

Chapter 2

FAIR HOUSING AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the laws and HUD regulations requiring PHAs to affirmatively further civil rights and fair housing in all federally assisted housing programs. The letter and spirit of these laws are implemented through consistent policy and procedures. The responsibility to further nondiscrimination pertains to all areas of the PHA's public housing operations.

This chapter describes HUD regulations and PHA policies related to these topics in three parts:

Part I: Nondiscrimination. This part presents the body of laws and regulations governing the responsibilities of the PHA regarding nondiscrimination.

Part II: Policies Related to Persons with Disabilities. This part discusses the rules and policies of the public housing program related to reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. These rules and policies are based on the Fair Housing Act (42.U.S.C.) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and incorporate guidance from the Joint Statement of The Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Justice (DOJ), issued May 17, 2004.

Part III: Serving Limited English Proficient Persons (LEP). This part details current requirements related to LEP persons.

PART I: NONDISCRIMINATION

2-I.A. OVERVIEW

Federal laws require PHAs to treat all applicants and tenant families equally, providing the same quality of service, regardless of family characteristics and background. Federal law prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, familial status, and disability. In addition, 24 CFR 5.105(a)(2) currently provides for additional protections regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status.

All PHAs must comply fully with all federal, state, and local nondiscrimination laws, and with rules and regulations governing fair housing and equal opportunity in housing and employment, including:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (as amended by the Community Development Act of 1974 and the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988)
- Executive Order 11063
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- The Age Discrimination Act of 1975
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (to the extent that it applies, otherwise Section 504 and the Fair Housing Amendments govern)
- The Violence against Women Act (VAWA)
- Any applicable state laws or local ordinances and any legislation protecting individual rights of tenants, applicants, or staff that may subsequently be enacted

When more than one civil rights law applies to a situation, the laws will be read and applied together.

PHA Policy

No state or local nondiscrimination laws or ordinances apply.

2-I.B. NONDISCRIMINATION

Federal regulations prohibit discrimination against certain protected classes and other groups of people. State and local requirements, as well as PHA policies, can prohibit discrimination against additional classes of people.

The PHA shall not discriminate because of race, color, sex, religion, familial status, age, disability, or national origin (called “protected classes”).

Familial status includes children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians, pregnant women, and people securing custody of children under the age of 18.

The PHA will not discriminate on the basis of marital status, gender identity, or sexual orientation as currently required under 24 CFR 5.105(a)(2). HUD enforcement of the *Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity Final Rule* has been halted. HUD rescinded Notice PIH 2014-20 regarding Equal Access Rule enforcement and has removed references to the rule from the *HCV Guidebook*. On April 28, 2026, HUD published a proposed rule that seeks to eliminate references to “gender” and “gender identity” with “sex” as defined by Executive Order 14168. This rule has not yet been finalized or codified. Protections for gender and gender identity vary significantly by state.

PHA Policy

The PHA does not identify any additional protected classes.

The PHA will not use any of these factors to:

- Deny to any family the opportunity to apply for housing, nor deny to any qualified applicant the opportunity to participate in the public housing program
- Provide housing that is different from that provided to others
- Subject anyone to segregation or disparate treatment
- Subject anyone to sexual harassment
- Restrict anyone's access to any benefit enjoyed by others in connection with the housing program
- Treat a person differently in determining eligibility or other requirements for admission
- Steer an applicant or tenant toward or away from a particular area based on any of these factors
- Deny anyone access to the same level of services
- Deny anyone the opportunity to participate in a planning or advisory group that is an integral part of the housing program
- Discriminate in the provision of residential real estate transactions
- Discriminate against someone because they are related to or associated with a member of a protected class
- Publish or cause to be published an advertisement or notice indicating the availability of housing that prefers or excludes persons who are members of a protected class

Providing Information to Families

The PHA must take steps to ensure that families are fully aware of all applicable civil rights laws. As part of the public housing orientation process, the PHA will provide information to public housing applicant families about civil rights requirements.

2-I.C. DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS

General Housing Discrimination Complaints

If an applicant or tenant family believes that any family member has been discriminated against by the PHA, the family should advise the PHA. The PHA should make every reasonable attempt to determine whether the applicant or tenant family's assertions have merit and take any warranted corrective action.

