

Provide Choice & Mobility for Renters: Outlaw Discrimination

Landlords shouldn't be allowed to discriminate against renters who pay with housing subsidies.

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This discrimination prevents economic & housing mobility.

When landlords refuse to rent to housing subsidy holders, this decreases choices for tenants on public assistance & dashes their hopes of escaping low-opportunity neighborhoods. This practice also clusters low-income communities, making it difficult for them to break cycles of poverty.

These laws work.

Martha Galvez's 2011 study, "*Defining Choice in the Housing Choice Voucher Program...*" found that households on public assistance were unevenly distributed in a manner similar to black residential segregation. **Also average neighborhood poverty rates for voucher holders were lower in areas with source of income discrimination laws in place.**

Spotlight on Clark County

"Something like 300 households in Clark County, including 90 families with children, qualified for private-market rental vouchers in the year after the new Housing Solutions Center opened its doors in March 2013 — but then couldn't find a landlord who'd accept them."

Housing Solutions Center in Vancouver found that "...even with vouchers in hand, only 56 percent of households found a landlord willing to rent to them."

The Columbian, July 27, 2014

Cities & municipalities across Washington already protect these vulnerable tenants.

- Bellevue • Kirkland • Redmond
- King County • Seattle

Including these states:

California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

Updated 1/23/2015

How you pay for your home shouldn't prevent you from having one.

In a home search, many vulnerable individuals and families face discrimination by landlords unwilling to rent to Housing Choice (Section 8) voucher holders. Also, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities receiving other legal sources of income (e.g. government and nonprofit subsidies) face similar discrimination.

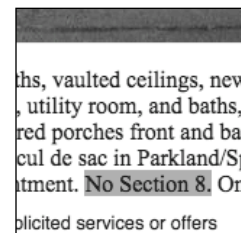
Already, several municipalities in Washington and many states have adopted laws prohibiting housing discrimination based on source of income (see sidebar). These protections are crucial to maximizing a family's ability to secure a safe and healthy home when paying with a housing subsidy or other legal sources of income other than those from current employment.

Discriminating against tenants who pay with a subsidy further harms already vulnerable people.

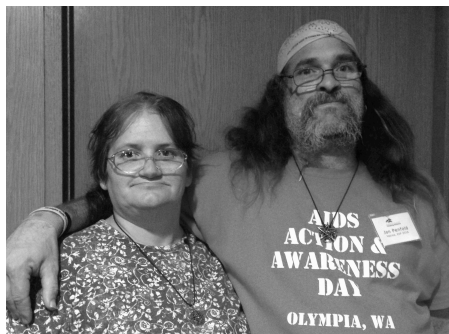
In most of Washington, landlords can and often do refuse to rent to people with Section 8 vouchers. Whatever their reasons, this ultimately results in huge disparities. **Veterans, people with disabilities, & seniors on public assistance often face much longer home searches or are unable to find an appropriate home at all.**

Discriminating against tenants who pay with housing vouchers is often a cover-up for racial discrimination.

Source of income discrimination disproportionately affects African American communities. Both federal & local policies over time have led to huge racial disparities in African American communities, preventing opportunities for economic mobility and safe, healthy, affordable homes. Thus, a disproportionately high percentage of voucher recipients are African American. In many cities, discrimination against Section 8 vouchers is often a cover up for discrimination on basis of race. **This discrimination is also a loophole in the nation's fair housing law that prohibits housing discrimination based on race, national origin, religion, etc.**



Screenshot of a Craigslist ad for a rental home in Tacoma taken on 12/25/14.



The new owner of Jon and Kelly Penfold's rental home started investigating his tenants' finances. **When he discovered Jon was using a HOPWA Voucher to help pay rent, he tried to make them move out, despite Jon and Kelly always paying their rent on time.** Jon described the full kitchen as very important to maintaining his health. After continued harassment from the landlord, Jon and Kelly felt they had no choice but to move.

What is the legislative solution?

Pass legislation to prevent landlords from denying tenancy based solely on the grounds of the tenant relying on a subsidy or "public subsidy" (e.g. Housing Choice voucher, SSI, etc.) to pay all or a portion of their rent.

Landlords could still reject tenants who do not have enough income/resources to meet the monthly rental payment and could still deny tenancy on legal grounds equally applied to all applicants.