

# Discrimination and Harassment

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Are you a renter? The *Alberta Human Rights Act* helps to protect renters from discrimination and harassment. Here are some commonly asked questions about discrimination and harassment while renting.

### What is discrimination?

Discrimination is when you are excluded or treated in a negative way based on protected grounds. For example, a landlord refuses to rent to you because of your religious beliefs.

Someone may discriminate because they assume incorrect things about a group. For example, a landlord assumes that you will not be a good tenant because you receive income support from the government.

A person or group may not discriminate on purpose; however, that does not make discrimination acceptable or legal.

### What does the *Alberta Human Rights Act* say about discrimination?

Under the Act, you should be treated fairly from the time that a housing advertisement is posted to the time that you end your tenancy. The Act helps protect you based on certain grounds. There are 14 protected grounds in the area of tenancy:

- Race
- Colour
- Ancestry
- Place of birth
- Religious beliefs
- Physical disability

- Mental disability
- Marital status
- Family status
- Source of income
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Gender expression



For more information about how the *Alberta Human Rights Act* helps protect renters in Alberta, visit: [www.cplea.ca/rightswhenrenting](http://www.cplea.ca/rightswhenrenting)

### What does discrimination while renting look like?

Discrimination can happen in many ways. It most often includes being treated unfairly or being excluded from renting based on a protected ground. Some common examples are:

- Refusing to rent to someone based on a protected ground. For example:
  - Refusing to rent to a single parent.
  - Preferring to rent to a family with no children over a family with children.
  - Telling a renter, “I don’t rent to people like you.”
  - Refusing to rent to someone because they are on AISH.
  - Refusing to rent to a new Canadian because they do not have a rental history.
- Applying rules or conditions to some tenants but other others could also be discrimination. For example:
  - Not allowing a renter to cook ethnic foods in their apartment.
  - Asking for a security deposit that is more than one month’s rent because the renter belongs to a religious community.
  - Making a tenant pay three months rent in advance if they are a newcomer to Canada.

I receive financial support from Alberta Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). I called about an apartment for rent and the landlord asked if I was working. I told them no, but that I had income from AISH. They suddenly said, “I can’t rent to you if you’re on disability, sorry!” and ended the call. Did the landlord discriminate against me?

According to the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, a landlord cannot refuse to rent to you based on your source of income, physical disability, or mental disability. A landlord refusing to rent to you if you receive AISH could be discrimination. If you think that you have been discriminated against, you can contact the Alberta Human Rights Commission.



Have you been discriminated against? You can contact the Alberta Human Rights Commission for more information.

## What is Harassment?

Harassment is unwanted physical or verbal behavior that stresses, offends, or humiliates you.

Some examples of harassment include:

- A neighbour threatening you because of your race.
- A landlord making jokes about your religious beliefs.
- A neighbour making unwanted advances because of you are a single woman (marital status).

## What does the *Alberta Human Rights Act* say about harassment when renting?

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* helps protect you from harassment when renting. Under the Act, you should not be harassed by landlords or neighbours because of a protected ground. For example, a landlord cannot verbally threaten you because of your source of income. If another tenant is harassing you, the landlord has a responsibility to address the harassment.

## What does harassment while renting look like?

Do you feel that someone's behavior is threatening, offensive, or humiliating? The person may be harassing you. Some examples of harassment include:

- A landlord makes rude remarks and jokes about a renter based on their place of birth.
- A neighbour pinches you and calls you names because of your ancestry. You have asked them to stop, but they do not stop.
- Verbal abuse or threats of you, other family members, or your roommates.

**My neighbour lives above me. When I am cooking, they come to my door and complain about the food smells and say that “no one wants to smell your ethnic food.” I’ve tried changing some of my cooking habits, but the neighbour is getting more aggressive no matter what I cook! What should I do?**

It is possible that your neighbour is harassing you based on race, ancestry, or place of origin. If a neighbour is harassing you, you should speak to your landlord. The landlord has a responsibility to address the harassment.

If the harassment continues, you might want to file a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission. For example, a tenant was told to stop cooking curry. The cooking smells were entering a neighbour's unit because of a faulty vent. The tenant decided to file a human rights complaint. The Commission found that asking the tenant to stop cooking ethnic food instead of fixing the vent system was discrimination based on ancestry.



Do you have more questions? Contact the Alberta Human Rights Commission:  
<http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/>

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Produced by:

Centre for  
Public  
**cplea**  
Legal Education  
Alberta

<http://www.cplea.ca/humanrightswwhenrenting/>

Funding for this handout was provided by:



Human Rights  
Education and  
Multiculturalism  
Fund