In all cases, the PHA will advise the family that they may file a fair housing complaint with HUD if the family feels they have been discriminated against under the Fair Housing Act.

PHA Policy

Applicants or tenant families who believe that they have been subject to unlawful discrimination may notify the PHA either orally or in writing.

Within 10 business days of receiving the complaint, the PHA will investigate and attempt to remedy discrimination complaints made against the PHA. The PHA will also advise the family of their right to file a fair housing complaint with HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) either online, over the phone, or by printing and mailing a housing discrimination complaint form to their regional FHEO Office. The fair housing poster, posted in conspicuous and accessible locations in PHA lobbies, will reference how to file a complaint with FHEO.

The PHA will keep a record of all complaints, investigations, notices, and corrective actions. (See Chapter 16.)

VAWA Complaint Processing [Notice FHEO 2023-01]

A complainant may, not later than one year after an alleged VAWA violation has occurred or terminated, file a complaint with FHEO alleging such violation. If there is a violation that began prior to a year before the complaint is filed, but it continues into the one-year time period, HUD will accept the complaint. FHEO will investigate the complaint if it is timely and FHEO otherwise has jurisdiction. If a complaint is filed more than one year after the alleged violation occurred or terminated, FHEO may, but is not required to, investigate the allegations under the additional authority and procedures described in FHEO 2023-01.

Complaints do not need to allege a violation of the Fair Housing Act for FHEO to accept and investigate the complaint.

PHA Policy

Applicants or tenant families who wish to file a VAWA complaint against the PHA may notify the PHA either orally or in writing.

The PHA will advise the family of their right to file a VAWA complaint with HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO). The PHA will inform the family that not later than one year after an alleged VAWA violation has occurred or terminated, applicants and tenants who believe they have been injured by a VAWA violation or will be injured by such a violation that is about to occur may file a VAWA complaint using FHEO's online complaint form via mail, email, or telephone.

The PHA will attempt to remedy complaints made against the PHA and will conduct an investigation into all allegations of discrimination.

The PHA will keep a record of all complaints, investigations, notices, and corrective actions. (See Chapter 16.)

PART II: POLICIES RELATED TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

2-II.A. OVERVIEW

One type of disability discrimination prohibited by the Fair Housing Act is the refusal to make reasonable accommodation in rules, policies, practices, or services when such accommodation may be necessary to afford a person with a disability the equal opportunity to use and enjoy a program or dwelling under the program.

The PHA must ensure that persons with disabilities have full access to the PHA's programs and services. This responsibility begins with the first inquiry of an interested family and continues through every programmatic area of the public housing program [24 CFR 8].

The PHA must provide a notice to each tenant that the tenant may, at any time during the tenancy, request reasonable accommodation of a handicap of a household member, including reasonable accommodation so that the tenant can meet lease requirements or other requirements of tenancy [24 CFR 966.7(b)].

PHA Policy

The PHA will ask all applicants and resident families if they require any type of accommodations in writing on the intake application, reexamination documents, and notices of adverse action by the PHA, by including the following language:

“If you or anyone in your family is a person with disabilities, and you require a specific accommodation in order to fully utilize our programs and services, please contact the housing authority.”

A specific position and phone number will be provided as the contact person for requests for accommodation for persons with disabilities.

The PHA will display posters and other housing information and signage in locations throughout the PHA's office in such a manner as to be easily readable from a wheelchair.

2-II.B. DEFINITION OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

A “reasonable accommodation” is a change, exception, or adjustment to a policy, practice or service that may be necessary for a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, including public and common use spaces. Since policies and services may have a different effect on persons with disabilities than on other persons, treating persons with disabilities exactly the same as others will sometimes deny them an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. [Joint Statement of the Departments of HUD and Justice: Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act]

Federal regulations stipulate that requests for accommodations will be considered reasonable if they do not create an "undue financial and administrative burden" for the PHA, or result in a “fundamental alteration” in the nature of the program or service offered. A fundamental alteration is a modification that alters the essential nature of a provider’s operations.

