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## Fair Housing

### **Fair Housing in Virginia**

Federal and state fair housing laws protect people from discrimination when trying to rent an apartment, buy a house, obtain a mortgage, or purchase homeowner's insurance. Fair housing requirements apply to all housing providers: property managers, owners, landlords, real estate agents, banks, savings institutions, credit unions, insurance companies, mortgage lenders, and appraisers.

The [Fair Housing Board](#) administers and enforces the Fair Housing Law, although the [Real Estate Board](#) is responsible for fair housing cases involving real estate licensees or their employees. Each Board investigates housing discrimination through the Fair Housing Office, which receives an average of 180 complaints each year. The majority of complaints involves disability and racial discrimination, while familial status complaints continue to rise.

- [Guidance Document](#): *Housing Discrimination on the Basis of Source of Funds*
- [Guidance Document](#): *Reasonable Accommodation Requests for Assistance Animals*

[The Virginia Fair Housing Office \(VFHO\)](#) operates under the [Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation](#). VFHO investigates complaints of housing discrimination, tries to resolve complaints fairly through voluntary conciliation, and offers free training and outreach to educate consumers and housing providers.

### **Who is Covered by the Law?**

[Virginia's Fair Housing Law](#) makes it illegal to discriminate in residential housing on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status, disability, source of funds, sexual orientation, gender identity, or military status. The law prohibits applying one standard to one class of individuals while applying a different standard to another class of individuals.

Virginia law prohibits discrimination on the basis of 'elderliness,' which is defined as age 55 and older for purposes of fair housing. Because the Commonwealth includes older Virginians as a protected class, its provisions are even broader than the federal fair housing law. The law also offers protection against discrimination based on disability. For Virginians who are disabled as well, in most instances, housing providers must allow reasonable modifications (i.e., grab bars, wider doorways) and accommodations (handicapped parking spaces, for example).

## **Your Right to Non-Discriminatory Treatment**

It's illegal for housing providers - property managers, owners, landlords, real estate agents, banks, savings institutions, credit unions, insurance companies, mortgage lenders, and appraisers - to treat you differently because of elderliness.

If you are 55 or older, you may file a complaint with VFHO if a housing provider:

- Refuses to rent, sell, or deal with you;
- Discriminates on the conditions or terms of sale, rental, occupancy, or facilities;
- Advertises in a discriminatory way;
- Falsely denies you housing availability; or
- Discriminates in financing or in broker's services.

## **File a Complaint**

If you think you have been discriminated against or if you have questions about the fair housing laws call 804-367-8530 or 888-551-3247. For TDD users, please call the Virginia Relay by dialing 7-1-1. You may also write Virginia Fair Housing Office, 9960 Mayland Drive, Suite 400, Richmond, Virginia 23233-1463. Our email address is [fairhousing@dpor.virginia.gov](mailto:fairhousing@dpor.virginia.gov). The fax number is 866-480-8333.

You can also visit a webpage that provides a complaint form that may be filled out and mailed in: <https://www.dpor.virginia.gov/FairHousing/#a2>.

## **What Happens When a Fair Housing Complaint is Filed?**

The Fair Housing Office is responsible for investigating housing discrimination complaints.

Complaints must be filed in writing within one year after the alleged discriminatory housing practice occurred or terminated.

Once the Fair Housing Office accepts a complaint for investigation, the complaint is assigned to an investigator. The purpose of the investigation is to gather facts about the complaint. An investigator generally interviews the complainant, the respondent, and relevant witnesses. The investigator may also review documents and records.

During the investigative process, a trained professional from the [Alternative Dispute Resolution Section](#) coordinates the conciliation process. Conciliation is a voluntary process in which the parties attempt to resolve the complaint by agreeing to mutually acceptable terms. If conciliation is successful, the investigation will be suspended. If conciliation is unsuccessful, or if one of the parties does not want to attempt conciliation, the investigation continues until it is complete.

After the investigation is complete, the investigator writes a final investigative report (FIR). The FIR summarizes the information obtained during the investigation, including contacts with the complainant and respondent, witnesses' statements, and records obtained and examined during the investigation. The FIR is presented to the Fair Housing Board (or the Real Estate Board for complaints involving real estate licensees or their employees) at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

## **Publications and Links**

- Fair Housing Law Overview [brochure](#)
- Fair Housing and People with Disabilities: [brochure](#)
- About Assistance Animals [brochure](#) (service, companion, and emotional support animals)
- About Hoarding and Fair Housing Law: [For Consumers](#) | [For Housing Provider](#)
- About Fair Housing for People with Criminal Histories [brochure](#)
- Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act: [DHCD Landlord/Tenant Handbook](#)
- Fair Housing Law [Poster](#) | [Spanish](#) version
- Fair Housing for People with Criminal Records [Poster](#)

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