



## New Year, New Protected Classes

By Jo Becker, Education/Outreach Specialist, Fair Housing Council of Oregon

### That's right! New fair housing protected classes

Did you know that a new protected class went into effect across the State of Oregon on January 1, 2008? Have you heard about Washington's new protected class effective July 22, 2007?

#### OREGON: Sexual Orientation / Gender Identity

The Oregon Legislature added sexual orientation as a protected class to state law during the 2007 Legislative Session with Senate Bill 2. This law applies to all housing, employment and public accommodation. It should be noted that "sexual orientation" also includes a person's gender identity or expression. For our purposes, obviously it's the impact on housing that is of concern to us.

#### WASHINGTON: Honorably Discharged Veteran / Military Status

Washington added new anti-discrimination protections to state law covering honorably discharged veterans and those with military status. This law applies to discrimination in employment, in credit and insurance transactions, in places of public resort, accommodation, or amusement, and in real estate transactions. Again, it's the impact on housing that is of concern to us.

#### What does this mean?

Housing providers including shelters, landlords and property managers, real estate agents and sellers, lenders and appraisers, home insurers, etc. cannot discriminate against an individual because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression in Oregon, or against those who are or were in the military in Washington. These protections are in addition to all of the previously enacted federal, state, and local protected classes.

Note that one's *perceived* sexual orientation or gender identity is also protected in Oregon, even if one's assumption about it is inaccurate.

#### Why do I need to know this?

Fair housing laws protect us all. We all have membership in various protected classes; each of us has a sex, a race, and a religion (or not), for example. We all have the right to choose where we live, and to enjoy our housing to the fullest extent without consideration of our membership in a protected class. The bottom line is *fair housing laws apply to everyone* and running afoul of them not only harms individuals, families, and society, it can be a costly experience.

#### What is Fair Housing and the Fair Housing Council of Oregon?

Fair Housing is a set of federal, state, and local laws that protect against illegal housing discrimination based on the following protected classes:

<b>FEDERAL:</b>	
	Race, Color, National Origin
	Religion
	Gender
	Familial Status

	Disability	
<b>STATE:</b>	<b>OREGON:</b>	<b>WASHINGTON:</b>
	Marital Status	Marital Status
	(Legal) Source of Income	Sexual Orientation
<b>LOCAL:</b>		
For a list of protected classes by jurisdiction in Oregon and SW Washington visit <a href="http://FHCO.org/brochures.htm">http://FHCO.org/brochures.htm</a>		

<b>NEWLY ADDED STATE CLASSES:</b>	<b>OREGON:</b>	<b>WASHINGTON:</b>
	Sexual Orientation / Gender Identity (effective 01/2008)	Honorably Discharged Veteran / Military Status (effective 07/2007)

The Fair Housing Council of Oregon (FHCO) is a nonprofit civil rights organization, founded in 1990, whose mission is to eliminate housing discrimination through access to enforcement and education. We serve all of Oregon and SW Washington.

FHCO staff members conduct education and outreach on fair housing law, and are available to educate the general public, housing providers, government and agency staff, attorneys and others about fair housing.

FHCO staff also receives and screens complaints of housing discrimination across Oregon and SW Washington. FHCO conducts both complaint-based and audit-based tests and refers complainants to appropriate resources including: the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Civil Rights Division of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, legal aid offices if the complainant is income qualified, private attorneys.

**Now What?**

These laws are in full effect right now. If you have questions about them, or would like to schedule a training to delve into greater detail on fair housing issues, let us know!

As I've said many times, we take a proactive approach to fair housing at the FHCO and would much like to maintain an open dialogue with you. To that end, we encourage your calls and / or email messages! In addition, if you would like to receive our newsletter or materials on fair housing free of charge, please let us know! We would also appreciate knowing what kinds of article topics and resource materials you would find useful that you could assist in developing.

I will continue to bring you a series of articles focused on education, information, and helpful resources. We're here as a resource for you and hope that you will take every opportunity to get to know us and take advantage of the services we offer!

---

This article brought to you by the Fair Housing Council of Oregon; a nonprofit serving the state of Oregon and SW Washington. Learn more and / or sign up for our free, periodic newsletter at [FHCO.org](http://FHCO.org).

**Questions about your rights and responsibilities under fair housing laws?**

Visit [www.FHCO.org](http://www.FHCO.org) or call 800-424-3247 ext. 2.

**Questions about this article? Want to schedule an in-office fair housing training program or speaker for corporate or association functions?**

Contact Jo Becker at [jbecker@FHCO.org](mailto:jbecker@FHCO.org) or 503/453-4016.

**Have property to promote?**

Advertise vacancies or for-sales free across the Portland/Vancouver market at [www.HousingConnections.org](http://www.HousingConnections.org)!