

HOUSING RIGHTS IN THE LGBT COMMUNITY

The City of Somerville's 2013 "Know Your Rights" campaign, sponsored by the City's Office of Commissions and partner organizations, focuses on fair housing for the LGBT community and other protected groups.

Other Somerville commissions related to the "Know Your Rights" and the LGBT community include the Human Rights Commission, the LGBT Liaison for the City of Somerville, the Multicultural Affairs Commission, the Somerville Commission for Women, the Commission for Persons with Disabilities, and others. A complete list of the City's commissions and information on current campaigns and contacts is available through the Office of Somerville Commissions at <http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/health/somerville-commissions> and <http://somercommissions.blogspot.com/>

BACKGROUND – LGBT FAIR HOUSING

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals, couples, or families looking to rent or own property face several forms of discrimination specific to their LGBT identity. While there are state, national, and international laws protecting LGBT tenants and landlords, it is important to identify common fair housing violations and strategies for addressing housing discrimination for LGBT people.

Massachusetts' law bans housing discrimination based on sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender expression, and gender identity. In 2011-2012, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) also established national fair housing protections for the LGBT community.

EXAMPLES OF VIOLATIONS OF LGBT HOUSING RIGHTS

1. A real estate agent, broker or lender will not sell you a home or give you a mortgage based on your sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender expression, and gender identity
2. A landlord won't rent to you based on your sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender expression, and gender identity
3. Your landlord tries to evict you or terminate your tenancy agreement
 - *If you paid your rent and haven't broken a lease clause or committed an illegal act, your landlord can't terminate your lease before the lease term ends.*

4. You are charged higher fees or monthly rents than heterosexual tenants
5. You are subjected to offensive comments and biases from your landlord
6. You are denied access to a homeless shelter or are subject to unsafe conditions in shelters because of threats or assault

TAKING ACTION

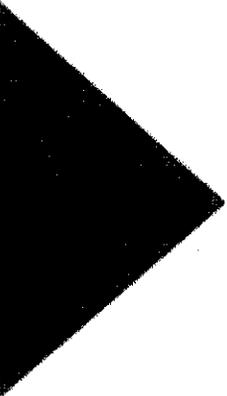
If you believe you've been discriminated against based on your LGBT identity, follow these steps to protect your right to fair housing (find more information at MassLegalHelp.org):

1. Write down the facts: *document the date, time, contact information, and any other relevant details from a conversation where you felt discriminated against*
2. Seek assistance with conducting a "testing" to investigate the discrimination: *an organization will send "testers" to the realtor or landlord who you believe is discriminating against you.*

After the initial discrimination incident, contact the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston ((617) 339-0491) to arrange a testing as soon as possible

- *If two testers investigate your LGBT discrimination complaint, one tester will provide LGBT identity information similar to yours and the other will provide information on their heterosexual identity. All other personal information (income, race, etc.) will be consistent.*
3. File your complaint with:
 - **The Somerville Fair Housing Commission:** (617)-625-6600 ext. 2577
 - **Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD):** ((617) 994-6000)
 - **The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):** *complaint forms available online at <http://www.hud.gov/complaints/housediscrim.cfm>. You can also call the HUD Fair Housing Discrimination Complaint Hotline at (800) 669-9777 or (800) 927-9275 (TDD)*
 - **A court:** *in a state court, you must file a complaint within a year*

4. **You could win:** *Damages, injunctions, and attorney's fees are all types of compensation for fair housing violations.*



Know Your Rights!
Fair Housing for
Somerville's LGBT
Community