CHICAGO AREA FAIR HOUSING ALLIANCE

Cook County: New Rights for Housing Choice Voucher Holders

Municipal Fact Sheet

The Cook County Human Rights Ordinance protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of one's source of income, but since 1993 it has exempted the protection of persons with "Section 8" Housing Choice Vouchers. An amendment passed on May 8, 2013 to protect Housing Choice "Section 8" Voucher Holders from discrimination. Starting August 8, 2013 landlords can no longer legally refuse to rent solely on the basis of a household's voucher status.

THE NEW HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROTECTION

- Residents with Housing Choice Vouchers have the right to be screened on the same basis as non-voucher residents by prospective landlords. Voucher holders still have to meet the criteria of the landlord—for example, pass credit and background checks.
- The amendment does not force property owners to rent any or all of their units to households using Housing Choice Vouchers; they are only obligated to consider their application.
- Cook County screens for eligibility for the voucher program.
- Landlord participation in the voucher program is not overly burdensome. Landlords have to complete four simple forms: the RFTA, the Payment and Ownership Declaration form, the W-9, and the Direct Deposit form.
- The amendment does not control rent rates. Landlords can charge whatever rent the market will bear.
- The City of Chicago, five Illinois municipalities, ten states, the District of Columbia, and eight counties around the country have laws protecting individuals from discrimination based on use of a Housing Choice Voucher.
- Only 5% of tenants in Suburban Cook County have housing choice vouchers.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

- Residents in the voucher program will have expanded housing options and are no longer forced to search for housing only in economically depressed and often racially segregated areas of the county.
- Landlords in your community will have the opportunity to receive guaranteed rent directly deposited from a secure funding source that is not impacted by economic fluctuations.
- Areas of job and educational opportunity in Cook County will be more open to residents with vouchers.
- Households with children, people with disabilities, senior citizens, and veterans that use the voucher will have access to quality housing all throughout Cook County.
- Through expanded access to areas of opportunity, voucher holders will have enhanced avenues to the necessary components for self-sufficiency—notably, greater job and educational access.
- Vouchers bring a diversity of people, ideas, and cultures into a community.
- Residents with vouchers are more likely to work and utilize local businesses in the communities where they live, stimulating economic prosperity.
- Vouchers make it possible for individuals to "age in place" and remain in a community if they develop disabilities.
- Expanding voucher protections ease racial and poverty concentrations throughout the County, furthering regional equity and leading to more housing options for everyone, including market-rate renters and homeowners.
- Equitable, stable, and inclusive housing patterns increase a town and area's desirability and economic viability.

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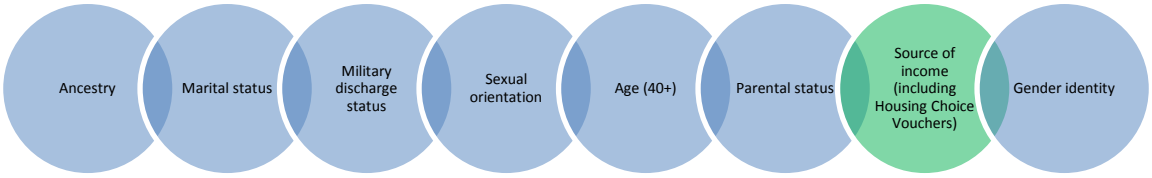
Summary of the Amended Cook County Human Rights Ordinance

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.
- 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.

CAFHA thanks the Fair Housing Consortium for this summary of Cook County Human Rights Ordinance