Open Communities is a leading voice for housing, economic and social justice in north suburban Chicago, working to promote inclusive communities that are welcoming to all.

Inclusive and diverse communities are healthy, robust and right. Our communities are richer when those who give to the northern suburbs also live here.

Open Communities has been working for fair and affordable housing for more than 40 years. Founded in 1972 by north suburban residents and congregations, we are a nonprofit, membership-based organization dedicated to fostering economically and culturally diverse communities.

We educate, advocate and organize in the name of social justice, working collaboratively with current and prospective residents, local groups and municipalities.

All of our services are free and confidential. Donations are welcome.
Fair Housing Is Your Right

You have the right to live where you choose.

This right entitles you to equal treatment from landlords, real estate professionals, bankers, insurance companies and government agencies when you rent or buy a home. Federal, state and local laws protect each of us from being discriminated against because of personal characteristics such as race, color, religion, national origin, disability, gender and whether there are children in our household.

Discrimination Today

These days, housing discrimination is usually subtler than a slammed door or rude statement. Unsuspecting house or apartment seekers may be politely turned away from the home of their choice, even though they are qualified to live there.

If you’ve heard remarks such as these or other discouraging comments while looking for a place to live, you may have experienced housing discrimination:

“We don’t rent to more than two people for a two-bedroom apartment.”

“We don’t rent to people who don’t have a job, even if you get disability benefits.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t work with your translator.”

“We don’t rent to families; most people in this building are older.”

“You can’t build a ramp for access to the building—it won’t look good.”

“This is a Christian community. You might not feel comfortable here.”

“We just rented the apartment.” But the unit still is available the next day.

It is illegal to:

- Refuse to sell or rent to someone because of his or her status in a group protected by fair housing law
- Advertise or state a preference that discriminates against protected individuals or families
- Impose unreasonable limits on when or where children can play
- Unfairly restrict or charge fees to someone who uses a wheelchair or support animal for her or his disability
- Refuse to make reasonable alterations to accommodate a resident’s disability
- Fail to enforce rules against discrimination-based harassment among residents in an apartment or multi-family building
- Threaten or interfere with anyone taking action to protect his or her housing rights.

Take Action

If you feel you’re being treated unfairly, take the following steps:

1. Contact Open Communities’ fair housing staff.
2. Document the problem by writing down what happens during meetings and phone calls with the landlord, property manager, real estate agent, loan officer or insurance agent.
3. Keep detailed records as to what was said and the outcome.
4. Save all receipts, copies of application forms, business cards and other relevant documents.
5. Don’t delay if you’re considering filing a complaint —there are time limits of from 180 days to two years, depending on where the housing is located.

When you contact us, our fair housing experts will evaluate the facts of your situation and talk with you about your rights and options.

How We Can Help

Open Communities is here to help ensure everyone’s fair housing rights in Chicago’s northern suburbs. We can:

- Educate individuals, real estate professionals and municipal officials about fair housing laws and responsibilities
- Write a letter on your behalf to request that your housing provider accommodate your disability
- Investigate your claim of housing discrimination
- Assist you in filing a fair housing complaint
- Refer your case to attorneys who specialize in fair housing litigation.

If you feel you’re being treated unfairly, contact our fair housing experts. They’ll evaluate the facts of your situation and talk with you about your rights and options.

Help Promote Fair Housing

You can help make your community a more welcoming place by becoming a volunteer fair housing tester. In addition to the satisfaction of providing a valuable community service, testers receive a small stipend and travel reimbursement.

Contact us to learn more about this volunteer opportunity.