Types of Reasonable Accommodations

When it is reasonable (see definition above and Section 2-II.E), the PHA shall accommodate the needs of a person with disabilities. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Permitting applications and reexaminations to be completed by mail
- Providing “large-print” forms
- Conducting home visits
- Permitting a higher utility allowance for the unit if a person with disabilities requires the use of specialized equipment related to the disability
- Modifying or altering a unit or physical system if such a modification or alteration is necessary to provide equal access to a person with a disability
- Installing a ramp into a dwelling or building
- Installing grab bars in a bathroom
- Installing visual fire alarms for hearing impaired persons
- Allowing a change in the family’s rent due date to correspond with the receipt of the head of household or spouse/cohead’s SSI or SSDI benefits
- Allowing a PHA-approved live-in aide to reside in the unit if that person is determined to be essential to the care of a person with disabilities, is not obligated for the support of the person with disabilities, and would not be otherwise living in the unit.
- Providing a designated handicapped-accessible parking space
- Allowing an assistance animal
- Permitting an authorized designee or advocate to participate in the application or certification process and any other meetings with PHA staff
- Displaying posters and other housing information in locations throughout the PHA's office in such a manner as to be easily readable from a wheelchair

2-II.C. REQUEST FOR AN ACCOMMODATION

If an applicant or participant indicates that an exception, change, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service is needed because of a disability, HUD requires that the PHA treat the information as a request for a reasonable accommodation, even if no formal request is made [Joint Statement of the Departments of HUD and Justice: Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act].

The family must explain what type of accommodation is needed to provide the person with the disability full access to the PHA's programs and services.

If the need for the accommodation is not readily apparent or known to the PHA, the family must explain the relationship between the requested accommodation and the disability.

PHA Policy

The PHA will encourage the family to make its request in writing using a reasonable accommodation request form. However, the PHA will consider the accommodation any time the family indicates that an accommodation is needed whether or not a formal written request is submitted.

2-II.D. VERIFICATION OF DISABILITY

The regulatory civil rights definition for persons with disabilities is provided in Exhibit 2-1 at the end of this chapter. The definition of a person with a disability for the purpose of obtaining a reasonable accommodation is much broader than the HUD definition of disability which is used for waiting list preferences and income allowances.

Before providing an accommodation, the PHA must determine that the person meets the definition of a person with a disability, and that the accommodation will enhance the family's access to the PHA's programs and services.

If a person's disability is obvious or otherwise known to the PHA, and if the need for the requested accommodation is also readily apparent or known, no further verification will be required [Joint Statement of the Departments of HUD and Justice: Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act].

If a family indicates that an accommodation is required for a disability that is not obvious or otherwise known to the PHA, the PHA must verify that the person meets the definition of a person with a disability, and that the limitations imposed by the disability require the requested accommodation.

When verifying a disability, the PHA will follow the verification policies provided in Chapter 7. All information related to a person's disability will be treated in accordance with the confidentiality policies provided in Chapter 16 (Program Administration). In addition to the general requirements that govern all verification efforts, the following requirements apply when verifying a disability:

- Third-party verification must be obtained from an individual identified by the family who is competent to make the determination. A doctor or other medical professional, a peer support group, a non-medical service agency, or a reliable third party who is in a position to know about the individual's disability may provide verification of a disability [Joint Statement of the Departments of HUD and Justice: Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act].
- The PHA must request only information that is necessary to evaluate the disability-related need for the accommodation. The PHA may not inquire about the nature or extent of any disability.
- Medical records will not be accepted or retained in the participant file.
- In the event the PHA does receive confidential information about a person's specific diagnosis, treatment, or the nature or severity of the disability, the PHA will dispose of it. In place of the information, the PHA will note in the file that the disability and other requested information have been verified, the date the verification was received, and the name and address of the knowledgeable professional who sent the information [Notice PIH 2010-26].

2-II.E. APPROVAL/DENIAL OF A REQUESTED ACCOMMODATION [Joint Statement of the Departments of HUD and Justice: Reasonable Accommodations under the Fair Housing Act, Notice PIH 2010-26]

The PHA must approve a request for an accommodation if the following three conditions are met.

