



Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs

Fair Housing and Immigrants in the Northern Suburbs: Issues and Challenges

By Gail Schechter, Executive Director, February 12, 2007

Despite legal protections guaranteed under the federal Fair Housing Act, immigrants are often denied decent and safe housing because of their national origin, race, or presence of children. Combined with the fact those immigrants who come to this country without education or proficiency in English earn lower wages, their housing options are severely limited. Immigrants who are undocumented are further challenged in the housing market if asked to produce documentation to rent an apartment or to take out a mortgage. Immigrants are disproportionately more likely to face the following barriers to the housing of their choice:

- 1. Immigrants, particularly those with low incomes and little education, face discrimination by landlords and real estate professionals on the basis of race, national origin, or, if applicable, presence of children in seeking housing.**

Manifestation:

- ❖ According to the Chicago metropolitan area tests for the national Housing Discrimination Study (HDS) conducted in 2000 by HUD, **Latinos are 15% less likely to be offered rental incentives; and in the home buying market, they are shown fewer units, get fewer offers of financing, and are actively discouraged from moving forward compared to white home seekers. At least one in three prospective Latino renters or homebuyers is estimated to face discrimination** in the Chicago area housing market. This is considered a conservative measure since the HDS did not evaluate small buildings, units for sale by owner, or situations in which the Hispanic tester did not receive a return call.
- ❖ In regions of significant growth in the immigrant population, real estate professionals, often under pressure by municipalities, are **requiring social security numbers or other documentation** from rental applicants.
- ❖ Immigrant renters often face overly restrictive requirements regarding the number of persons who can live in the apartment. **Occupancy restrictions** can be discriminatory if they are only enforced against immigrants or families with children.
- ❖ Municipalities may **discourage the development of new rental housing, particularly affordable housing** those with three or more bedrooms, or subdivision of homes into rentals for fear of attracting low-income immigrants.

Effect:

- ❖ Immigrants are often **steered to housing that is not of their choice** and likely substandard.
- ❖ Fear of retaliation by the local government for doing business with undocumented immigrants has the effect of **stifling the housing market for all immigrants** (or anyone who looks like an immigrant) regardless of legal status.
- ❖ As the housing options of immigrants shrinks, the price of this scarce housing rises as a type of **“discrimination tax.”** The high price of housing encourages multiple households living together to meet expenses.
- ❖ Immigrants **do not have access to affordable housing near their places of work.**

2. **Immigrants are often victims of retaliatory behavior in housing they have already secured.**

Manifestation:

- ❖ The landlord will often **fail to properly maintain the unit** occupied by an immigrant, from delaying maintenance to refusing to make repairs.
- ❖ The landlord may charge **extra fees** to immigrant tenants that are not in the lease or oral agreement, such as electrical service in the common areas or water bills.
- ❖ The landlord may **harass** the immigrant tenant by prohibiting visitors, entering unannounced, or threatening the tenant outright with eviction if they complain.
- ❖ The landlord may circumvent eviction proceedings through **illegal lockouts**.
- ❖ **Municipalities** may themselves engage in behavior designed to harass tenants by:
 - **Failing to provide information** to tenants about their rights in **multiple languages**.
 - **Selectively enforcing property standards** in housing occupied by non-immigrants.
 - **Conducting spot inspections at unreasonable hours or without notice**.
 - **Condemning property with little notice and no court-ordered action**.
 - **Not providing an administrative or judicial recourse for tenants**.
 - **Honoring anonymous complaints** against individual immigrants without requiring proof.
 - **Threatening to contact immigration authorities** if individuals exercise their housing rights.

Effect:

- ❖ Undocumented immigrants may **fear seeking public services** and assistance from the authorities, even in case of an emergency.
- ❖ Limited acculturation or limited language proficiency has led to **friction between recent immigrants and native-born residents**.¹

The Fair Housing Act guarantees the right to all persons in the United States of America to file a fair housing complaint without fear of retaliation, intimidation, or coercion.

The Fair Housing Act protects all individuals from housing discrimination, regardless of immigrant status.

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and familial status.

If you suspect unfair housing practices, contact the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs at 847-501-5760 (TTY 847-501-2741) or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777 (TDD 1-800-927-9275).

¹ Sapta Gupta, "Immigrants in the Chicago Suburbs," prepared for Chicago Metropolis 2020, February 2004, <http://www.chicagometropolis2020.org/documents/ImmigrantPolicyPaper.pdf>