



HOUSING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION

How do the fair housing laws define religion?

The laws do not define religion. Presumably, landlords are not permitted to discriminate against any faith or belief system. However, it is possible that religions based on racial discrimination, such as the Ku Klux Klan, would not be protected by the fair housing laws. Certainly, landlords are not allowed to treat applicants differently because they lack any faith or organized religion.

Can a landlord or agent ask about an applicant's religion?

No. It is illegal for a landlord, seller, agent, or bank to ask about your religion.

What if a landlord wants to rent out apartments to people of his or her own faith?

That is illegal. A landlord cannot impose his or her own religious beliefs on renters nor can the landlord treat applicants of his or her own faith differently from people of other faiths.

Can a landlord refuse to rent to someone who doesn't believe in God?

No. Landlords cannot differentiate based on an applicant's religion or lack of religion.

What if a church wants to limit residency in its retreat center to its own members?

The fair housing laws have an exception that allows a religious organization or a non-profit controlled by that organization, to limit occupancy in its buildings to members of the same religion. However, the residency in the buildings must have a purpose other than money-making. The laws also require that, in order to use this exception, the religion cannot restrict membership on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

Do the fair housing laws apply to all housing?

The laws against religious discrimination apply to all housing EXCEPT

(1) a home in which the landlord resides and rents out only one room (however, it is still illegal to make discriminatory statements in advertising);

(2) buildings operated by a religious organization for other than a commercial purpose, unless the religion is racially exclusive.

Some examples of religion discrimination:

"What church do you go to?"

"I feel more comfortable with other Jews."

"People who have no religion have no morals."

"Are you interested in joining the Church of Christ?"

"Are you religious?"

"You probably wouldn't like this neighborhood – it is very Catholic."

"I hold a prayer meeting every Sunday. Is that something you'd be interested in?"

"How do I know you'll be reliable if you don't believe in the word of God?"

"Don't sell your house to those Jehovah's Witnesses – they'll bring the neighborhood down."