

Fair Housing and Advertising

The Fair Housing Act and the Iowa Civil Rights Act prohibit discrimination in advertising for rental and purchase of housing. The prohibition of discrimination in advertising applies to everyone who advertises housing, even if the particular housing is itself exempt from fair housing law, such as certain owner-occupied buildings.

What advertising is covered?

The law applies to all advertising:

- Spoken statements made to buyers or renters.
- Visual representations.
- Published or printed statements.
- Postings on the internet.

Who is protected?

Advertisements cannot contain terms which limit housing rental or purchase on the following bases:

- Race, color, national origin.
- Religion or creed.
- Sex.
- Sexual orientation.
- Gender identity.
- Disability.
- Familial status.

What is allowed?

- Descriptions of properties: “two bedroom” “washer and dryer included”
- Description of services and facilities: “indoor swimming pool”
- Description of neighborhoods: “walk to bus stop” or “houses of worship nearby”
- Prohibition of certain actions: “no smoking” or “no bicycles allowed”
- Descriptions of accessibility features: “wheelchair ramp”

Do's and Don'ts

- Advertise the characteristics of the property, not characteristics of people.
 - Size and location of the unit
 - Monthly rental price
 - Features, such as utilities included, laundry room.
- An advertisement for roommates of one sex is ok if living space is shared.
- Do not advertise characteristics for prospective tenants or buyers.
- Acceptable phrases: “walk-in closets” “three bedroom” “jogging trails nearby”
- Offensive phrases: “Exclusive” “no children” “singles preferred” “female only” “Hispanic area” “prefer bright, healthy person” “No Jews”

What to do?

Contact the Iowa Civil Rights Commission to find out about filing a housing discrimination complaint. A housing officer will assist you with information and will take the information and prepare a complaint for housing situations. The Commission will also cross-file your complaint with HUD under the federal law. State law requires the complaint to be filed within 300 days of the discriminatory incident to be within the jurisdiction of the Commission.

You may file a complaint with HUD under the federal law within one year of the discriminatory incident. You may also initiate a civil action directly in district court not later than two years after the termination of the discriminatory housing practice.

Iowa Civil Rights Commission

Grimes State Office Building

400 E. 14th Street

Des Moines, Iowa 50319

515-281-4121, 1-800-457-4416

FAX 515-242-5840

<https://icrc.iowa.gov/>