

**Ontario Human
Rights Commission**

Office of the Chief Commissioner

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To: Ontario-based newspapers and print media

Spreading the message about human rights in housing: you can help!

At the Ontario Human Rights Commission, we have heard many stories of discrimination in rental housing. Some people face discrimination right at the beginning of their search – in rental housing advertisements. Tenants and advocates have brought a number of these ads to our attention. As a result, we are working with partners in housing and the media to increase awareness of human rights in housing, and find ways to prevent and address discriminatory ads.

We've approached a number of housing websites about discriminatory online ads and sought their help in tackling the problem. We would also like to raise awareness in the print media about the issues, suggest some best practices and offer you some related resources.

What the *Code* says

Ontario's *Human Rights Code* prohibits discrimination in housing based on 14 grounds:

- family status
- marital status
- age
- receipt of public assistance
- sexual orientation
- sex (including gender identity and pregnancy)
- disability
- race
- colour
- ancestry
- citizenship
- ethnic origin
- place of origin
- creed (religion)

The *Code* protects freedom of expression of opinion. However, Part 1 and section 13.(1) of the *Code* say it is discriminatory for a person to publish or display any notice that shows the intention of the person to infringe a right. For example, it is discriminatory for a landlord to place an ad that says things like:

- No children
- Must have working income/provide proof of employment
- No Ontario Works or ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program]
- Single tenant only

These statements suggest that some people will not be allowed to rent a property because of their family status (having children), marital status (having a spouse or partner), because they receive public assistance, or indirectly, based on age (such as retirement vs. working income) or disability (receipt of ODSP).

Other ads include statements that may reflect a landlord's honest efforts to attract people they believe would be most interested in the rental unit. For example:

- Ideal for quiet couple or professional single
- Perfect for female student.

Even if these landlords don't intend to discriminate, the ads suggest that some people – families, people who receive social assistance, men or older people – may be screened out.

If you publish a discriminatory ad, you may risk getting a human rights complaint from a member of the public. Our hope is that you will consider taking some simple steps and follow best practices to prevent the publication of ads that could create problems in your community.

Resources and best practices

The OHRC and our partners in the rental housing sector have sent a [letter to websites](#) letting them know about human rights in housing and discriminatory online housing ads, and describing some best practices. We have also created an [online fact sheet](#) on how to write a non-discriminatory housing ad. Our fact sheets for [tenants](#) and [landlords](#), and [Policy on Human Rights and Rental Housing](#) may also be helpful.

Here are some suggestions for best practices for rental housing print ads:

- Add a non-discrimination clause to hard copy or online forms by which landlords place ads, listing the prohibited grounds of discrimination under the *Code*
- If you have online information describing how to place an ad with your paper, include a link to the OHRC [fact sheet on writing non-discriminatory housing ads](#)
- Have staff who deal with ads read the OHRC [fact sheet](#), so they can better identify and address discriminatory ads before they go to print
- Print a statement on your classifieds page(s) about discriminatory ads, advising readers to contact you if they have a concern
- Ensure that staff who handle complaints from the public are aware of the issue so they can respond appropriately to related complaints.

Also, if your publication has both print and online classified housing ads, then all of the suggestions for housing websites would be relevant to the online aspect of your operations.

Print and online publishers have been strong partners in advancing human rights in Ontario and across Canada. We hope you will see the value of this work, and of joining

the shared effort to eliminate discrimination in rental housing. Please contact us for more information or assistance.

We like to share good news stories through our Facebook and Twitter networks and would be delighted to let our friends and followers know about any positive steps you are able to take. You can reach Jacquelin Pegg, Inquiry Analyst with the OHRC, by telephone at 416-326-9501 or by e-mail at Jacquelin.Pegg@ohrc.on.ca.

Yours Sincerely,



Barbara Hall, B. A., LL. B., Ph. D. (hon.)
Chief Commissioner

