



City of Seattle

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Seattle Office for Civil Rights

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City files charges against 13 property owners for alleged violations of rental housing discrimination

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights has filed director's charges of illegal discrimination against 13 property owners after on-site fair housing testing showed evidence of housing discrimination. Twelve of the property owners have agreed to settle the charges, which the City of Seattle filed with the WA State Human Rights Commission. Property managers have agreed to reimburse Seattle for the costs of testing, require their employees to attend fair housing training, provide funding for a fair housing campaign, and post fair housing notices in their properties to inform residents of their rights.

"Unfortunately, housing discrimination is not a thing of the past, but a reality for too many people in Seattle," said Seattle Mayor Ed Murray. "These test results tell us that we still have work to do to share information with landlords on their responsibilities and with tenants, so they understand their rights."

In addition to resulting in 13 charges, the testing conducted revealed that prospective renters experienced different treatment from Seattle landlords over half the time across all four tested categories: race, national origin, sexual orientation and gender identity.

To address housing discrimination citywide, the Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) will launch a Fair Housing Campaign to reach out to landlords and renters, including an ad campaign, workshops for both landlords and the public, and a Fair Housing Hotline.

Testing discovered evidence of different treatment in more than half of all results

SOCR conducted a total of 124 tests, focusing on four different groups protected under fair housing laws. Test findings revealed:

- Race (42 tests): 64% showed evidence of different treatment.
- National origin (43 tests): 67% showed evidence of different treatment.
- Sexual orientation (30 tests): 63% showed evidence of different treatment.
- Gender identity (9 tests): 67% showed evidence of different treatment.

Testers posed as prospective renters, so the different treatment they experienced depended on the information they received from landlords and the questions they were asked. For example,

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African American and Latino testers were told about criminal background and credit history checks more frequently than the white testers. They also were asked more often about their spouses' employment history (especially with Latino testers). They were shown and told about fewer amenities, provided fewer applications and brochures, and were shown fewer vacant units. In some cases, the prices quoted were higher for the same unit.

Testers for sexual orientation and gender identity were shown fewer amenities, provided fewer applications and brochures, and were shown fewer vacant units. In some cases, the prices quoted were higher for the same unit.

"We have filed charges in 13 cases where the differences in treatment were undeniable," said Patricia Lally, Director of the Seattle Office for Civil Rights. "These test results are not isolated incidents – they demonstrate patterns of behavior that have profound impacts on people's lives."

SOCR sent letters to all tested property owners informing them of their individual test results. SOCR has offered to meet with managers whose test results showed some evidence of discrimination to evaluate their rental process and to provide fair housing resources to help them to improve their policies and procedures.

"The result from this survey is evidence why we continue to educate our members," said Bill Hinkle, Executive Director of the Rental Housing Association of Washington (RHA) located in West Seattle. "We believe this is a key ethic in our business to treat everyone equally with dignity and respect and according to the law. The RHA has agreed to partner with SOCR to promote fair housing with its members and throughout the city."

Fair Housing Campaign to address housing discrimination

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights is launching a Fair Housing Campaign to address housing discrimination in Seattle. The campaign will include print and radio ads, workshops for both landlords and the public, and a Fair Housing Hotline. The Hotline will provide rapid responses by phone or email to landlords' questions about housing discrimination laws. SOCR also will provide free training to property management staff on request, and schedule fair housing workshops for community organizations and the general public. For information about free classes and other educational materials sponsored by the Rental Housing Association, visit www.rhawa.org or call 206-283-0816.

SOCR is working with the City's Office of Housing and Mayor Murray's Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda to develop policies that address barriers to housing. The Housing Affordability and Livability Advisory Committee will deliver its recommendations to the Mayor and City Council by May 29, 2015.

How fair housing testing works

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights contracted with the Fair Housing Center of Washington to conduct the tests. In most cases, the Fair Housing Center used paired testers posing as

prospective renters to measure differences in the services they received from leasing agents, as well as information about vacancies, rental rates, and other conditions. The matched pairs of testers had similar rental profiles in every respect except for their race or disability. Test sites were selected at random from all geographic areas of the city, and were conducted between January and June, 2014.

The City budget includes \$50,000 to conduct testing on an annual basis.

Mission of the Seattle Office for Civil Rights

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights is a department of the City of Seattle, responsible for enforcing the City's anti-discrimination laws within Seattle city limits. SOCR also is the home of the City of Seattle's new Office for Labor Standards, which enforces Seattle's new minimum wage and wage theft laws, as well as Paid Sick and Safe Time and the Job Assistance Ordinance.

SOCR offers ongoing education and training programs to landlords and property managers, including [free bi-monthly training](#) held in conjunction with Fair Housing Partners of Washington, a regional fair housing consortium. For more information about fair housing or the Seattle Office for Civil Rights, contact 206-684-4507.