



Fair Housing 101: Advertising for Roommates and Housemates

What is Fair Housing?

Fair housing is about protecting all people's housing rights. The Federal Fair Housing Act protects people on the basis of *race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, and familial status* (households with children under 18 and women who are pregnant). The Illinois Human Rights Act has additional protections regarding *ancestry, marital status, age 40+, military status, sexual orientation, gender identity, order of protection status, and unfavorable military discharge*.

How do these laws apply to advertising for roommates or housemates?

Individuals looking for roommates are exempt from fair housing laws except in regards to advertising. This means that to "make, print, or publish" or ask someone else to make, print, or publish a statement or ad that indicates any preference, limitation, or discrimination based on one of the protected classes is illegal. Despite any preference you may have based on a protected class, none of your ads seeking potential roommates may state such preferences.

What kinds of advertisements are covered?

All kinds of advertising are covered, whether online, in print, like in newspapers or flyers, and even verbal.

What can I not say?

You cannot say anything that references one of the protected classes listed above.

If you are advertising for shared housing in which you will be sharing common areas, you may express a preference based upon your sex only if it is for the same sex, such as "Male seeking male housemate." Do not describe yourself using any of the protected classes, such as "Christian woman seeking roommate." You also cannot describe the neighborhood or building using protected classes, like "Lots of young people in the building," "Hispanic neighborhood," or "No children, please."

Why does this matter?

Because so many people see them, advertisements are key in determining whether a housing market is truly open and free from discrimination. Even subtle hints of preference will discourage people from different communities from seeking that housing. Discriminatory ads also encourage others to use exclusionary language. Such ads are considered unlawful and could lead to a housing discrimination complaint and possibly a lawsuit filed against you.

Contact HOPE Fair Housing Center, a nonprofit organization, if you have questions or concerns about discriminatory advertisements.

HOPE Fair Housing Center

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