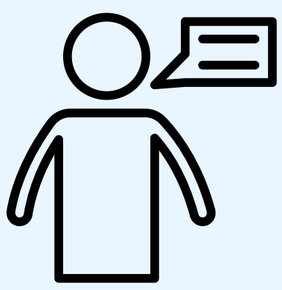
How Racial Bias Restricts Housing, Neighborhood Choice, and Integrated Communities - Fact Sheet

A Fairfax County, Va., publication

Overview:

Prior to the Fair Housing Act, decades of government policy allowed for legalized segregation and discrimination. These policies have had a lasting impact on communities of color and continue to shape our country in many ways. It is important to understand how, because of this history, seemingly race-neutral policies or practices can further marginalize people of color and perpetuate segregation.



Racially Coded Language:

Certain facets of American life are so defined by segregation and stereotypes that they can be used in conversation as proxies for race. Examples include schools, crime, and neighborhood character. If a real estate agent, for example, tells a homebuyer that they should limit their home search to a certain school district, that suggestion likely has a racial implication, since neighborhood segregation often correlates with school segregation in communities.

Tenant Screening Criteria:

Tenant screening criteria, such as criminal background checks or credit scores, often have a discriminatory impact on rental applicants of color. If used, they should be applied equally to all applicants. For criminal background checks, housing providers should conduct individualized assessments of applicants' histories to mitigate the potential such screenings have to discriminate.

Source of Funds Discrimination:

Housing Choice Vouchers can be a tool used to desegregate communities by facilitating mobility for low-income families into neighborhoods of opportunity. Where Source of Income/Funds is a protected class, like in Virginia, it is illegal to discriminate against someone because they use a housing voucher. A housing provider who refuses to accept a rental applicant because they use a housing voucher - or excludes voucher holders by instituting a discriminatory minimum income requirement - is likely violating state law.

Contact us:

Housing discrimination is illegal. To report possible housing discrimination, contact the Fairfax County Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs (OHREP) or Equal Rights Center.

Fairfax County OHREP: 703-324-2953 | TTY 711 www.fairfaxcounty.gov/humanrights/
Equal Rights Center: 202-234-3062 www.equalrightscenter.org

To request this information in an alternate format, call the Fairfax County Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs, 703-324-2953 | TTY 711.

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