

FACT SHEET: 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, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, and disability. Discrimination based on immigration status is often directly correlated to national origin or religion.

Are there state or local laws with additional protections?

State and local fair housing laws prohibit discrimination based on national origin and religion. In our eight-county service area, East Lansing and Lansing have resolutions regarding protecting civil liberties for all people, including immigrants. Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti each have *Solicitation of Immigrant Status Ordinances* that prohibit public servants from inquiring about immigration status (in most instances).

Fair housing laws protect you regardless of your immigration status.

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 because of where you are from, your immigration status, or your religious faith;
- require you to get a cosigner 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;
- 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.

Some landlords, owners, real estate agents, etc., might ask if you are in the country legally, ask to see your green card or visa, or ask for your social security number. If you think that you are being asked about your immigration status for discriminatory purposes, call the Fair Housing Center.



Landlords can ask for identification and conduct credit checks to ensure ability to pay rent. However, a person's ability to pay rent or fitness as a tenant cannot be based on his or her immigration status.

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

State and federal fair housing laws continue to protect you once you are living 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 symbol;
- 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, your belongings, or property amenities (like a swimming pool or laundry area).

You are also protected if you are buying a home or attempting to get a mortgage.

Call the Fair Housing Center if you believe you are being prevented from buying a home or getting a loan because of your immigration status, refugee status, national origin, or religion.

NATIONAL ORIGIN DISCRIMINATION

National origin discrimination is different treatment in housing or housing related transactions because of a person's ancestry, ethnicity, birthplace, culture, or language, and it is illegal. This means people cannot 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.

Examples of potential national origin discrimination include:

- refusing to rent to persons whose primary language is not English;
- offering different rental rates;
- steering prospective buyers or renters to or away from certain neighborhoods or buildings; and

- failing to provide the same level of service or housing amenities.

What should I do if I believe my rights have been violated?

The Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan (FHC) is ready to help with any problem of housing discrimination. Information provided about allegations or complaints of housing discrimination will be kept confidential.

The Fair Housing Center will not report undocumented immigrants to the authorities.

If you do come into contact with ICE after you have filed a complaint with the FHC or HUD, 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. This includes threats to report a person to ICE if they report housing discrimination to HUD or the FHC. HUD and the FHC do not inquire about immigration status when investigating claims of housing discrimination.

We are a private nonprofit organization providing investigative services (testing), advice, advocacy, conciliation, attorney referrals, and community education for Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, and Washtenaw counties. The mission of the FHC is to end discrimination in housing and public accommodations and to promote accessible, integrated communities.

If you think you have experienced housing discrimination or have a question about fair housing, call us at [877-979-3247](tel:877-979-3247).

You can also fill out a contact form on our website (www.fhcmichigan.org) and FHC staff will follow up with you to obtain additional information concerning your allegation or complaint of discrimination.

Sources

National Fair Housing Alliance

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

U.S. Housing and Urban Development, 2012

["Immigration Status and Housing Discrimination Frequently Asked Questions"](#)

