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California Civil Rights Department Finds Widespread Housing Discrimination Against Federal Housing Choice Vouchers

With the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles opening its Housing Choice Voucher waiting list, California announces proactive efforts to stop discrimination against voucher holders

LOS ANGELES – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) announced today that it is sponsoring fair housing testing in Los Angeles County and initial results of the testing show widespread discrimination against holders of federal Housing Choice vouchers, formerly known as Section 8 vouchers.

Thus far in 2022, nearly half (47.5%) of the 80 properties tested showed evidence of unlawful discrimination, such as landlords refusing to even consider a prospective tenant with a Housing Choice voucher. CRD is analyzing the testing results, conducting further testing and investigation, and expects to bring enforcement actions where appropriate.

“One of the keys to tackling California’s decades-long housing supply imbalance is to safeguard access to rental housing by combatting source-of-income discrimination,” said Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency Secretary [Lourdes Castro Ramírez](#). “Housing vouchers are highly effective anti-poverty programs that reduce housing cost burdens and address housing insecurity. Families in need that have waited for years for this assistance should not be denied housing simply because a landlord does not like the idea of subsidized rent.”

“Conducting fair housing testing is a powerful, proactive strategy for our department to protect Californians’ civil rights and their ability to secure safe and affordable housing,” said CRD Director Kevin Kish. “Discriminating against someone on the basis of their source of income is unlawful and when it occurs, we will use all the tools at our disposal to stop it, from education and outreach to mediation to legal action.”

Fair housing testing is a well-recognized method for identifying housing discrimination in real-world scenarios. During the testing process, individuals respond to housing advertisements and inquire whether the housing provider accepts Housing Choice vouchers and, if so, whether any conditions apply.

Today’s announcement comes on the same day that the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) [opened its Housing Choice voucher waiting list](#) for the first time in five years. Financed by federal government, Housing Choice vouchers provide rental assistance to low-income households. The household pays the difference between the actual rent and the amount subsidized by the program. [According to HACLA](#), in 2021, the agency paid more than \$603 million to private landlords on

behalf of more than 43,700 participant families.

[Research has shown](#) that Housing Choice vouchers are highly effective at addressing housing insecurity. Vouchers reduce the burden of housing costs, improve health, education and social outcomes, and bring in landlords as partners.

Only 19 states – including California – and the District of Columbia prohibit housing discrimination based on someone’s “source of income.” Since 2020, California’s Fair Employment and Housing Act, which is enforced by CRD, has included a tenant’s use of a Housing Choice voucher or other form of government assistance as a source of income, among other protected characteristics. Yet many voucher holders wait months, or even years, to receive a voucher, then struggle to find housing because providers refuse to rent to voucher holders.

To combat this discrimination, CRD receives, investigates, mediates, and prosecutes complaints of source-of-income discrimination in housing. In 2020, CRD investigated 82 source-of-income complaints and settled 21 of them. Recently, for example, [CRD settled a complaint](#) against a large housing complex in Marin County that, according to the complaint, refused to accept Section 8 vouchers.

In addition, CRD has launched its fair housing testing program and other affirmative efforts to enforce the FEHA’s protections for Housing Choice Voucher holders. The efforts include reviewing thousands of online housing advertisements for unlawful statements such as “Section 8 Not Accepted”, documenting violations, and notifying housing providers in violation and assisting them in knowing the law. CRD also provides educational webinars and materials to [tenants](#) and [housing providers](#) so that they better understand their civil rights and obligations.

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CRD is the state agency charged with enforcing California’s civil rights laws. Formerly known as the Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH), the mission of the CRD is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state-fund programs and activities, and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit the CRD’s web site at calcivilrights.ca.gov.

