

CHICAGO AREA FAIR HOUSING ALLIANCE

Cook County: New Rights for Housing Choice Voucher Holders

Tenant Fact Sheet

The Cook County Human Rights was amended on May 8, 2013 and now protects Housing Choice “Section 8” Voucher Holders from discrimination. **What does this mean for voucher holders?**

BACKGROUND

- In the past, voucher holders were exempt from source of income protection at the county level, meaning that landlords could legally refuse to rent solely on the basis of a household’s voucher status.
- Although this protection has been in place in the City of Chicago since 1993, the new county-wide protection goes into effect on August 8, 2013
- The voucher program allows families to pay fair market rent in units throughout the county, and with this amendment housing options for voucher holders will be expanded—voucher tenants will no longer be forced to search for housing only in economically depressed and often racially segregated areas of the county.

HOW THE PROTECTION WORKS

- Tenants will have the right to be screened on the same basis as non-voucher tenants by prospective landlords.
- Landlords may not refuse to process a renter’s application simply because s/he has a housing voucher.
- To secure housing, tenants will still have to meet the criteria of the landlord—for example, pass credit and background checks.
- The voucher program is essentially a three-way agreement between the renter, landlord, and housing authority that allows for the subsidized payment of market rate rents. Required paperwork includes the lease (terms of which are established by the landlord and agreed to by the tenant, as in a typical leasing arrangement) and the housing assistance payment contract (a contract between the landlord and housing authority which runs concurrently with the lease). Landlords can receive direct deposit of the housing authority’s rent portion, and the tenant pays the remainder of the rent on the schedule agreed upon by the landlord and tenant.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR VOUCHER TENANTS

- Tenants with housing vouchers will have increased opportunities to secure decent, safe, affordable, accessible, and integrated housing along with access to community amenities.
- Tenant advocates should work to inform tenants of this new protection and encourage voucher holders to search for housing outside of traditional voucher enclaves, or areas of concentrated poverty.
- With this new protection, areas of job and educational opportunity in Cook County are now more open to voucher tenants, as it makes it illegal for landlords to treat voucher and non-voucher tenants differently.
- Programs for tenants that improve credit ratings, renter skills, and introduce and acclimate tenants to new areas of opportunity are essential to ensure that this protection serves its intended purpose.
- Tenants with disabilities have an especially hard time finding housing, as accessible units are severely limited. This amendment enables voucher holders with disabilities to have more accessible housing options.

REPORTING DISCRIMINATION

If a landlord refuses to rent solely on the basis of the voucher, impose different terms or conditions on voucher tenants, advertises or communicates that s/he does not accept vouchers, or otherwise treat HCV holders differently from tenants without vouchers, file a complaint.



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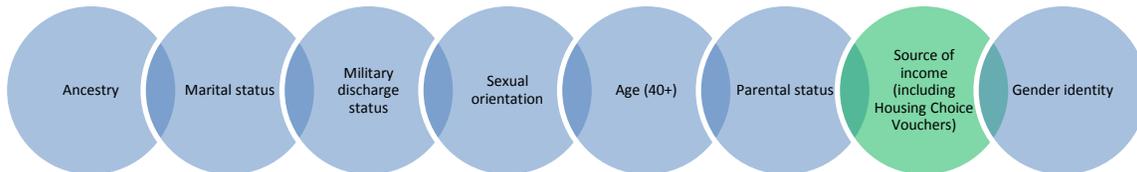
Cook County: New Rights for Housing Choice Voucher Holders Summary of the Amended Cook County Human Rights Ordinance

The Cook County Board of Commissioners adopted the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance on March 16, 1993. The Ordinance is designed to protect all people who live and work in the County from discrimination and sexual harassment in employment, public accommodations, housing, credit transactions, County services and County contracting.

WHAT IS PROTECTED?



In addition to the 7 classes protected by the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Cook County Human Rights Ordinance also protects against discrimination based upon:



WHAT IS PROHIBITED?

- Refusing to sell or rent, negotiate for sale or rental, or otherwise making unavailable or denying a dwelling because of a person's protected status.
- Imposing different terms, conditions, privileges, or services because of a person's protected status.
- Making discriminatory statements or publishing discriminatory communications with respect to the sale or rental of a dwelling.
- Lying about the availability of a dwelling because of a person's protected status.
- Blockbusting and steering.
- Retaliating against, interfering with, or intimidating a person exercising his/her fair housing rights.
- Aiding and abetting

YOU HAVE WITHIN 180 DAYS OF THE ALLEGED VIOLATION TO FILE A COMPLAINT

If you believe fair housing rights have been violated, contact:

Cook County Commission on Human Rights
69 W. Washington, Suite 3040 Chicago, IL 60602
312-603-1100 312-603-1101 (TDD)
human.rights@cookcountyil.gov

For additional info or for assistance with filing a complaint, visit the CAFHA website at www.cafha.net.