What is Religion-Based Housing Discrimination?

Religion is a protected characteristic under federal, state, and local fair housing laws. You are protected from religious discrimination in all aspects of housing, including when renting, buying, or selling a home, or while residing in your home. That means that you cannot be treated differently by landlords, sellers, agents, banks, management companies, operators of facilities, co-op boards, or other housing providers because of your religion or because you wear religious items or engage in religious practices and rituals. You are also protected if you are associated with (such as being married to) a person of a certain religion.

Are all religions covered by the law?

All religions and religious beliefs are protected, even if not widespread or well-known. This also includes non-belief or non-practice of religion, such as atheism or agnosticism.

What are some examples of religion-based housing discrimination?

- Asking about an applicant’s religion
- Ignoring or “ghosting” an applicant because of their religion
- Advertising that a home is located near a particular house of worship
- Recommending or disparaging neighborhoods because most residents observe a particular religion
- Allowing outdoor religious decorations for certain religions, but prohibiting similar displays for others
- Making negative comments about a family’s religion
- Harassing tenants who wear religious head coverings, accessories, or garments
- Creating or tolerating graffiti or vandalism representing religion-based hatred
- Running ads in only one religious publication

Are there any exceptions?

Very few. Housing provided by religious organizations specifically for affiliated members of their own religion, such as monasteries and convents, and which is not offered to the general public, may be exempt from liability for religious discrimination.

Where can I learn more?

If you think you are experiencing any form of housing discrimination, contact the FHJC. We will help sort out the facts and provide you with information about your rights and options under fair housing laws. You can also contact us – anonymously if you prefer – if you know about housing discrimination that is happening to others. Our counseling and investigative services are provided for free, regardless of income.