WHAT QUALIFIES AS “RELIGION?”

“Religion” describes the beliefs, practices, and/or customs present in the practice and non-practice of religion, such as those who are agnostics or atheists, as well as the practice of multiple religious or spiritual traditions. Housing providers may discriminate against people based on their religion (which may be expressed by symbols, manners of dress, or stated beliefs) or the perception of their religion (which may include ethnicity, cultural stereotyping, or familial relationships).

Some housing providers may believe it’s easier to not have people of multiple faiths (including no faith) living in their buildings will often try to find ways to avoid renting to anyone who’s perceived to be different. For these reasons, religious discrimination can often be accompanied by other forms of discrimination including by race or national origin.

BELIEFS? PRACTICES? CUSTOMS?

Whichever ways you express your faith or non-faith – that’s YOUR business. Not a landlord’s. They don’t get to modify the ways your beliefs are shown nor are they able to control the religious makeup of a building, block, or neighborhood.

“RELIGION” CAN INCLUDE:

- What you wear (i.e., a yarmulke or jewelry)
- What you do and eat (i.e., prayer habits, food preferences)
- What you say (i.e., accents and speech, language, or prayer), and
- What you practice or observe (i.e., ceremonies, holidays, days of observance etc.) that may help express cultural, religious, or ancestral heritage

WHAT DOES DIRECT RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION LOOK LIKE?

Sometimes it’s obvious, like a flat-out refusal to rent to women who wear hijabs (religious headscarves), Sikhs who wear turbans, or anyone who isn’t a member of a particular faith community (i.e., refusing to rent to non-Jews).

But more often, it’s subtle and hidden. Providers might reference their dislike for a certain religious group or practice. Some providers may attempt to steer people away from their building by emphasizing perceived differences, saying things like “There isn’t a mosque (or synagogue or church) nearby” or “You know, this is a Jewish neighborhood.” Another method to steer people away may be by offering lower rents or more favorable terms to applicants of a particular faith group.

TAKING ACTION

YOUR GENERATION CAN PLAY A KEY ROLE IN MAKING FAIR HOUSING A LIVING REALITY FOR EVERYONE

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. Our counseling and investigative services are provided for free, regardless of income. fairhousingjustice.org

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