

Housing Justice Coalition

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Who We Are

The Washington State Housing Justice Coalition (WHJC) is a community of people and organizations who are seeking justice for our friends, families and neighbors impacted by the criminal legal system to ensure access to safe, stable housing by ending arbitrary rental discrimination in Washington state. We believe an important component to help end this discrimination is passage of statewide legislation. We are committed to supporting legislation that aligns with our collective values of humanity, racial equity, equitable access to housing, empowerment and inclusion, and meaningful change.

Policy Agenda

The Washington Housing Justice Coalition (WHJC) was formed to advocate for the passage of legislation that prohibits a landlord from advertising, requiring disclosure of, taking an adverse action against, or implementing any policy or practice that automatically or categorically excludes individuals with any arrest record or conviction record from rental housing.

Coalition Work

- Developing the coalition and its goals and values
- Listening sessions with directly impacted individuals
- Research of other jurisdictions with fair housing ordinances
- Research project collaboration with The Evergreen State College on criminal legal system involvement discrimination for housing

The Evergreen State College Research Project

Guiding research question:

Why are Washington state residents previously involved with the criminal legal system denied housing?

Research Highlights

- 290 Respondents took the survey
- Respondents came from 30 out of Washington State's 39 counties
- 180 (65%) were previously involved in the criminal legal system
- Of those 180 respondents, 157 were denied housing and 121 (80%) specifically stated they were denied housing due to previous criminal legal system involvement

Research Question – Why were you denied housing in Washington?

poor credit pass background check said previous criminal convictions
denied past drug record years ago rent Eviction charges credit score
housing family criminal history told
Felony criminal background
Felony conviction income due even though
conviction issue credit theft time prison Criminal record clients
history making rental history due criminal history background check

– [previous criminal legal system involvement](#)

121 (combined words of criminal history, Felony, Felony conviction, conviction, charges, criminal convictions, Criminal record, record, criminal background, theft, due criminal history, prison)

– [background check](#)

36 (combined words pass background check, denied, past, time, and history)

Two Jurisdictions with a Fair Housing Ordinances

City of Seattle

- Chapter 14.09 (Fair Chance Housing)
- Passed in August 2017

City of Oakland

- Chapter 8.25 (Fair Chance Access to Housing Ordinance)
- Passed in February 2020

City of Seattle

Prohibits the unfair practice to advertise, publicize, or implement a practice to automatically exclude individuals with criminal history

If a landlord takes an adverse action based on a legitimate business reason and must provide a written notice.

Seattle Office of Civil Rights can investigate violations

Any aggravated person may file a violation

Does not apply to an adverse action take by landlords of federally assisted housing subject to federal regulations

City of Oakland

A landlord must not, at any time or by any means, whether direct or indirect, inquire about an applicant's criminal history and if such information is received, base an adverse action in whole or in part on an applicant's criminal history.

A landlord may review the state registry when it is stated that it is a requirement on the rental application. It cannot be reviewed until the applicant is qualified and provided a conditional rental agreement.

It is not a violation of the ordinance for the landlord to comply with Federal or state laws that automatically exclude tenants.

There are administrative, civil and criminal penalties.