

Rent Watch Article 4 Religion

Question: I am a Muslim looking for an apartment in a predominantly Christian community, but my rental applications continue to be denied. I am concerned that potential landlords recognize me as Muslim from my hijab and deny my applications based on my religion. Can a landlord refuse to rent to me because of my faith?

Answer: Religion is a protected category under the Fair Housing Act (FHA). That means that landlords generally may not refuse to rent to potential tenants based on their religion. There is a limited exception for non-commercial housing operated by religious organizations. In such cases, the religious organizations may choose to house only members of their religion, provided that they do not discriminate based on race, color, or national origin.

In short, no commercial landlord may deny your housing application because you are a Muslim. However, it is often difficult to demonstrate that you were denied based on your religion if the landlord has not explicitly stated this. Fair housing organizations such as Project Sentinel can help expose such instances of discrimination with the assistance of “testers.” Testers pose as potential tenants. If the landlord approves the testers not wearing hijabs, it is easier to demonstrate the connection between Muslim applicants and the denial of rental applications.

If you need assistance or have any questions about religion as a protected category under fair housing law, please contact Project Sentinel at info@housing.org, call (888) 324-7468, or contact your local fair housing agency.