



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Billy J. Williams
District of Oregon

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U.S. ATTORNEY SEEKS REPORTING OF DISCRIMINATION AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN HOUSING RESULTING FROM COVID-19 PANDEMIC

PORTLAND, Ore.—U.S. Attorney Billy J. Williams is asking anyone who has witnessed or experienced discrimination or sexual harassment by a landlord, property manager, maintenance worker, or anyone with control over housing to report this conduct.

The COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency has impacted many Americans' ability to pay their rent and has increased housing insecurity. It is violation of the federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) for housing providers to exploit this crisis by sexually harassing tenants in exchange for rent or other housing needs.

"Nobody should feel unsafe in their own apartment or home—particularly in the midst of a global pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Williams. "Our office stands ready to investigate allegations of sexual harassment by anyone in control of housing and, where appropriate, we will pursue enforcement action. We will work closely with our enforcement partners to investigate any federal violations of Oregonians' civil rights. The first step is reporting of such discrimination."

The Justice Department's [Sexual Harassment in Housing Initiative](#) is led by the Civil Rights Division in coordination with U.S. Attorney's Offices across the country. The initiative's goal is to address sexual harassment by landlords, property managers, maintenance workers, loan officers or other people who have control over housing.

Last fall the U.S. Attorney's Office hosted two roundtables to bring awareness to this type of predatory discrimination. Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. Attorney Williams asks for the community to be even more vigilant given the increased vulnerability of individuals.

The Department of Justice has filed lawsuits across the country where a pattern or practice of sexual harassment in housing is alleged. Investigations frequently uncover sexual harassment that has been ongoing for years. Many individuals do not know that being sexually harassed by a housing provider can violate federal law or that the Department of Justice may be able to help.

Discrimination based on race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, and other protected classes is unlawful under [several federal laws](#), including FHA, and may result in criminal or civil

liability. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by FHA. Further, violent acts of hate based upon these and other protected classes violate federal [hate crimes statutes](#). Discrimination can arise in many different contexts in addition to housing, including education, employment, health and safety, and places of public accommodation.

“It is important that we all work together to address unlawful discrimination, including violent acts or threats based upon protected classes,” U.S. Attorney Williams emphasized. “As in all emergencies, the COVID-19 outbreak has affected people of many different races, religions, and ethnicities, as well as those with disabilities. Laws prohibiting unlawful discriminatory behavior must and will be vigorously enforced.”

If you believe you are a victim of discrimination based on race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, or other protected classes, you can find information about how to file a complaint at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/how-file-complaint> and <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs>. Anyone who has experienced sexual harassment in housing, or knows someone who has, can also email fairhousing@usdoj.gov. The U.S. Attorney’s Office Civil Rights Coordinator can be reached by calling (503) 727-1000.

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