- The request was made by or on behalf of a person with a disability.
- There is a disability-related need for the accommodation.
- The requested accommodation is reasonable, meaning it would not impose an undue financial and administrative burden on the PHA, or fundamentally alter the nature of the PHA's operations.

Requests for accommodations must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The determination of undue financial and administrative burden must be made on a case-by-case basis involving various factors, such as the overall size of the PHA's program with respect to the number of employees, type of facilities and size of budget, type of operation including composition and structure of workforce, the nature and cost of the requested accommodation, and the availability of alternative accommodations that would effectively meet the family's disability-related needs.

Before making a determination whether to approve the request, the PHA may enter into discussion and negotiation with the family, request more information from the family, or may require the family to sign a consent form so that the PHA may verify the need for the requested accommodation.

PHA Policy

After a request for an accommodation is presented, the PHA will respond, in writing, within 10 business days.

If the PHA denies a request for an accommodation because there is no relationship, or nexus, found between the disability and the requested accommodation, the notice will inform the family of the right to appeal the PHA's decision through an informal hearing (if applicable) or the grievance process (see Chapter 14).

If the PHA denies a request for an accommodation because it is not reasonable (it would impose an undue financial and administrative burden or fundamentally alter the nature of the PHA's operations), the PHA will discuss with the family whether an alternative accommodation could effectively address the family's disability-related needs without a fundamental alteration to the public housing program and without imposing an undue financial and administrative burden.

If the PHA believes that the family has failed to identify a reasonable alternative accommodation after interactive discussion and negotiation, the PHA will notify the family, in writing, of its determination within 10 business days from the date of the most recent discussion or communication with the family. The notice will inform the family of the right to appeal the PHA's decision through an informal hearing (if applicable) or the grievance process (see Chapter 14).

2-II.F. PROGRAM ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH HEARING OR VISION IMPAIRMENTS

HUD regulations require the PHA to take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with disabilities related to hearing and vision have reasonable access to the PHA's programs and services [24 CFR 8.6].

At the initial point of contact with each applicant, the PHA shall inform all applicants of alternative forms of communication that can be used other than plain language paperwork.

PHA Policy

To meet the needs of persons with hearing impairments, TTD/TTY (text telephone display / teletype) communication will be available.

To meet the needs of persons with vision impairments, large-print and audio versions of key program documents will be made available upon request. When visual aids are used in public meetings or presentations, or in meetings with PHA staff, one-on-one assistance will be provided upon request.

Additional examples of alternative forms of communication are sign language interpretation; having material explained orally by staff; or having a third-party representative (a friend, relative or advocate, named by the applicant) to receive, interpret and explain housing materials and be present at all meetings.

2-II.G. PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

The PHA must comply with a variety of regulations pertaining to physical accessibility, including the following.

- Notice PIH 2010-26
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968
- The Fair Housing Act of 1988

The PHA's policies concerning physical accessibility must be readily available to applicants and resident families. They can be found in three key documents.

- This policy, the Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy, describes the key policies that govern the PHA's responsibilities with regard to physical accessibility.
- Notice PIH 2010-26 summarizes information about pertinent laws and implementing regulations related to nondiscrimination and accessibility in federally funded housing programs.
- The PHA Plan provides information about self-evaluation, needs assessment, and transition plans.

The design, construction, or alteration of PHA facilities must conform to the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS). Notice PIH 2010-26 contains specific information on calculating the percentages of units for meeting UFAS requirements.

Newly-constructed facilities must be designed to be readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. Alterations to existing facilities must be accessible to the maximum extent feasible, defined as not imposing an undue financial and administrative burden on the operations of the public housing program.

2-II.H. DENIAL OR TERMINATION OF ASSISTANCE

A PHA's decision to deny or terminate the assistance of a family that includes a person with disabilities is subject to consideration of reasonable accommodation [24 CFR 966.7].

When applicants with disabilities are denied assistance, the notice of denial must inform them of their right to request an informal hearing [24 CFR 960.208(a)].

When a family's lease is terminated, the notice of termination must inform the family of their right to request a hearing in accordance with the PHA's grievance process [24 CFR 966.4(l)(3)(ii)].

