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In another nod to gays, feds tackling housing bias

By Ed O'Keefe

In the latest example of the Obama administration extending greater rights to gays and lesbians, the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) is making changes to ensure they don't face discrimination when applying for federal housing assistance.



The department unveiled a series of proposed rule changes Thursday that would prohibit lenders from using sexual orientation or gender identity as a way of determining a borrower's eligibility. In a nod to same-sex marriages and same-sex parents, the rule change would state that eligible families have the opportunity to participate in HUD-based programs regardless of marital status or sexual orientation.

The new rules, if adopted, also would prohibit owners and operators of HUD-funded housing from asking applicants or occupants of the housing about sexual orientation or gender identity.

HUD is conducting a national study on the potential impact of housing discrimination against gays and lesbians, but in its [formal notice of the proposed rules](#) cited a 2007 study of housing discrimination in Michigan that found disparate treatment of gays in 32 out of 120 fair housing tests conducted.

"This is a fundamental issue of fairness," HUD Secretary **Shaun Donovan** said Thursday.

The proposed rules must undergo a 60-day public comment period before formal implemented. If approved, they would join a [growing list of policy and procedural changes](#) made by federal agencies that don't require congressional approval, including gender-neutral passport application forms, changes to how the U.S. Census Bureau counts same-sex relationships and the extension of fringe benefits to the same-sex partners of gay and lesbian federal workers.

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