Continues on the back

What can you do if you have experienced discrimination?

If you believe you have experienced housing discrimination, **the best thing to do is to report your experience** to the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan, or FHCWM.



FHCWM is a private, nonprofit organization, **not a government agency**. Our staff **provides FREE fair housing services** to 38 counties across West Michigan, including direct support to people facing discrimination.

What steps does FHCWM take to protect people who report discrimination?

We know the decision to report housing discrimination is not always easy. Sometimes people who experience discrimination are scared they might face retaliation for reporting, even though retaliation is illegal under fair housing laws.

While we cannot know for certain how housing discrimination cases will be handled by our federal, state governments, FHCWM is committed to:

1. Offering multiple ways to report housing discrimination

We believe that each person's situation is unique. There is not one way to report that works for everyone. Because of this, **we offer many ways for people to report discrimination to us**.

We accept reports by phone call, text message, email, mail, fax, through a form on our website, and in person at our office.

Ways you can report discrimination to us:

- **Phone:** 616-451-2980
- **Fax:** 616-451-2657
- **Email:** contact-us@fhcwm.org
- **Mail:** Fair Housing Center of West Michigan
20 Hall St SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
- **Website Form:** fhcwm.org/report-discrimination

We can also meet you if that is helpful. If you would like to report discrimination in person, making an appointment makes sure someone is available to meet with you.

Anyone can report discrimination to us!

You can report discrimination anonymously, meaning you do not have to provide your name. You can also have someone else report for you.

If you need an interpreter, we will try to arrange one at no cost to you, especially if you schedule an appointment beforehand.

2. Maintaining your privacy

We are careful about protecting your privacy. We will not share information about your case without your permission.

3. Being fully honest about our process

We will provide you with full information about how we handle reports of discrimination. We will share all guidance with you to help you make fully-informed decisions.

4. Respecting your choice

We believe you know your situation best. You should have the right to make your own decisions on how you would like to move forward in your case.

If you do not want to move forward, we will respect that. We will never push you to do something that you are not comfortable with. We will never act without your approval.

Any questions?

If you have any questions, please contact us by phone at **616-451-2980** or by email at **contact-us@fhcwm.org**.