When reviewing reasonable accommodation requests, the PHA must consider whether reasonable accommodation will allow the family to overcome the problem that led to the PHA's decision to deny or terminate assistance. If a reasonable accommodation will allow the family to meet the requirements, the PHA must make the accommodation [24 CFR 966.7].

In addition, the PHA must provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities to participate in the hearing process [24 CFR 966.56(h)].

PART III: SERVING LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT (LEP) PERSONS

2-III.A. OVERVIEW [OAG Memo 7/14/25, FHEO Memo 9/19/25, and Executive Order 14224]

In March 2025, Executive Order 14224 revoked Executive Order 13166, which had directed agencies to enhance access to federal programs for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) and required tailored guidance for recipients of federal funding under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Executive Order 14224 also declared English as the official language of the United States.

In response, on July 14, 2025, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) issued a memo on the implementation of EO 14224, which rescinded all prior guidance to federal agencies regarding Title VI of the Civil Rights Act's prohibition against national origin discrimination affecting LEP persons. The memo presents a legal analysis that finds language is not an immutable characteristic entitled to Title VI protection and decoupling LEP persons from national origin discrimination. HUD FHEO has stated they will prioritize enforcement actions involving intentional discrimination where language has been used as a proxy for national origin or a vehicle for intentional discrimination [FHEO Memo 9/19/25].

The OAG Memo states that, where allowed by law, agencies should determine which of their programs and policies might serve the public at large better if operated exclusively in English. The OAG memo also states that agencies are not required to amend, remove, or otherwise stop production of all multilingual documents, products, or other services prepared or offered. Further, many states and localities have laws regarding language services to be provided to non-English speaking persons that may apply to the PHA.

Language for Limited English Proficiency Persons (LEP) can be a barrier to accessing important benefits or services, understanding and exercising important rights, complying with applicable responsibilities, or understanding other information provided by the public housing program.

PHA Policy

PHA oral and written communications with families will generally be conducted in English. For applicants and participants who may require language assistance, the PHA will encourage families to bring an advocate, family member, friend, or other adult representative to assist in communications. The PHA will also utilize available resources such as bilingual staff, community volunteer resources, responsible use of artificial intelligence technology, and/or machine translation to assist families with communication.

EXHIBIT 2-1: DEFINITION OF A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY UNDER FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS [24 CFR Parts 8.3 and 100.201]

A person with a disability, as defined under federal civil rights laws, is any person who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual, or
- Has a record of such impairment, or
- Is regarded as having such impairment

The phrase “physical or mental impairment” includes:

- Any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic or disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs; cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genito-urinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or
- Any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities. The term “physical or mental impairment” includes, but is not limited to: such diseases and conditions as orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, mental retardation, emotional illness, drug addiction and alcoholism.

“Major life activities” includes, but is not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, and/or working.

“Has a record of such impairment” means has a history of, or has been misclassified as having, a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major live activities.

“Is regarded as having an impairment” is defined as having a physical or mental impairment that does not substantially limit one or more major life activities but is treated by a public entity (such as the PHA) as constituting such a limitation; has none of the impairments defined in this section but is treated by a public entity as having such an impairment; or has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, only as a result of the attitudes of others toward that impairment.

The definition of a person with disabilities does not include:

- Current illegal drug users
- People whose alcohol use interferes with the rights of others
- Persons who objectively pose a direct threat or substantial risk of harm to others that cannot be controlled with a reasonable accommodation under the public housing program

The above definition of disability determines whether an applicant or participant is entitled to any of the protections of federal disability civil rights laws. Thus, a person who does not meet this definition of disability is not entitled to a reasonable accommodation under federal civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations.

The HUD definition of a person with a disability is much narrower than the civil rights definition of disability. The HUD definition of a person with a disability is used for purposes of receiving the disabled family preference, the \$400 elderly/disabled household deduction, the allowance for medical expenses, or the allowance for disability assistance expenses.

The definition of a person with a disability for purposes of granting a reasonable accommodation request is much broader than the HUD definition of disability. Many people will not qualify as a disabled person under the public housing program, yet an accommodation is needed to provide equal opportunity.